

Hardcore and Punk in Czecho-Slovakia: From Grassroots Political Protest to Political Activism? A Case Study of the North Bohemian Hardcore Punk Scene

While security concerns are still predominant in Czech subcultural studies, other works have focused on politicisation or taken the anthropological perspective. At the same time, subcultures are the constituent parts of unorganised civil society. Many of their activities are oriented outside the subcultural scene, toward the public space. The present dissertation deals with the hardcore punk subculture as a part of civil society. Its goal was to identify the forms of integration in the public space that are typical of the subculture.

The fieldwork was conducted primarily in the Ústí nad Labem Region in the years 2012–2016. Participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews were the chosen research methods. Thematic analysis was subsequently implemented to interpret and analyse the data.

The approach was selected following a wide-ranging discussion of the main concepts of subcultural theory, their specifics and characteristics in the post-socialist region. Of central importance were the “core concepts” formulated by Patrick J. Williams, who studied the straight edge subculture around the world. The core concepts could be applied in the study because the characteristics of the punk subculture in the Czech context were found to be little different from those in other countries. Identity and authenticity, space and resistance became the overarching concepts through which the study was framed.

The North Bohemian community relies on traditional ideology and values such as anti-fascism, animal rights, environmental activism, and vegetarianism or veganism. The do-it-yourself principle became an absolute norm because the easy availability of modern technologies and a high level of knowledge and skills allowed subculture members to effectively replace professional services provided by the business sector.

The study demonstrated that the hardcore punk scene in North Bohemia continues to be active, with relatively high levels of involvement in civic activities. However, this is primarily the case of long-term activists, as members of the young generation tend to migrate to Prague. The resulting shift in strategies is characterised by intensive use of modern technologies, a decline of radical activism, and a primary focus on local issues. This is where a relatively well-apparent centre-periphery cleavage has been identified, with differences between the forms of activism typical of the Ústí nad Labem Region and Prague. Nevertheless, hardcore punk remains a form of resistance to mainstream society, not a mere leisure activity.