Society and Lifestyles Project
Recommendations for Policy Makers

Abstract
The aim of the Society and Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonisation through Knowledge of Subcultural Communities SAL project was to increase knowledge on the values and beliefs of (and attitudes towards) various subcultural groups including lifestyle subcultures, different subgroups inside ethnic minority groups and groups of New religious movements in a wide range of mainly EU-member and Eastern and Central European states. The objective was to investigate subgroup differentiation, structures and processes and to determine the level of tolerance and intolerance towards these various subgroups whose non-conformity to mainstream social and/or religious norms is often perceived as posing a challenge to social harmonisation. Recommendations for policy makers are presented in this article (see Introduction to the SAL Research, p. 9).

Keywords: policy recommendations, subcultural groups, New religious movements, ethnic minority groups, lifestyle subcultures, intolerance and discrimination, human rights, EU policy, national policy, systems theory
Project focus and scope of the research

The SAL project focused on case studies of various subcultural groups (including drug-users, eco-villagers, hippies, punks, “Euro-Indians”, skinheads and members of criminal gangs and radical political parties/movements); on the relationships between members of prevailing religions and New religious groups, whether revived from the pre-communist era (ethnic neo-Paganism) or exported from the West (e.g., Mormonism, neo-Hindu movements such as Hare Krishna and others) and, finally, on the plight of certain ethnic minority groups (Gypsies/Roma and Muslims). The countries covered included Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovakia.

Project methodology

The project took advantage of an interdisciplinary approach based on the methodologies of cultural/social anthropology, sociology and natural sciences. It was implemented by means of ethnographic fieldwork which focused on in-depth participation by the researchers in the groups under investigation. The purpose for this was to explore the real life meanings and to understand the meanings of the values originating from these groups and disseminating into the society-at-large. The sustained and long term idea of the project was the comparison of different groups in different societies through identification of the main social powers (for more details, see “Introduction to the SAL Research”, p. 9).

Project findings

The SAL project findings vary according to the countries and subgroups studied (lifestyle subcultures, New religious movements and ethnic minority groups). Only brief highlights will be provided here1 as a context for the recommendations below.

Lifestyle subcultures

SAL research considered the adoption and adaptation of some western-style subcultural groups in Eastern Europe and the ways in which these groups articulated political positions. The SAL research on skinheads in Lithuania not only explored their espousal of radical nationalist views but also discovered evidence of police harassment as well as verbal and physical abuse from members of the public. Researchers also found that school teachers spread biased and misleading information about skinheads; this was often reinforced by the mass media.

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The SAL research among criminal gangs and radical, nationalist political groups in Kazan, Russia, showed that mass media coverage promoted stereotypical views of these groups rather than an understanding of their motivation, and this leads to moral panics. However, not all subcultural groups experienced negative reactions from society. For instance, SAL researchers in Slovakia investigated eco-villagers from Zajezova whose views were based on a rejection of a modern, urban consumer society. The research showed that, over the last decade, they had succeeded in earning the respect of locals, mainly because of their ecological way of life. SAL researchers in Slovakia also found that Euro-Indians were well treated.

Outside the EU, tolerance towards subcultural diversity in Russia is under threat due to a proposed new law on the spiritual and moral upbringing of children currently being discussed in the Duma (Parliament). This law seeks to prohibit those studying in a state or municipal institution of secondary or higher education from displaying clear signs of their membership in lifestyle subcultures such as Goths or punks.

Finally the SAL research in Russia also demonstrates that young people – such as members of groups such as the Youth Human Rights Movement, the Network Against Racism and Intolerance and the international Memorial Society – do not necessarily engage in negative, anti-social activity but are actively participating in the democratic process by trying to combat racism, fascism and intolerance. Furthermore, while some of the SAL research in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania confirms the use of hip-hop as a culture of resistance, which criticises the dominant society, other young people involved in hip-hop and general leisure/party cultures, in contrast to stereotypical thinking, are members of youth subcultures that are not opposed to society but actively interested in successfully integrating into it. Instead of society reacting to such subcultures with moral panics, where young people are alienated from society, other aspects of these subcultures can also be seen as part of a socialisation process for young people.

New religious movements
In parts of the expanded EU, the media often misrepresent New religious movements of foreign origin as dangerous cults or sects who brainwash their recruits. SAL project research among members of the Hare Krishna movement in Lithuania and Moldova, for example, showed that attitudes varied, with some negative attitudes evident in Moldova despite the movement’s charity work. In Lithuania the situation was similar in 1995 but this has since changed, with high levels of tolerance prevailing today. However, some Hare Krishna members in Lithuania have suffered as a result of inconsistent interpretations of the law governing their activities. In Moldova,
Hare Krishna members thought that it was best to keep quiet to avoid trouble from the state, while Hare Krishna members in Lithuania failed to declare their religious beliefs during job searches due to a sense of discrimination. Those in the Lithuanian Army also encountered intolerance because of Hare Krishna membership. Although not all New religious movements experienced negative attitudes, one of the biggest problems related to legal status and registration, which has been required for New religious movements in Russia since 1997 and for Muslim and Indian-inspired New religious movements in Slovakia since 2007, to cite just two examples.

More generally, SAL research demonstrated the diversity, not only of but also, within so-called New religious movements, which might more usefully be considered as new religious phenomena. On one hand, these ranged from ethnic neo-Paganism with pre-communist roots and Indian-inspired organisations based in the West, to New Age spiritualities originating in Russia and a breakaway Orthodox Church in Moldova (Metropolia Basarabia). On the other hand, neo-Paganism could be rooted in traditional folklore and customs (as in the case of certain Baltic neo-Pagan groups) or be part of a broader, ethnically exclusive and militaristic worldview (as in the case of some Russian skinheads and Cossack revivalist groups). Meanwhile research into contemporary theosophy in Latvia revealed three distinct strands focusing on culture, education and extreme right-wing politics respectively. The question thus arises not only of the degree of tolerance or intolerance shown towards so-called New religious movements in Eastern and Central European countries but also of the degree of tolerance or intolerance shown by certain of these indigenous movements towards certain other groups.

**Ethnic minority groups**

Research focused on the Muslim minority in Slovakia and the Gypsy/Roma community in Hungary. With regard to the former, SAL researchers discovered that, as a result of the impact of 9/11 and the fear of so-called “religious extremism”, Muslims and converts to Islam experienced ignorance, prejudice and different forms of open or latent intolerance from family, friends, colleagues and the mass media. Muslims experienced verbal and physical attacks including the forceful removing of headscarves. As with some New religious movements, followers of the Islamic faith have had difficulties registering as an “official church” resulting in Slovakia having no official mosque. In relation to the Roma in Hungary, SAL research demonstrates that, while Gypsy folklore is popular among Hungarian youth, the Roma experience social exclusion, prejudice and problems in accessing education and the labour market, with the mainly Romugro population in northern and eastern Hungary in particular suffering from rural poverty.
Recommendations

The European Convention on Human Rights (1948), the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981) and, more recently, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (2000) all emphasise the need to protect human rights and to respect the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe. Two articles of the 2000 Charter are particularly relevant to the SAL project research and findings:

- Article 10: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and, in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.”

- Article 22: “The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.”

More specifically, in relation to the young people who participated in the SAL project, a September 2007 EC Communication to the Council and the European Parliament entitled “Promoting young people’s full participation in education, employment and society” stresses the urgent need, in line with the Lisbon Strategy, to promote the full participation of young people in society. The Communication includes emphasis on the need to:

i) provide greater and better educational opportunities

ii) reduce youth unemployment

iii) ensure that young people have the necessary skills to enter the labour market

iv) overcome social exclusion and gender imbalances

v) encourage youth participation in the democratic process and institutions.

In light of the issues highlighted in the Main Project Findings above, we make the following recommendations.

EU policy

1. In line with the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions (in force since March 2007) and in the context of the post-Soviet countries of Europe, “culture” needs to be more broadly interpreted, going beyond current cultural policy (the arts, sports, media,
theatre, museums and libraries) to incorporate non-mainstream aspects, thereby creating opportunities to enhance the quality of life for everyone and providing access routes out of marginalisation and unemployment for the kind of subcultural groups investigated here.5

2. EU funding schemes (such as the European Social Fund, EU Framework Programme projects, the Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme and the URBAN Community Initiative) should be used to support new initiatives piloting educational and cultural activities to encourage greater awareness, knowledge and tolerance of the many subcultures, New religious movements and ethnic minority groups in the new member states of the EU.

3. The scope of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights should be broadened to include the monitoring of reports on religious freedom – including New religious movements – and any abuses, such as discrimination, alienation and problems with legal status and registration, can produce radicalisation of the affected groups based on a deep feeling of resentment and victimisation.

National policy

4. In the context of National Social Inclusion Plans to support diversity and equal opportunities, governments should take the lead in providing equal employment opportunities to groups who experience discrimination and social exclusion (e.g., Muslims, Roma, some members of New religious movements and youth subcultures). If the general population sees that future job prospects are open to all irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle or religion, this will encourage integration and overcome negative mass media and popular stereotypes.

5. Education and youth policies in various member states should be used to celebrate a variety of different subcultural, religious and ethnic groups and their activities by using teachers and youth-centre or community arts workers to introduce children and young people to a wide range of different traditions and cultures. At the university level, where not already in place, university students should have the opportunity to learn in mixed environments where differences are accepted about different religions, ethnicities, cultures and subcultures.

6. “Diversity workshops” in schools, universities, workplaces and government agencies (e.g., youth services and social work agencies) should be organised across the EU on a regular basis to continue to educate society and officials of the various institutions about alternative religions, subcultures, ethnic diversity and the interconnection between human rights and democracy.

Further research

7. Regular audits to monitor the status and condition of and changes in the various religions, subcultures and ethnic minority groups across the EU, taking due account of differences in cultural, historical and religious backgrounds and traditions, should be commissioned by the Agency for Fundamental Rights or another suitable EU institution.

8. The provision of funding opportunities from EU Framework Programme 7 and subsequent programmes for interdisciplinary research centres and their networks to study youth subcultures, New religious movements and/or ethnic minority groups. This would enable the collection, analysis and dissemination of more accurate and detailed information about these groups, leading to greater understanding among the academic community and the general population as a whole. Continuing ignorance about and prejudice against these groups, on the other hand, can only lead to hostility and alienation, creating a very real threat to social harmony.

Fundamental research

9. Recommendations 1 through 8, presented above, are focused on the current attitudes of the society with respect to various groups as well as the current state of these groups. Even the two recommendations for further research are present-oriented to audit, assess and disseminate information about current conditions. To be sure, these are important issues but they provide little guidance to the policy makers when estimates of future conditions are desired. As discussed in “Groups in Theory and Practice”, Section 1 subsection Systems theory: an aid for policy makers, p. 30, some degree of projection into the future may be needed for successful policy decisions. As was pointed out there, such projections can be made on the basis of dynamical systems models of groups, but these can be formulated only if the right kind of information is available in a sufficient amount. We recommend continuing studies of a small number of subcultural groups with the goal of creating dynamical systems models with a demonstrated degree of reliability and utility for policy decisions.
Projekto „Visuomenė ir gyvenimo stiliai“ rekomendacijos socialinės politikos formavimui

Santrauka


Rekomendacijose pažymima, jog nacionalinė įvairių Europos šalių politika turėtų būti susijusi su ES politika. Tačiau tyrimai atskleidė nemažai skirtingų vertybinų orientacijų individų ir grupių diskriminavimo bei netolerancijos jų atžvilgiu faktų. Tyrėjai pateikia kai kurių etniniių mažumų (musulmonų, čigonų), religinių bendruomenių (pvz., kai kurių Naujųjų religinių judėjimų grupių narių) ir gyvenimo stiliaus subkultūrinių grupių dalyvių socialinės atskirties įrodymus. Įsidarbinimo perspektyvos, socialinės garantijos neturi būti susietos su tautybe, gyvenimo stiliumi ar religija. Netoleruotinas neigiamas žiniasklaidos stereotipų, formuojančių nuomonę apie grupes, skleidimas.

Mokyklose, universitetuose, jaunimo centruose, bendruomenėse jaunimas turėtų būti supažindinamas su įvairiomis tradicijomis ir kultūromis, didelį poveikį gali daryti žiniasklaida. Tačiau turi būti atlikta daugiau sisteminiių lyginamųjų mokslinių tyrimų, kurie padėtų prognozuoti grupių formavimosi procesus ir jų poveikį visuomenei. Rekomenduojama tęsti mažų subkultūrinių grupių tyrimus, kurių tikslas yra sukurti grupių elgesio modelius, pagrįstus gausiais patikimais sukauptais empiriniai duomenimis, jų lyginamąją analizę. Tokie tyrimai būtų naudingi asmenims ir institucijoms, bendrauvančioms su įvairių vertybių orientacijų grupėmis, prisidėtų prie socialinės ir kultūrinės politikos formavimo.

Raktažodžiai: rekomendacijos socialinės gerovės plėtrai, subkultūrinių grupių, naujieji religiniai judėjimai, etninės mažumos, gyvenimo stiliaus subkultūros, netolerancija ir diskriminacija, žmogaus teisės, ES politika, sistemų teorija.