MAIN THESES

of the Ph.D. dissertation

**Institutionalized subculture?
Resistance as an instrument of formal education**

by

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Institute of Behavioral Sciences and Communication Theory

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CONTENTS

1. Research history and justification of the subject

In my dissertation I describe and analyze the internal discourse of 'Diákház'[1] (Student House), a tuition-free alternative high school in Budapest. I focus on one particular problem of the Diákház students, who are typically dropouts of other educational institutions. This problem is the experience that their own interpretations and capabilities (knowledge) cannot be legitimized (in the school, the social and the family environment), a phenomenon I have labelled *invalidity*. The question I am searching the answer for is whether and how the practices and content of school communication support students' problem solving. In the Diákház established in the early 1990's, a very special mode of operation was created for working with socio-culturally diverse students who are mistrustful with institutional formalities. This mode of operation almost totally dismisses traditional school formalities, pedagogical and disciplinary methods, and at the same time it involves characteristic sub- and counter-cultural elements. In my dissertation my argument is that it is through the very maintenance of these subcultural practices that the Diákház makes the knowledge suitable for the elimination of the invalidity problem available to its students.

My work is linked to several disciplinary and research fields. It has the most direct connection with the traditions of subculture research. Subculture as a theoretical framework first appears in the Chicago school, as an example for problem solving in groups of people who do not want or are unable to implement solutions that

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[1] I have changed the name of the school, the informants and some of the events in the dissertation.

conform to the norms of the wider social system, and generate solutions by creating a common system of norms different from the former one (a subculture).

The second significant wave of subculture research is related to the Birmingham school (*Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies – CCCS*), which considers subcultures organized around specific scenes, relations, social events and (working-class) identity to be symbolic forms of resistance against the dominant culture. The 'magical' tools of resistance (i.e. ones that do not provide actual solutions) are clothing and musical elements, language and rites taken from the middle class, consumer culture and endowed with meaning by the members.

In the 1980s we see the emergence of post-subculture research, which opposes the class-based approach to subcultures and the 'external' perspective of research represented by the CCCS, and aims to capture the inner, lived experience of the members of subcultures (often studied by active or ex-subculturists via participatory research). In this approach, members of the subcultures that provide a frame to the search for originality and status, create the dichotomies of mainstream/subculture and commercial/alternative based on *subcultural capital* – analogous with Bourdieu's cultural capital – that comprises the forms knowledge, behavior and accumulated assets recognized in the subculture, and attribute added value to themselves as persons who, as opposed to 'average people', have autonomous, individual taste. The subcultural style is the expression of individuality, the appearance is important in and of itself. Subculturalists do not identify with obvious group definitions: instead, shallow subcultural attachment and transits between

subcultures are typical.

As regards subculture research in Hungary, I rely on József Rácz's work, who deals with Hungarian subcultures in the 1980s, and emphasizes the loss of status and roles among youths who drop out of or abandon the institutional environment, and the social and protective functions of the subculture.

In my own work, on the one hand, I apply the theoretical frames of subculture research. I look at the phenomena of the Diákház in terms of the concepts introduced by the different schools (some of which also occur in other approaches), such as symbolic deviance[2], protective provocation[3], the style expressing resistance, the individualist, 'elitist' differentiation from the average, or the experience of *communitas*[4] characterizing subculturalists' gatherings. On the other hand, I apply the methodological considerations from post-subcultural research. I was a student of the Diákház and a member of the alternative and ethno-subcultural scenes in the 1990s myself, thus, later as a researcher, in addition to the subculturalist experience of most of the students, the school's operation and

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[2] The difference between deviance that originates from *material causes* and *symbolic deviance* is introduced by Albert K. Cohen. The latter expresses the opposition of working class youth barred from middle class opportunities to conform solutions and society in general. Tammy L. Anderson extends the concept of symbolic deviance to those who find themselves in deviant, outsider status due to any kind of disparateness or otherness and choose resistance and the celebration of their otherness as a response, creating a positive identity element of it.

[3] Albert K. Cohen applies Fritz Redl's concept to cases where subculturalists refer to the anger and hostile emotions provoked by outsiders to dispense themselves from their moral commitments.

[4] Victor Turner's concept, the opposite of structured social existence organized in hierarchical systems; equality between individuals, the experience of unstructured or barely structured and relatively undifferentiated community, collectiveness. It characterizes the liminal phase of *rites de passage*, but is also described as a subcultural experience.

subcultural characteristics were familiar to me too. Therefore, my researcher position is identical to the insider position of researchers working in their own subcultural community.

The contribution of my research to the field is that while the subcultural interpretative frame and practices of meaning construction are traditionally discussed *in contrast with institutional systems*, I applied this interpretative frame and the method of post-subculture research to an educational institution, where I show how forms of subcultural practices are sustained in an *institutional framework, serving institutional purposes*.

The school as a research field provided a well-defined framework to my study, which (even though its subject was not the educational activity of the school) has yielded conclusions that also have relevance to the perspective of education. In this regard, my research can be linked to research in the *ethnography of education* or *anthropology of education*. The elements that my study shares with works in these areas are the method of participant observation, interviews with open-ended questions, the use of the concept of culture, the school as a research field, and the fact that such studies were mostly implemented 'at home' rather than in foreign countries. These works typically focus on poor school performance resulting from the differences between the school culture and the cultures of ethnic/linguistic minorities, or linked to social classes and gender. As opposed to this, in the community which I observed, the tension is not between the studied school and the culture(s) of the students, but it is the studied school – together with its students – which is in opposition with other schools (or a majority culture, which, as they see it, these other schools represent). Furthermore, my work is not about the

failure of the students or the educational methods, but the other way around: it is about overcoming failure.

Thus, the novelty value of the work is the application of the (post-)subcultural interpretative framework and methodology in the study of a school community, and the presentation and cultural analysis of an *instrument that has not existed before in the domestic education system*. It presents a school concept which sustains itself by continuously balancing between the school formalities and the subcultural experiences that resist such formalities, and successfully utilizes the motive of opposing the school and the school system to keep the former school-leaver students in the institutional framework of education.

2. Applied methods

Between 2004 and 2016 I implemented a long-term fieldwork in the Diákház with ethnographic methods, mostly *participant observation*. The two main phases of the research were 1) from the beginning of February to mid-July 2004, and 2) from the beginning of October 2011 to the end of June 2012. In these periods I was present in the school 1-3 times a week, in most cases from opening to closing (approximately in the period between 9 am to 5 pm), but the participant observation sometimes continued even after closing. I implemented observations during classes, the breaks, at teacher consultations, school forums involving students, entrance interviews, celebrations, organized and chance events, and during the extra-curricular activities (such as music or dance rehearsals, parties, outings). In the period between the main phases and after the second phase, I kept in touch with my key informants in order to follow up on changes, answer the questions emerging during the processing, and to complement deficiencies in the field notes or collect more data, and a couple times in a year I also visited the Diákház and its external events.

The most important data collected during the participant observation included the content and meta-communicative elements of the *personal interactions* (for example facial expressions, tone of voice), the persons participating in the interactions, their number, particular practices related to *space management* (characteristics, shaping and use of the built environment, the proxemics and movement of the participants of interactions), certain practices of *time management* (managing the boundaries of daily routine and other

activities), as well as other communicative behaviors (for example posting written messages, advertisements, decoration, choices of appearance and clothing).

The participant observations were complemented with interviews conducted with 10 students and 8 teachers. The themes of the interviews were mostly the same (school and professional career and experiences, the road to admission to the Diákház, perceptions of the Diákház, subcultural attractions, interpretations of my observations, and the students' social and family backgrounds). The reason for the low number of interviews is that in order to create a calm atmosphere that supports opening up, I preferred less structured conversations. However, in this scenario, I found that the added information they provided compared to the information that could be gained in everyday conversations and observations was not proportionate to the extra energy that organizing and implementing them took.

In addition, I took pictures of space formation, furniture and decoration, and in addition to the photos, I recorded video and audio materials of the communal events and celebratory occasions. I collected photos, video recordings and online materials made by the informants in or for the community (information, photos and representation materials shared on the school homepage, Facebook sites and groups, teacher-student communications). The role of data gained with these complementary methods was to elaborate, confirm or question the experiences of the participant observation.

During the research I applied the symbolic and interpretive anthropological approach. On one hand, during the analysis of the ritual events of the school (school celebrations) I considered the ritual

acts and objects as symbolic instruments used for representing, reproducing the social (school) order or for obscuring contradictions. During the analysis I used Victor Turner's concepts of *structure* (social order) and the *liminal phase* of the rites, in which *communitas,* that is, the image of an ideal society with no distinctions by rank, is created via the physical and symbolic separation of the participants and/or the *symbolic reversal* of the status system (anti-structure).

On the other hand, following Clifford Greetz's conception of culture and applying the symbolic approach to the 'rites of everyday life', I was concerned with the world views of the community members that materialize in symbols (objects, acts, events, qualities or relationships that are carriers of any kind of concept), and with the methods by which the members of the society create their common social realities through interpreting and reinterpreting the symbols. I aimed to create a *thick description* of the discourse of the Diákház, that is, to generate an interpretation of the *cultural text* taking shape in the behaviors. I intended to explore how the users of the observed communicational practices present their interpretations of themselves and anything else, how they participate in the negotiations over the interpretations defining the discourse, and how they use these in managing relations between each other, and in solving some of their problems.

The new insights that can be gained through qualitative research in general, or the opportunities offered by participant observation specifically, can induce the reconsideration of former hypotheses and the generation of new ones. Even though I did not intend to do so, the method of data gathering and processing was similar to the cyclic methodology of *grounded theory*. With this

method, the research questions and hypotheses emerge from the data and interpretations, and subsequently generate further data gathering, interpretations, questions, etc. Thus, not only the theses of the research, but its questions were also born as a result of the fieldwork.

The processing of data was carried out in several phases. I paired the data with keywords, for which I created systematic, increasingly abstract categories. I intended to reveal types of forms, patterns by which I can make statements about the typical themes, problems, problem management strategies, modes of manifestation, and teacher-student relations of the Diákház. I reconsidered the focal points of the data analyses and interpretations several times before finalizing them and finding connections with the theoretical framework.

3. Results of the dissertation

The aim of the *first (pilot) phase* of the study was to learn about and describe particular elements of the operation of the Diákház (students' sociocultural background, school career, the school's management, decision-making, knowledge transfer and assessment practices, interpretations related to the theme of 'otherness', hierarchical relations). The aim of the *second phase*, which was the primary resource of the dissertation, was to analyze the discourse of the Diákház from the perspectives of subculture and communication. The central topics were: the common problem emerging from the students' self-representations; the thematic hubs of interpretations that appear in the discourse; the adaptation of the topics to the subcultural and/or school function of the Diákház; the typical forms of communicating interpretations; the shaping of students' interpretations imported from external scenes; the knowledge that became available in the discourse and facilitated the solution of the students' common problem.

3.1. *Subcultural and school operation.*

One of the initial statements of my dissertation is that the discourse of the Diákház is basically determined by two different interpretative frames and the related communication behaviors and by the functions of these, which I sum up in the term 'mode of operation'. One of these frames is the *school mode of operation*. Teachers created a special pedagogical system for the work with children who resist institutional formalities, are mistrustful with teachers/adults (partly due to their negative experiences), and are often very different considering their social statuses, ideological commitments and the (sub)cultural and

other conceptions of themselves. They eliminated most of the traditional school formalities, rules, disciplinary and pedagogical methods (for example formal addressing, compulsory attendance, daily testing of knowledge, warnings, classes formed by age groups). Instead, they work with alternative formal and informal disciplinary techniques (for example contracting, paying and withdrawing attention, negotiations), personalized treatment and study plan, a workgroup (crew) that controls teachers' facilitating communication and knowledge sharing, they offer mentoring support for the students and involve them in the school decision-making processes (to some degree). This is complemented with other formal and informal instruments and practices that are structured with an educational purpose (for example exams and traditional disciplinary methods temporarily applied at exams, such as sitting order, keeping the time frames, strict control of communication), and rules (such as the ban of alcohol and drug consumption or dealing, the ban of bringing weapons or objects that look like weapons to school, the obligation of passing at least three exams a year) and the related communication (encouragement for learning, self-dependence, taking responsibility).

The other frame, which I call *subcultural mode of operation*, involves certain practices common in subcultural communities, or practices very similar to those. They include the experience of *communitas*, which is very typical in the Diákház, and manifests itself in the informal relations (for instance the use of informal pronouns between students and teachers, joint conversations, meals, work, playing music and games together in the teachers' office, the free use of school spaces), and the application and presence of subcultural conceptions mentioned earlier (for example symbolic deviance,

protective provocation). According to Ross Haenfler's definition that I apply, it also involves the *shared identity* of the group members, their ideas, practices and objects endowed with *disctinctive meanings*, and the very typical and often spectacular manifestations of their resistance to conventional (or so perceived) society and the sense of *marginalization* with relation to it. (At the same time, due to its organized nature, the Diákház community does not correspond to the Haenflerian definition, which also involves the diffuse character of the social network.)

3.2. The participants of the scene

In the second phase of the research I could meet approximately 70% of the 107 students who enrolled in the Diákház. Additionally, I mostly met the nine teachers of the narrower work group, one administrator, the school janitor, and sometimes the guest and visiting teachers (as well as parents, accountants and other external co-workers, support professionals, visitors and passers-by around the school whom I do not count as participants of the scene). The students were typically between the ages of 16-25, the ratio of genders was 54% girls and 46% boys. Most of them lived in the capital city, a third or quarter of them commuted from suburban areas, and a smaller number from a longer distance. (These general ratios are also characteristic of other years.)

Only applicants who dropped out of other educational institutions are admitted to the Diákház. The students comprised a very diverse group with regard to sociocultural aspects (for example the parents' educational attainment, social class, status, or family and

financial background, circumstances of living, professional orientation, ethnic and cultural background, ideological commitments, gender identity and orientation). At the same time, the presence of certain peripheral social categories, deviances and deprivation was rather typical (for instance youth from state care, young mothers, young people with disabilities or partial ability disorders, youths who are treated with psychic issues, self-harming or drug abusers, or involved in minor offences). In addition, representatives of different music or youth subcultures (for example punk, rap, hippie, goth, skinhead and rocker) are found among the students as well as the teachers.

The applicants admitted to the school were typically ones who were found to be in need of the help of Diákház, motivated for learning and more apt to work amidst the circumstances of the Diákház, as assessed at the admission interview (but exceptions were also often made regarding the former points). Most of them *lack a stable family background* (abusive or negligent parents or no parents), have had *negative school experiences* (such as verbal or physical conflicts with classmates, teachers), and anxiety and self-esteem disorder occur as well. (Negative school experiences are also mentioned by some of the teachers as the main reason for ending up in the Diákház.)

3.3. *The common problem of students manifested and managed at the scene*

I observed communication in the Diákház scene from the perspective of how it supports problem solving. The problems that lead students

to leave school are diverse. I put the emphasis on the dysfunctions of (traditional) school communication that originate from problems with the definition of interpretative frames. In the background of these we find the states, consequences and risk factors of the 'adolescent crisis' that characterize most of them. These include problems of self-assertion, self-esteem and adaptation, social inhibition, factors of family background and environment (for example divorce, illness, death in the family, abusive or negligent families, state care, poor social circumstances), weakening school performance, marginalization, rejection of parental/social expectations and the symbols of social integration, questioning norms, provocative behavior, ostentatious clothing, hairstyle, body piercings, tattoos, vulgarity, seeking trouble, avoiding achievements, alcohol and drug abuse, minor offences, self-harming behavior, suicidal attempts, etc. One or more of these phenomena related to the adolescent crisis tend to occur in almost every student's experiences and self-image, the most typical being the experience of marginality in former schools or contemporary groups, and social isolation.

In the discourse of the Diákház, all of these phenomena appear as cases that are not adjustable to the expectations of the traditional school scene, as examples of the 'otherness' of the students, that is, the *difference* between the legitimately communicable content and their own interpretations and problems that are not or cannot be communicated. The focus is on the *fact* of difference, rather than its dimensions (social, cultural, ethnic, generational, ability, etc.), and thus 'otherness' becomes a common problem of students coming with very different problems and identities.

In the dissertation I call this common problem the *problem of invalidity*. I mention the theory of Marsha Linehan, who writes about the psychological consequences of the invalidating social environment. Such an environment presents the individual's experiences, the interpretations she makes about herself, her intentions and aims as deficient, invalid. If the individual is not able to leave or change this invalidating environment or is not able to adapt to its expectations, it can lead to psychic disorders or borderline syndrome.

Based on the common problem of 'otherness' as it appears in the Diákház discourse and Linehan's concept of invalidity, I define the *invalidity problem* in the theoretic-conceptual framework of the Participation Theory of Communication. Here invalidity means the inapplicability of the agent's capabilities, the lack of legitimacy regarding the agent's problems and interpretations in a given (institutional) scene. A definitive characteristic of institutional scenes (as opposed to communicative scenes which are formed based on the agents' individual capabilities), is the existence of an *a priori* constitutive base, which codes the rules regarding the communicative behaviors considered legitimate at the scene (for example those relating to meaning attribution or interpretation). It thereby also defines the possibilities of communicative problem recognition and problem solving, and provides the procedures for legitimating the interpretations that appear at the scene. A common experience of the students of the Diákház that I mention is the fact that they could not mobilize their own capabilities in traditional school scenes, either for communicating or for solving some of their problems (e.g. adolescent crisis). These scenes did not offer legitimate opportunities for this to

begin with, and (in order to preserve the legitimacy of the scene) they did not validate the students' endeavors for applying capabilities imported from external (family, peer, subcultural) scenes and extraneous to (not yet legitimated at) the school scene.

Together with the rejection of students' capabilities, the external scenes from where they imported them and where they counted as legitimate may also be depreciated (for example punk hairstyle or tattoo in a subcultural community), and the same holds for their self-understanding connected to these scenes. In light of this, I speak about a *problem of invalidity* if it does not relate to one particular situation only, but also affects the self-image of the agent, where discourses outside the school scene and the ability to fight the effect of invalidating communication also play a role. Therefore, I do not (unconditionally) consider the students' traditional school scenes as the source of invalidity, I just highlight that these scenes did not facilitate, but impeded them in problem management.

3.4. The main thematic hubs of the discourse and their relation to the subcultural and/or school operation of the Diákház

Connected to some major thematic hubs, the interpretations that appear in the Diákház discourse map out a kind of norm system prevalent in the Diákház. The interpretations that can be categorized in major themes (as opposed to other, incidentally occurring interpretations) interlace school communication in a repetitive manner, connecting to each other or the subcultural and school operation, irrespective of the communicative situation or the subject of communication. They can be observed during a poem analysis in a

class as well as during the conversations of students and teachers during the breaks. The presentation of the interpretations connected to main themes also appears as a normative expectation in the Diákház discourse.

One central group of the interpretations that determine the Diákház discourse is what I call 'otherness discourse'. This includes manifestations and interpretations that are about the 'otherness' of the Diákház and its community, and about the social situation of 'otherness'. I further divide the otherness discourse to the topics of *difference and diversity, deviance, marginality, resistance*.

(1) In the topic of *difference and diversity* I include the manifestations of Diákház people that represent their differences from each other, the positive relation to heterogeneity and diversity (for example manifestations that approve of a distinctive style, or the avoidance of statements that blur differences between the Diákház people). These map out the values of the Diákház, which go a long way to tolerate individual differences and characteristics, and are present irrespective of the changing student and teacher generations.

(2) In the topic of *deviance* I include manifestations that refer to the students' *real and symbolic deviance*. Teachers tend to use these in the former sense, to support their statements about the students' needs or the necessity of individual treatment (for example when they mention the obstacles to students' school careers and the reasons behind them). Students tend to use them in the positive sense, as a conscious, proudly displayed resistance to social norms.

(3) Manifestations about *marginality* include the negative marginality that appears as a consequence of the discriminative behavior of majorities, and a kind of 'elitist' detachment from the

conventional, the petty, narrow-minded, middle-class 'conformist' members of society. The former appears in the reports of students who are excluded from school groups and peer groups and abused, while the latter is manifested in pitying 'average people' and the world of 'collecting achievements', as well as in teachers' remarks that refer to the peripheral position of the Diákház due to its individuality and its methodological distance from other (traditional as well as alternative) schools.

(4) In the topic of *resistance* I include provocations against persons who represent the 'mainstream' or intend to stick to the rules of the society of the 'majority', their scandalizing, conflicts with them or reports about all of this. In addition to being seen as a form of adolescent authority conflict, they also function as protective provocations that aim to maintain the image of opposition between the Diákház and the external world. (An example for this is when a teacher joined the students in provoking narrow-minded observers coming from other schools.) The otherness discourse links in with the subcultural functioning of the Diákház by making available interpretations similar to the subcultural concepts of *diversity, marginality and resistance*.

Another emphatic theme in addition to the topics of the otherness discourse is *independence and responsibility*, which includes manifestations that refer to students' freedom of decision in matters of their studies and other school-related issues (e.g. attendance and preparation), and their responsibilities regarding their decisions and school careers. I also include here the manifestations by which teachers encourage the students to use the opportunities and forums they have for representing the issues important for them (petitions,

advocacy meetings), even against their schoolmates or teachers or the school. The manifestations that belong to the topic of independence and responsibility represent the social expectation of adult behavior on one hand and breaking with traditional school obligations on the other hand, and so they relate to both the school and the subcultural modes of operation.

The topic of *knowledge* includes the (sometimes very didactic) manifestations that represent the relation between knowledge, qualification, smarts and social status. On one hand, this relation appears as negative in the stories about teachers teaching in other schools who lay claim to the exclusive right to knowledge and about persons who abuse their status related to knowledge; on the other hand, it appears as positive in manifestations that contrast *real* knowledge with the emptying formal hierarchy. The topic of knowledge manifests both the rejected social structure and the standpoint of opposing the absurdities of that structure, thus, similarly to the topic of independence and responsibility, it relates to both the school and the subcultural modes of operation.[5]

3.5. *Typical forms of communicating (making available) interpretations and value judgements*

I describe seven typical forms of manifesting interpretations that belong to the main topics of the Diákház discourse, and which students tend to pay attention to.

(1) The *style* of external (clothing and other) elements that shape

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[5] In the dissertation, I also present the manifestations of *communitas* and structure among the topics, which I will refer to later in this summary.

personal appearance and body management, by which some of the students represent their difference, individuality, 'deviance' in ways that are common in their own respective subcultural scenes, and refer to the distance they keep from the mainstream of society (e.g. punk, dreads, unusually shaved and dyed hair, tattoo, body piercings, mixing style elements traditionally differentiated by gender).

(2) The *decoration* of the Diákház, which is parallel to similar practices of certain youth/music/subcultural - more specifically punk - scenes, the elements of which are suitable for displays of self-expression, creativity, 'thinking differently', resistance to power, and autonomy (e.g. collages and tools made of scrapped and reused objects, montages with an edge of social criticism, street art elements, informal, artlessly phrased postings).

(3) The *stories told by* students or teachers, the characters or the events of which represent important Diákház interpretations, value judgements and ideas through parables, as the edifying conclusions to both the presenter and the audience. (Such stories may contrast the emptying order of statuses with knowledge and humanity, or present higher status persons as arrogant, or members of strongly structured systems as profoundly dumb.)

(4) The *talking circles* of a bunch of teachers and students in the teachers' office or in the school hall, which some more people also attend to. These are often organized around conversations starting from students' provocative remarks, and among other things, reflect the informal relations between teacher and student that generates an experience of *communitas*. (For example conversations based on students' provocations blaming a teacher with drug consumption or disparaging their work, in which teachers join in without losing their

temper.)

(5) *Performative acts* presented by a small number of people that display the deviant behaviors, attributes (for example drug abuse, female homosexuality, marginality) in a caricatured, exaggerated from. These sometimes involve childish acting about the deviant lifestyle intended to raise a smile (for example grinding cocaine with a ruler used in math class), and sometimes embarrassing adaptations of traumatic experiences (for example the song of a gypsy girl about skinheads beating up gypsies).

(6) Short written and rehearsed dramatic plays and dance performances staged at the Albert days[6], in which, similarly to the carnival forms of status reversal, status hierarchies (also in force in the Diákház) are parodied by inverting the male-female, old-young, mature-immature, clever-stupid dimensions. Examples are playing roles that represent a lack of education, stupidity (kindergarten children, shopping mall girls), men in women's costume and the other way around.

(7) *Online interfaces* (school website, social media pages) on which both the content relating to the school's operation (exam schedule, encouragement of students to attend school) and content relating to the subcultural mode of operation (photos and comments representing the *communitas*, subcultural style elements) appear.

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[6] Yearly celebration organized by the Diákház.

3.6. Forming of the interpretations imported from external scenes by students

I consider the school scenes to be intercultural communication scenes, and I understand intercultural communication as a contest between (the participants of) different discourses for defining an interpretative frame, for applying their own interpretative frames. This approach allows me to look at the interpretations valid in external scenes (defined on subcultural, ethnic, religious, gender, social or other bases) and imported into the school interpretative frame as representations of (cultural) identities, and establish a connection between cases of the legitimation or rejection of interpretations and the experience of validity and invalidity as it appears in the self-image of the participants of the communication.

While students' interpretations foreign for the school scenes were often not legitimated in the traditional school scenes, students' behaviors and interpretations cannot be formally deemed illegitimate at the Diákház scene (except for extreme cases), given the lack of formal disciplinary procedures. This creates an opportunity for students to negotiate with the teachers over the legitimacy of their interpretations imported from external scenes. During these negotiations, the teachers balance between the interpretations of the school and the (self-)interpretations presented by the students (for instance the historical or skinhead subcultural interpretation of 'radical'), aiming to give space to the students for revealing themselves. Even if the interpretations of students do not always gain legitimacy in the school scene, they still appear as a possible description of the world in the negotiations, thus contributing to the

generation of a sense of *validity*.

3.7. Additional capacities that support the solution of the invalidity problem

The Diákház discourse makes both the subcultural and formal institutional methods of status elevation available to its participants simultaneously. The resource of the former is the otherness discourse, in which the 'otherness' of students appears as a value and a force of group generation, contributing to the experience of *validity* rather than invalidity. The school mode of operation, on the other hand, ensures that the subcultural operation is kept within the formal institutional frames, which is made possible by regulating the students' behavior (the instruments being the negotiations mentioned above, the contracts in which students assume responsibilities, the crew that secures the facilitator instruments and communication strategies of the teachers, and the mentor system). This makes it possible that the 'benefits' derived from the subcultural operation facilitate a status elevation that is also considered valid in the formal institutional systems (obtaining a high school qualification).

The parallel operation of the subcultural and school functions allows for experiencing two contradictory conditions, the *communitas* (status equality among the Diákház people) and structure (the hierarchical relations between teachers and students). The maintenance of the hierarchical conditions necessary for the management of the school and their concealment from students who resist formal structure lays the burden of constant conflict on the discourse of the Diákház, but also animates it at the same time.

Different practices have developed and become established for alleviating the tension arising from this conflict (provocative manifestations probing the boundaries of the *communitas* experience, straightforward arguments against the hierarchy, honest expression of thoughts questioning the teachers' status, and jokes pointing to the hierarchical relations). Subcultural and school operation, *communitas* and structure mutually validate each other. Structure makes the *communitas* sustainable, and the *communitas* experience and the opportunity of questioning hierarchy without retortions make the school's hierarchical structure acceptable for students, thus, the experience of being outsider to the structure becomes the way the to the elevation of the structural position. In this regard, the Diákház is a kind of therapy scene that serves the functions of separation and re-aggregation relating to the liminal and the subsequent incorporation phases of rites of passage.

An important element of the added capacities and knowledge available in the Diákház scene is their *mutuality*, the fact that they are perceived as common (that is, awareness of the opportunity to validate own needs and interpretations in this scene), which is a result of the joint shaping of the knowledge (see community communication, negotiations, questioning).

Another important element is the effect of the otherness discourse on the Diákház people's practices of identity construction and social categorization, during which 'otherness' does not only appear as a characteristic or general principle of explaining school leaving, but also becomes an *element of self-definition* (and in the case of many Diákház students, that is what it had originally been, too). In this discourse, the Diákház as a community is created via the social

categories of the 'traditional' or 'conform' (school) world and the own world, which is markedly different and separate from the former. As a community (even if it cannot be defined as a subculture), it also fulfils the social and protective functions of subcultural communities, as described by József Rácz. These are the mitigation of the experience of discrimination, the enhancement of self-esteem, the creation of a group sharing common background knowledge that provides safety from social devaluation, all of which support the Diákház folks in experiencing individualization and 'belonging somewhere' at the same time.

Another important ingredient of the Diákház 'solution' is that in the discourse involving both subcultural and school interpretations, difference, resistance and marginality can be represented by knowledge as well as style, and thereby students are guided towards identifying with more innocent (and 'smarter') symbolic manifestations of deviance instead of 'real' deviances.

The Diákház inserts the experience of being outsider to institutional, hierarchical systems into the educational system as an institutional mode of operation. It makes an instrument for solving the problem of school leaving and (cultural) otherness (or invalidity) available to the whole system, and this is an instrument that did not exist in this system before.

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