

Alena Novotná

Social Relations of Voluntarily Modest People

Pedagogika Rodziny 2/2, 265-268

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Alena Novotná

Social Relations of Voluntarily Modest People

“[...] are not poor. They are the property-less. He is poor who would like to be rich and is not. Lack of means is a voluntary state and view of life. They do not need that our pandemonium from catalogues.” B. Filan

The idea of B. Filan (1999: 32) might be unprofessional in terms of theory of social work, social policy, sociology and other disciplines concerned, inadequate, but it gives a true picture of the essence of the phenomenon of voluntary modesty with which we also encounter in our socio-cultural conditions.

The aim of our contribution is to define and describe the phenomenon of voluntary modesty, which has already been described in the context of socio-cultural-ecological conditions of the Central Europe by many others, such as from the Czech Republic H. Librová (1994, 1997, 2003), L. Musil (1997, 1999), E. Kohák (1998) and others, among sociologists in particular, and in Slovakia exclusively (according to our knowledge), ethnologists and ethnographers, cultural and social anthropologists. Furthermore, cultural ecologists, humanities environmentalists, and partly theologians²⁸ are generally devoted to this phenomenon. Our contribution is more oriented on social relationships of people living modestly on a voluntary basis in the socio-cultural environment of the Slovak Republic. We want to present the results of the research which we implemented in 2006-2008. This is a qualitative research of attitudes of voluntarily modest people as to their own way of life and chosen social factors, from which in this work we present

²⁸ Another area to examine the given social and cultural phenomenon is seen also from the aspect of ethnoscience, ethnomethodology, ethnopsychiatry, ethnopsychology and ethnosociology, sociology of family, culture, values, religion and others.

social relations with the closer and wider social environment. We were interested in social relations of the voluntarily modest in connection with the way of life, its change, the impact of this change on social relationships and the quality of such a change.

The research group consisted of eight research participants with whom we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. A supplementary method was represented by participatory observation and an analysis of the conversations of the participants with other researchers (ethnographer, editors of selected journals and monographs). The research participants were chosen deliberately based on performance component of an attitude towards voluntary modesty, specifically according to the visible signs of voluntary modesty - a way of life, household equipment and other indices.

1. Voluntary modesty as a counterpoint of poverty as well as consumerism

When consumerism - (from lat. *Consumare* = consume) is understood as a tendency to consumer lifestyle connected to individual and social value overestimation of the material goods consumption, resulting to the “consumption for consumption” (Veľký sociologický slovník, 1996: 532) and poverty as a condition threatening an individual in his bio-psycho-social development, mostly associated with deprivation and social exclusion, than we understand voluntary modesty as modesty of an individual in consumption or selection intensity (Kohak, 1998: 81), which does not threaten an individual in their bio-psycho-social existence while combining the reduced tangible consumption. We agree, however, (on the basis of the research carried out by Novotná, 2009) with L. Musil, that between environmentally favorable and harmful ways of life, there is a wide variety of transitions (1999: 24 to 40), which definition and analysis are not the aim of this work.

2. Social relations of voluntarily modest research participants with a broader social environment

Based on the research carried out we can conclude that voluntarily modest research participants are confronted with incomprehension of the social environment towards their way of life, perceiving a different degree of this incomprehension. In the context of the range of incomprehension of the way of lives of voluntarily modest people by the social environment, we found a few connections:

- the connection with the place of residence in terms of regional cultural-historical differences and population density,
- the relationship with local and regional concentration of people leading a similar way of life,

- the connection with the frequency and quality of mutual interaction with the social environment.

In this research we also found out that incomprehension of the social environment towards the lifestyle of voluntarily modest people and towards the phenomenon of voluntary modesty is not in a form of an enmity and hatred. Comprehension towards the way of life of the voluntarily modest and them within the social environment is limited and ambivalent (admiration and perception of such a lifestyle as non-problematic and easier, good with rejection at the same time, misunderstanding of the significance of individuals' subjective reasons for this way of life, and pointing to the inability to live this way of life at present).

The voluntarily modest research participants link the development of social relationships with their own contribution, such as mutual assistance, regular contact with the social environment. At the same time they perceive the social relationships development as a means to understanding them and their values and their way of life by the social environment.

All research participants strongly expressed a feeling of shortage in the scope of social networks, while they see their future in the development of social structures and relationships in the place of residence or in the nearby region. The research participants do not distinguish the development of social relations and structures from the point of presence of voluntary modesty as a phenomenon and system of values. The participants, however, have some idea of "attracting" people living voluntarily modestly into their neighborhood, as people who are close to them by their values and way of life. The research data, however, is the view of the participant living in the social environment made up of more people, who can be characterized as voluntarily modest based on their way of life. Such a research participant perceives the lack of older people in their environment as a natural element of a demographically structured society which is absent in their surrounding with all aspects and benefits of the presence of older people in the relationship and social structures.

We realize that the results of our implemented and partially presented research can not be generalized, though it is considered beneficial and clarifying the issue of comprehension of poverty as a social phenomenon, which has broad socio-cultural, but also individual context, especially with an impact onto practical social work. When presenting the results of the research we are deliberately avoided stating the findings, assessments and contexts of the research results with the social work profession and theory, or with other scientific disciplines. In this research we also discovered a number of other connections and facts that may be a challenge or a topic of the further research on the phenomenon of voluntary modesty.

Stosunki społeczne ludzi dobrowolnie biednych

Streszczenie

Autorka prezentuje w artykule częściowe wyniki badań przeprowadzonych na grupie ludzi żyjących skromnie z wyboru. Ukazane zostają relacje społeczne badanych osób, ich cechy szczególne, wzajemne związki, relacje wynikające ze stylu życia, a w szczególności ich cechy z subiektywnego punktu widzenia badanych.

Słowa kluczowe: dobrowolna skromność, konsumpcjonizm, bieda, stosunki społeczne, wartości społeczne, styl życia.

Summary

The author's contribution presents partial results of research carried out in a group of people living a voluntarily modest way of life, which relate to the social relations of the participants, their particularities, mutual connections, connections related to the way of life and partially their quality from a subjective point of view of the research participants according to their responses.

Keywords: voluntary modesty, consumerism, poverty, social relations, social values, the way of life.

Bibliography

Filan B. (1999), *Tam tam tri. Ikar*, Bratislava: 1999.

Kohák E. (1998), *Zelená svatozář: kapitoly z ekologické etiky*. Praha: SLON.

Librová H. (1997), *Decentralizace osídlení – vize a realita*. Část druhá. Sociologický časopis 33, 1.

Librová H. (1994), *Pestří a zelení: Kapitoly o dobrovolné skromnosti*. 1 vyd. Brno: Veronica, Duha.

Librová H. (2003), *Vlažní a váhaví: Kapitoly o ekologickém luxusu*. 1 vyd. Brno Doplněk.

Musil L. (1999), *Těžba uhlí, problém prostředí, modernita: jak ovlivnila ekologická výzva organizaci jedné ostravské šachty*. Brno: Masaríkova univerzita a nakladatelství Georgetown.

Novotná A. (2009), *Dobrovolná skromnost' ako spôsob života*. Dissertation work. Trnavská Univerzita, Trnava: currently before the defense.

Composite authors (1996), *Velký sociologický slovník 1*. Praha: Karolinum.