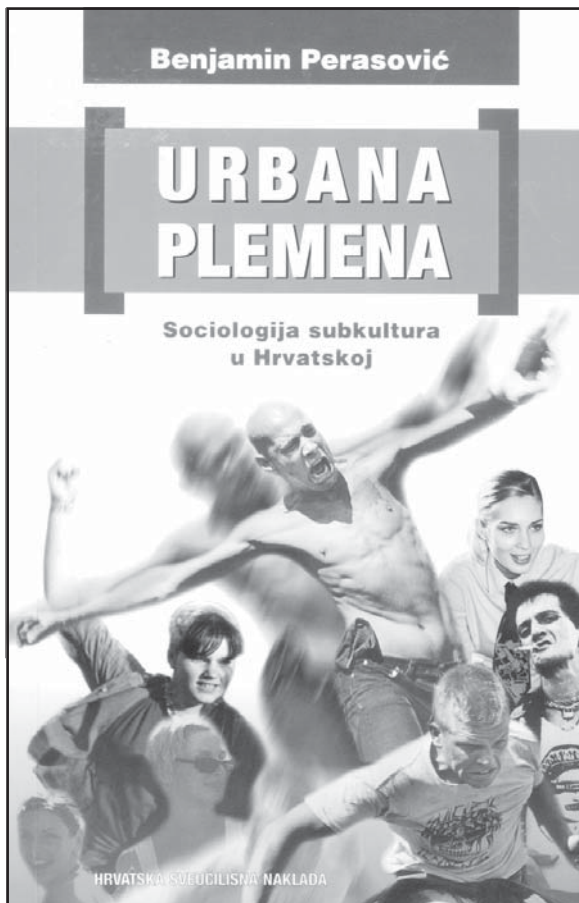


URBAN TRIBES – THE SOCIOLOGY OF SUBCULTURES IN CROATIA

Benjamin Perasović, Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, Zagreb, 2001

442 pp., (pb) ISBN 953-169-054-5



The publisher “Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada” has recently published the book *Urbana plemena – sociologija subkultura u Hrvatskoj* (*Urban Tribes – the Sociology of Subcultures in Croatia*) written by the author Benjamin Perasović. This book of an enviable volume (442 pages) originated from the doctoral dissertation defended by the author in March 1999 at the Department for Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. The dissertation about the subculture of the young was extended to include the study about different lifestyles and about the identity of approximately fifteen subcultural groups in Croatia during the last twenty years, starting from the seventies up to the nineties. The study is divided in three parts.

In the first part the author analyses the key terms and the theories of the subculture of the young, and he does that in the following order: 1. Chicago school, 2. Theory of a delinquent subculture, 3. Interaction (Interaction order), the

labelling theory and the sceptic revolution in the sociology of deviation, 4. Counter culture (alternative culture) and the widening of the range of (sub)cultures of the young, 5. Concept of moral panic, 6. Birmingham school, 7. Postsubcultural studies and the geography of the cultures of the young.

In the second part of the book, the listed terms and social theories are applied in researching the subcultures of the young in order to reconstruct some lifestyles and identities on the scene here in Croatia.

In the third part the author deals with the analysis of the relations between a relatively established sociology of the subcultures of the young in the world and the research which resulted in perceptions about the subcultural groups of the young in Croatia. The basic goal of this study was to give impetus to the development of research and to help understand the phenomenon of subculture, since, according to Perasović, the number of the past campaigns of moral panic about the subcultures in Croatia is larger than the number of sociological studies on this issue.

In the Introduction the author expressed his support to Croatia’s rare qualitative research of the subcultural phenomena of the young. By emphasising their insufficient theoretical justification—the studies about graffiti and its supporters, which will be primarily dealt with in the survey of this book because they belong to one of the most thoroughly analysed subcultures in Croatia—the author rightly notices that for sociology in Croatia ‘it is better to have a book about Torcida (author D. Lalić – observation by Z. Ž.; *Torcida* is the name of the football club Hajduk’s supporters from Split, Croatia (translator’s note) the active participant of a subcultural scene... than a dissertation about the influence of sociological paradigm on Peter Marsh’s theory about a ritualised aggressiveness and behaviour of a football gang in general. Naturally, such an assessment holds true only for the first, initial phase of research in this field, while talking about one book (*Torcida* by D. Lalić - observation by Z. Ž.) and its possible influence, and the desirability of covering all the dimensions of sociological work suggests itself in each and every future phase as self-explanatory’ (11).

Perasović impressively demonstrates the 'desirability of covering all the dimensions of sociological work suggests itself in each and every future phase as self-explanatory' in his own analysis of some portions of the domestic subcultural scene, starting from the seventies (snappy dressers, *hašomani*, hooligans), to the eighties (punk, 'new renegades', *darkeri*, rockabilly, supporters, heavy metal, hip-hop, new social movements), to the nineties (subculture in the war, a techno-tribe, *fanzines*). The author also directly participated in the research of the listed phenomena.

When talking about supporters, in Croatia there already exists an enviable number of studies, both theoretical and empirical, about this issue. For most of these studies the theoretical basis lies, at least implicitly, in the recognised psychological and sociological approaches in the world. Some names of the authors who dealt with the issue of supporters during the period of ex-Yugoslavia and today in Croatia are: K. Petrovič, Ž. Buzov et al., S Vrcan, D. Lalić, N. Fanuko et al., I. Glavan, H. Prnjak, T. Birtić, etc.

As for the book by Perasović, it may be said only for the chapter about supporters that the number of studies exceeds the number of moral campaigns about football gangs. The author carefully and systematically surveyed almost all the accessible literature in which, partly also as in Croatia, the generally accepted opinions about the supporters prevail, together with the perceptions of alcoholism and violence as natural side effects of their behaviours. In contrast to the widespread perceptions, sociology that deals with sport as a social phenomenon interprets the behaviour of supporters in a more complex way. 'It is impossible to separate the issue of the violence of the supporters from the series of aspects of the context in which such violence appears, starting from the language of sports media that is abundant in war and military terminology, to other elements of the context of a 'sporting event', to the non-sport aspects of socialisation, parental, school and general social environment' (1280).

Within the context of the author's study of the supporters as one of the groups on the subcultural scene in Croatia in the mid-eighties two facts must be taken into account, firstly, the 'urbanisation' of football supporters, and secondly, the ever more open and versatile interaction between some rock-subcultural scenes and the originating lifestyle of its supporters. In the mid-eighties in Croatia the supporters became independent and self-aware protagonists of the subcultural scene that gradually develops its language and iconography and that does not run away from accepting the elements

established and already accepted by other subcultural groups. Apart from the widespread awareness about belonging to the international football gang, the supporters use car-spray to write their graffiti on the walls of stadiums, but also on the walls of houses and buildings in the town; their graffiti are in English, and so are some of their banners; the supporters experiment with drugs, they dress up in such a way as to imitate the clothes used by the members of some other groups, to imitate the hair-dos, and to wear ear-rings, they dance in the stadiums, and when attending a rock concert they wear their own identification signs.

When comparing the supporters with other groups, one must, however, never overlook the fact that football always was, and still is, a constituent part of a dominant (urban) culture. This means that no matter how far, through the image of a specific, urban, subcultural supporter, football deviated from parental culture – among other things, fathers and sons do not go together to football matches, as used to be the case after World War II. – it is indisputable that a part of this parental culture remained implicitly a part of the world of football supporters (through maximalism, football language and abusive language).

At that point in time when (young) supporters turn from ordinary 'leisure-time consumers' to the world of subculture as a separate group, they are closer to the 'alternative' than to the original world and civil values.

'The world of football supporters itself had been, before the urban subculture of young supporters was created, on the edge of 'deviation' and specific subculture within a very benevolent area reserved for such activities in the dominant culture. This is the area of tolerance that is not disrupted by an occasional condemnation in the dominant culture, and in which this tolerance appears as a result of 'crossing the border-line' (any border-line of something sanctioned, regardless of whether we are talking about the amount of alcohol drunk, about disturbing public order, about violence, political slogans and symbols, etc.), because the identity is reduced to leisure time and the status of a 'hobby', so that, apart from an occasional 'crossing the border-line' a passionate football supporter in the pre-subcultural period may be criminalised in his community within the same group with passionate fishermen, bridge players, hikers or any other protagonists who, according to the 'perception of the majority' devote themselves to a too large extent to otherwise unquestionable or even desirable hobbies and activities. The community of a protagonist will regard as dubious precisely

this 'crossing the border-line' of a hobby or a leisure-time activity, thus assessing the degree of jeopardising a normal daily routine in which work and earning money, marital and parental duties act as basic co-ordinates' (287).

Because of acquiring their own picture of themselves, which is actually their self-awareness growing up, the supporters have tuned, as remarked by the author himself, from the 'twelfth' to the first player who, occasionally, move from the pages at the end of a newspaper to the front pages. Their evident narcissism found it rewarding: they were finally recognised as protagonists! At the same time this means that the stadium ritual, as a basic and constituent element of a subcultural style of football hooligans, became a nucleus for the gathering of a subcultural group that has its own identity. This group neither disappears nor disperses itself, as was the case with the 'old

supporters' after a game. However, it neither disappears nor disperses itself at school on Monday, at home or at work. As Lalić impressively wrote in his study *Torcida – pogled iznutra* (*Torcida – the view from within*), *Torcida* – and this also holds true for other groups of supporters – also lives without a football.

Perasović crowned his long-lasting preoccupation with supporters (which dates back to the mid-eighties), as well as with other subcultures in different years and different phases of observation and participation, with a praiseworthy result and a rich picture that fully describes one protagonist seen from his own supporter's point of view. In this way the author added a book to the already published works in the field of sociology, thus contributing a piece to a competent jigsaw puzzle, a book that will be read and analysed by the widest audience of readers.

Zoran Žugić