

## Subcultural Tastes in Latvia 2002-2010: The Content of Style

Jānis Daugavietis\* & Ilze Lāce

### Abstract

By carrying out a quantitative analysis of the musical taste of secondary school pupils, we attempt to understand how their tastes are formed, what their 'subcultural element' is and how it has changed over an eight-year period. Both in the classification of tastes and in the explanation of their meaning, as well as in the interpretations of the concept of subculture, we employ a group of conceptually related theories: Pierre Bordieu's 'sociology of taste' and Richard Peterson's thesis of omnivorism; as well as traditional and postmodern theories of subculture. Analysing the subcultural musical tastes, we conclude that the data from the 2010 questionnaire shows a far more 'postmodern' musical taste than that of the 2002 questionnaires. The distinctions between the groups of musical tastes are not as pronounced, the principles by which they are formed are less strict, and their content is more heterogeneous. Analysing the social factor (structure) and the relation of taste, a similar trend is observable – the homologous effect is weakening, although in certain cases it is still evident, namely in relation to gender and ethnicity.

**Keywords:** musical taste, secondary school pupils, subcultural genres, traditional subcultures, Latvia.

### Introduction

Although much criticised, the concept of subculture continues to flourish. The word 'subculture' long ago became part of everyday language, even in the post-Soviet arena, where it is increasingly replacing a term with similar meaning – 'non-formals'<sup>1</sup>. It is highly likely that thanks to the spectacular characters the term 'subculture' represents, it will remain in use in the media, and we will once or twice a year hear news of what the representatives of the 'skinhead subculture' have done in Rīga's Jewish cemetery and elsewhere. What often surprises us is that Latvia's (Rīga's) skins are seen as being a subculture, even though only a handful is active. Indeed, we have never heard of a skinhead demonstration or club. The same is true of punks, goths and emos. Yes, there are also those here who dress and behave as a member of these subcultures should; however, there are so few of them that it is difficult to imagine that they could create and maintain something that we could call a subculture.

Regardless of the criticism of the conception and meaning of subculture in academic circles (Bennett 1999, Hesmondhalgh 2005), which has lasted for over three decades, it will continue its academic life. "The concept of 'subculture' survives as a centrally defining discursive trope in much sociological work on the relationship between youth, music and style" (Bennett 1999: 603). It is possible that the survival of the word, although it is variously disguised (for example, [sub]culture; (sub)culture; sub-culture), is dependent on the paucity of alternatives. In both everyday and academic thought, the word is reified to the level that various new alternatives (for example, 'scenes' or 'tribes')

\* E-mail address of the corresponding author: janis.daugavietis@lu.lv

1 In Russian: неформалы (non-formals), неформальные движения (non-formal movements).

are unable to graft themselves successfully into the language. In addition, the alternatives offered by critics of the theory of subculture are themselves built on the very foundation of classic subculture theory. They can, therefore, be no more than modifications of the theory.

In retaining and utilising this concept, there must be an attempt to agree on how it is currently understood, taking into account changes of a social and historical nature as well as those pointed out by criticism. A separate point to be made in the question of 'the new definitions of subculture' is to think about it in terms of other similar places – for example, a small country, whose inhabitants usually adopt the culture and behavioural norms of those born elsewhere, not those created in their own country.

Can we use this same concept of subculture, a concept created and developed by late capitalism (late modernity) in developed Western countries, to describe the expressions of musical, style-related, or political preferences of Latvian youth? Maybe in a small post-Soviet country among about a dozen individuals the term 'subculture' is not applicable to the expressions of taste and lifestyles, which one associates with certain subcultures and styles created by those born in the West. Maybe, however, we have to content ourselves with the fact that subculture is a 'catch all' (Bennett 1999) term, one which we have to continue to use to describe Latvia's industrial or dubstep musical scenes of just ten or twenty participants, as well as the thousand-strong English and German goth armies, teenage Skype users, and the world's bloggers?

Assuming that musical taste is a good source for an empirical analysis of subculture, we will try to get closer to the 'content of subculture' and the meaning of subcultural style by using survey among students in the capital city of Latvia.

## From subcultures to post-subcultures and back

If the initial subculture concept ('structural') was described under such terms as *resistance, subordination, [working] class, opposition, deviance, delinquency, non-conformism, marginalization* etc. (Cohen, A. 1997, Cohen, Ph. 1997, Hall, Jefferson 2003), then from the late 1980s, criticism of this theory offered new concepts and alternative visions: *taste cultures, scenes, tribes, club culture, postmodern subcultures*, etc. (Shuker 2001; Bennett 1999; Muggleton 2000). Simplifying this, we can say that within the contemporary social science there has been a crystallisation of the two biggest approaches to the conceptualisation of subculture: 'traditional' and 'postmodern'. In the first, subcultures are seen as being either groups who have been ostracised from society or groups who have split away of their own accord. In both cases, there is a social or structural basis (for example, inequality). In the other version, subcultures are more forms of individual free choice, whose structural characteristics are heterogeneous and changeable<sup>2</sup>.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the research community and the approach known as post-subcultural studies have been evolving. It largely stems from the postmodern and post-structural criticism of the classic subculture theory by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). One of the main arguments represented in this approach is the decline of the significance of traditional social structures. It is argued that in today's globalised world, youth identities are more personalised than ever before. They are fragmented and free-floating, and "those groupings which have traditionally been theorised as coherent subcultures are better understood as a series of temporal gatherings characterised by fluid boundaries and floating memberships" (Bennett 1999: 600). These modifications picture subcultures merely as different lifestyles, leisure time activities and classless consumption. Involvement in such activities is seen rather as an act of individual choice, not a result of play of 'big' social factors like

2 Hesmondhalgh described it in the following way: ".../ a simple duality ...: fixity and rigidity versus instability and fluidity" (2005:24).

class, gender, ethnicity or others. “For postmodernists, subcultures react imaginatively through consumption and identity to construct creative meanings that can be liberating from subordination. Postmodern subcultural theory seeks to move away from models of social constraint and places greater emphasis on agency in the search for individual meaning in subcultural practice.” (Blackman 2005: 8).

At the same time, opposite opinions appear that can be called ‘neo-structuralist’, and they criticise the post-subculturalist approach and methods, arguing that the elimination of the structural approach in sociology is premature, and that the critics of the CCCS can be criticised for the same ‘weaknesses’ they were pointing out to the Birmingham school: insufficient empirical basis, focusing on spectacular and minor subcultures, and a generalisation of the findings to the wider public (Shildrick & MacDonald 2006).

Although the representatives of both approaches still debate the understanding and concept of subculture and its adequate usage or non usage generally (Bennett 1999, Hesmondhalgh 2005), in both interpretations of subcultures it is also possible to find some similarities, both in their conceptual structure and in their empirical understanding. For the most part, both traditional and postmodern approaches accept and hold on to the main elements of the classical definitions of subculture, including subcultures as subgroups with their own values and forms of behaviour; subcultures as subordinate to or different from the dominant groups; problem resolving (emancipatory) and a symbolic resource.

The differences lie in how these approaches see the formation and construction of subcultures, their significance and their influence. Continuing in a simple form of the language of dualism, their structure is homogenous or heterogeneous, stable or fluid, collective or individualistic. One possible way to clarify these differences would be by looking at the various political platforms from which one or the other approach follows, as well as the terms used: both clearly show in which instances the theory is a result of left-wing or communitarianism ideologies, and which stem from a liberal oriented ideology.

## The sociology of taste by Bourdieu and after

It is quite safe to assert that it was Pierres Bourdieu’s ‘sociology of taste’ and especially his book ‘Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste’ (1996) which gave a basis to the sociological and empirical research of music and other cultural spheres. In this work, Bourdieu evaluates aesthetic judgements as limiting rather than progressive or liberating because they are dependent on social structures and, therefore, can also be empirically measured (1996). Bourdieu modelled a chain of sociological proofs which had at one end taste, and at the other end the whole social structure of society.

Traditionally, the assumptions of homology and homogeneity are seen as being the main arguments of Bourdieu’s sociology of taste. The homology of taste is a result of the traditional sociological understanding of social reality as a typifiable and Marxist approach, which classifies social structures and relationships hierarchically: dominating and subordinate. This is also the case for culture(s). The argument of homology, for its part, foresees that tastes arrange themselves in those same hierarchical status relationships that are found in their creator – the fractions (social classes, status groups). Bourdieu’s homogeneity of culture and taste dictates that each social group-related preference is internally homogeneous (1996).

Bourdieu’s critique is related to interpretation of cultural field. The hegemony of ‘high culture’ long ago acquiesced to the hegemony of pop culture, therefore, a ‘high-low’ cultural opposition ceases to act as an essential line of division between lifestyles. Nowadays the main line of opposition is more likely to be arranged according to the diversity of consumption or eclectic hierarchy, which have omnivores on one end, and univores on the other (Peterson and Kern 1996).

## Omnivorism-univorsism modification

Richard Peterson and his initiated cultural ‘production perspective’ has in its framework a formulated and empirically proven “omnivore-univore” thesis: an individual of a higher status has a much wider range of tastes than that foreseen in Bourdieu’s theory; therefore, the assumption of the incompatibility of high and low culture can be discarded (Peterson 1992, Peterson and Kern 1996, Bryson 1997). If Bourdieu’s assertion regarding the lower sections of society remains valid, then the same can no longer be asserted for the higher classes, whose tastes and consumption are also increasingly ‘low’ art. They can, therefore, no longer be classed as snobs (Peterson and Kern 1996). This observation is confirmed repeatedly in other research (Chan and Goldthorpe 2004); however, the discussion remains because it can be viewed as a modification or a more precise rendering of Bourdieu’s theory. As far as better situated or better educated individuals consuming a wider spectrum of goods, there is no radical contradiction with Bourdieu’s theory. They have greater capital in all respects and their opportunities are more diverse, and the lower classes are still typically univores (Chan and Goldthorpe 2004). However, until now the expressed criticism of Bourdieu’s sociology of taste is sooner viewed as supplementary or as of the kind that continues its tradition, as opposed to destroying it (Daugavietis 2005).

## Assignments

Returning to the research of subculture, in both cases, its empirical research has been mostly carried out ethnographically. Our research is based on quantitative methods. We are exploring musical subcultures from the listeners’ side, and this is an instance in which culture is researched through individual taste. Our aim is to test some assumptions about the way musical tastes of youngsters are made, what they are made of, and what we can say about their ‘subcultural element’. Analysis is based on data from two surveys of Rīga secondary school pupils (2002 and 2010) on their favourite musical genres and performers.

There are two main research questions that relate to the theoretical discussion mentioned above:

(1) Can we talk about the impact of structural (social) factors on (musical) taste – can we still assert that subcultural tastes are socially homological, and that ‘membership’ in them is still clearly demarcated?

(2) What is the logic of construction of tastes OR *What’s inside the ‘black box’ of ‘subcultures’?* What is the content of subcultural taste: is it more hierarchical, subordinate and homogenous, or is it instead more polysemantic, fluid and heterogeneous?

Regarding the first question, there are two main competing theoretical assumptions in the sociology of culture, one is the concept of homology supported by Marxist tradition, including both CCCS (Clarke et al. 1976) and Pierre Bourdieu (1996), another is the postmodern interpretation of forming social identities (including tastes), which can be found in the writings of post-subculturalists (Bennett 1999, Muggleton 2000). In order to test these suppositions, we analyse the impact of two structural factors on taste: gender and ethnicity<sup>3</sup>. If these factors create groups with different tastes, then we can confirm the homology thesis. If, however, they do not, then there is a basis for agreeing with the postmodern theory of the instability and fluidity of subcultural identity. In addition, we also examined the changes in pupils’ musical tastes during an eight-year period, comparing the most popular subcultural genres in 2002 and 2010, assuming that introducing the dimension of time into the analysis can help us understand group formations and changes.

<sup>3</sup> These were the only structural factors measured.

The second question foresees two opposite extremes: first, when tastes are formed based on one of the traditional classifications and these tastes are internally homogenous, and second, when the internal composition of tastes is unclear and has a diverse character content wise. The empirical criteria which determine whether the classification of tastes is nearer to one or other pole is the traditional nomenclature of genre and style, which on the one hand will be structurally clear and more likely to be uniform, and on the other hand will be epitomised by postmodern diverse tastes. If a young person states certain musical genres and their corresponding musical performers as his or her favourites, then these can be viewed as being traditional or homogenous tastes. If, however, he or she chooses various genres or performers that represent different genres, then this kind of taste can be termed heterogeneous.

Subcultures in small countries like Latvia should be viewed differently, but even more critically. We still apply the concept of subculture to describe processes or even events of local importance. However, these local 'subcultures' are so few in number, inactive and isolated that they can rarely be described in terms other than 'group', 'friends' or 'local scene'. This is a further question of ours in the discussion concerning the universal usage of the concept of subculture.

## Methodology

Data from two representative surveys of Rīga secondary school pupils (2002 and 2010) on their favourite musical genres and performers is used in the analysis. In both surveys, respondents were selected through a representative two-stage cluster sample<sup>4</sup>. The survey took place at school during lectures. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed and later collected by the interviewer. The sample sizes of 2002 and 2010 are fairly similar, 473 and 418, respectively. The distribution of pupils by schools by language of instruction, gender and form is rather similar with the exception of form 10 in the survey of 2002, which might mean a slightly larger proportion of younger pupils.

Data from two questions on favourite musical genres and performers in the questionnaire was used in the analysis. In both surveys of 2002 and 2010, pupils were first asked to choose five musical genres they liked most from a list of 30 genres in 2010 and 33 genres in 2002 genres<sup>5</sup> (option to write 'other' was given), and rank their choices from one to five. Then pupils were asked to write and rank five (ten in 2002, but only the first five were used in the analysis) of their favourite musical performers. The data on performers as well as their 'nationality' was coded afterwards.

347 of 418 surveyed respondents (83%) in 2010 and 417 of 473 (88%) in 2002 gave valid answers on their favourite musical genres and performers, and were further used in the analysis. 290 of the respondents had named one of the 51 most often mentioned performers in 2010, therefore, their answers were later used in cluster analysis.

As opposed to the majority of research into tastes whose research questionnaires are developed using only the nomenclature of genres, our questionnaire was designed in a more open manner. While designing this survey, in addition to a list of predefined genres, we also used open-ended questions – each respondent could include his or her favourite musical performers or composers. This methodological solution was based on the assumption that it would widen the options of discovering the latent classification principles of musical tastes considerably, and would contribute to understanding the meanings respondents ascribe to the musical genres and styles (Daugavietis 2006).

4 First, sample size was calculated, using formula for simple random sample,  $P=95\%$ ,  $\Delta=5\%$  (in 2010);  $\Delta=3.5\%$  (in 2002). 21 schools were sampled in the first stage using random numbers. To ensure as wide variety of respondents as possible, one class (from grades 10-12) per school was sampled. The number of schools (classes) was determined, based on the average number of pupils per class in Rīga. In the second stage, the particular class surveyed was chosen from the list of total classes in grades 10-12 using random numbers. Schools refusing to participate were replaced by other similar schools from the sampling frame.

5 List of genres in 2002 and 2010 slightly differed but was standardised for analysis.

Data analysis was aimed at exploring the logics of the construction of musical tastes with a focus on 'subcultural genres'. Data from 2002 and 2010 on the musical preferences of pupils was compared, as well as preferences of boys and girls and pupils with different languages of instruction in schools

## Genres and styles: overview of tastes

This subsection analyses and compares 2002 and 2010 survey data using cluster analysis. This method is commonly used in the beginning of analysis to gain a general impression about the structure of data and associations among the cases or variables in the sample, and our task here is similar: to discover the way the patterns of musical tastes of pupils are structured, which musical genres and performers are closest (and furthest) in their opinions; what are the associations and groupings. The method allows for clustering both cases (individual tastes of pupils) and variables (genres and performers). These groupings are formed on the basis of similarities in answer patterns, thus, manifesting a considerable degree of closeness in musical taste. Because of methodological reasons, only those genres named by more than 10% of respondents were included in the analysis.

In 2002, the first grouping consisted of five genre groups, which were based on the similarity of the genre preferences of pupils:

- 1) 'heavier' and more 'alternative' preferences: *nu metal, punk and hard core, heavy metal and alternative and indie*;
- 2) *electronic and techno*;
- 3) *latino, schlager, classical music and world music*;
- 4) *rock*;
- 5) *hip hop, rap and pop and top40*.

These can further be grouped into two larger groups, of which one 'taste' group is made up of *hip hop, rap, pop, top40*, and the other of less mainstream genre preferences or more 'alternative' tastes.

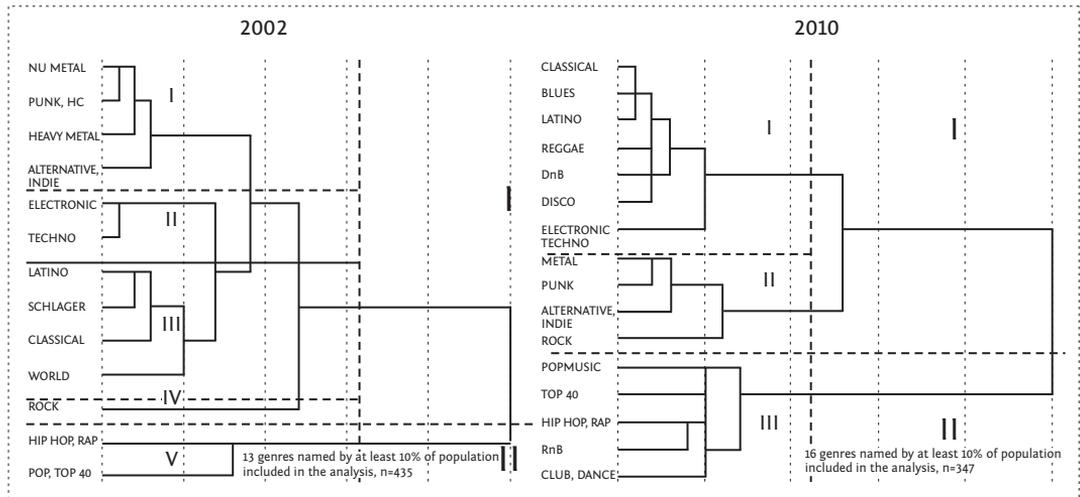
Grouping genre preferences in 2010 reveals a more consolidated picture: the genre preferences of pupils cluster around three rather distinct 'taste groups':

- 1) *classical, blues, latino, reggae, DnB, disco and electronic and techno*, somewhat less strongly associated with this taste;
- 2) *metal, punk, alternative and indie*, and *rock*, somewhat less strongly associated with this;
- 3) *pop music, top40, hip hop, rap, RnB and club and dance music*.

Similarly to 2002, these latter groups add up to two more general taste groups, one being more related to popular music, the other to more diverse and 'alternative' tastes.

Both in 2002 and 2010, the most preferred musical genres can be grouped in three wider styles of *pop, hip hop* and *rock*. A significant result is the slight decrease in the popularity of *hip hop*, which is the only statistically significant difference in the most frequently mentioned genres in 2002 and 2010. A possible explanation of this decline might be that *hip hop* is not as hyped as it was 10 years ago, when it became really popular in Latvia. *Hip hop* has transformed from the music of 'our generation' to 'classics' and the music of another (older) generation.

Further in the analysis, we will concentrate on the six most frequently chosen 'subcultural genres', i.e., *Hip hop, rap; Alternative, indie; Nu Metal, Korn family; Heavy Metal; Techno; Punk, hardcore* (2002) and *Hip hop, rap; Alternative, indie; Metal; Reggae; Punk; DnB* (2010). Even though the mentioned subcultural styles are claimed to be mainstream, we consider that these can still be viewed as typical subcultural genres not only because they are still called that in the mass media and academic literature, but also because their values quite sharply contrast with the accepted norms of our society. The genre of *hip hop* and *rap* is both a critique of social reality and a glamorisation of consumption. *Alternative* and *indie* is characterised by several deviant norms, ranging from an excessive fascination with music, art,



**Figure 1:** Grouping of most often mentioned genres, 2002 and 2010

Source: authors' compilation

or alternative models of life and consumption to escapism. *Punk* is still known as both hedonistic and an advocate of a socially active way of life, dependent on the subgenre. *Techno* and *DnB* are forms of club music, a culture that is quite strongly associated with drug use. The same social deviation is built into the foundation of the structure of *Reggae*. *Metal's* anti-social and often misanthropic content still excites a certain section of society, ranging from the clergy, who continue to see in it a violent spirit, to parents who partake in the moral panic.

If we look at the content of other forms of mass media, cinema for example, we can see the same anti-social and unacceptable images being shown, and so maybe we should not talk about these aspects (violence, narcotics, etc.) as deviations. Having said that, the film industry is censored and each film with controversial content is placed in a certain category, so it is still not possible to say that these values are accepted as being a social norm.

In general, no significant changes can be noticed, comparing data from 2002 and 2010. *Hip hop* is the dominating genre, others are considerably less popular, and the frequencies do not differ much, except for *Alternative*, *indie* and *Reggae*, which have gained popularity. The growing popularity of the *Alternative*, *indie* can be explained by the expansion of global (Western) mass culture in Latvia during the last 10 years. In Western mass culture, this is an already established genre with a big and stable segment of youth musical tastes.

If we look historically, the terms *Alternative*, *indie* were rather widely used in Latvia only in the 90s, as a consequence of joining the 'global information space' (Western cultural market) later. Thanks to the internet and more and more globalised local mass media, local audiences became more fragmented, and this is just one of the 'new' emerging major styles. The main audience of *Alternative*, *indie* is typically a white middle class listener, and the general population of our surveys (secondary school pupils in Rīga) conforms to this description quite well, so Latvian kids have simply finally joined the taste-group their Western peers have had for a longer period.

The story with changes in the popularity of *Reggae* could be explained in similar way. There are no apparent internal social or cultural factors that could have contributed to such a growing appeal for reggae. We do not have a tradition of a reggae scene, although the number of ragga/ska bands

**Table 1:** The most popular 'subcultural genres, %

2002	multi-response	as the first choice	2010	multi-response	as the first choice
Hip hop, rap	56	19	Hip hop, rap	40	10
Alternative, indie	18	4	Alternative, indie	27	9
Nu Metal, Korn family	17	5	Metal	21	5
Heavy Metal	16	3	Reggae	17	2
Techno	14	1	Punk	15	1
Punk, hardcore	11	1	DnB	15	1
<i>n=417</i>			<i>n=347</i>		

Source: authors' calculations

is increasing. Nor do we have any famous or influential reggae stars. The appeal for reggae might come from the image of freestyle and teenagers' growing interest in different kinds of psychoactive substances, which are increasingly available<sup>6</sup>.

During the last ten years, the Latvian cultural market has been flooded not only with the old Western symbolic goods, like musical genres and notions, but our shops and supermarkets have also been filled with associated tangible goods. In the case of reggae, all kinds of Jamaican and *rasta* related goods, banners and synthetic dreadlocks are among the most popular, as well as all kinds of accessories associated with *mary jane* consumption. Obviously, these shops appeared first in the capital city of Rīga, expanding later to other towns. After the opening of the first shop in 2008, some 30 or more followed shortly, selling then 'legal drugs' (different mixes, *salvia*, *kratom*, etc.) and full range of accessories, starting from all kinds of pipes and water bongs, to instructions for use and scales.

## Social divisions at play?

The next section is devoted to testing the hypothesis about the social determinants of musical taste, following the homological argument that the tastes of different social groups should differ. Because the sample is homogenous in respect to social class – the respondents are 15-18 year old pupils of Latvia's capital Rīga – just two main factors<sup>7</sup> of social difference are tested: gender and ethnicity<sup>8</sup>. Previous data analysis of the same data set from year 2002 has shown significant differences in tastes when controlled for these two variables (Daugavietis 2005).

Comparing the popularity of subcultural genres in 2002 and 2010, we see that gender based differences have almost disappeared. If the data of the first survey shows significant differences in four cases out of six most popular subcultural genres (see bolded in Table 2.), then in 2010 there is just one such case – *metal* is more often preferred by boys. From typical *top40* consumers (Daugavietis 2005), girls moved towards different alternative styles, with the exception of hard, masculine and metal music. Alternatively, we can take another angle, hypothesising about changes of the 'alternative' styles: in the 10 year period they have moved towards the *top40* format and/or a more feminine audience, with alternative singers-stars like Avril Lavigne and others.

6 Research reveals that one third of Rīga' pupils have tried marijuana, which is quite close to the highest indicator group in Western countries (Koroļeva, Sņikere, Trapencieris, Mieriņa & Goldmanis 2009).

7 Samples were not large enough to distinguish between the different social status subgroups, e.g., parents' education or the school's prestige.

8 The ethnicity of Rīga's secondary school pupils is measured by the language used in the school – Latvian or Russian.

**Table 2:** Similarities and differences in subcultural taste: genre by gender (%)

2002	Girls	Boys	2010	Girls	Boys
Hip hop, rap	55	59	Hip hop, rap	38	42
Alternative, indie	16	20	Alternative, indie	29	24
<b>Nu Metal, Korn family</b>	11	24	Punk	16	15
<b>Heavy Metal</b>	10	24	Reggae	15	18
<b>Techno</b>	10	21	<b>Metal</b>	14	29
<b>Punk, hardcore</b>	8	16	DnB	13	17

Source: authors' calculations

**Table 3:** Similarities and differences in subcultural taste: genre by school language (%)

2002	Latvian	Russian	2010	Latvian	Russian
Hip hop, rap	57	56	Hip hop, rap	39	42
<b>Alternative, indie</b>	26	11	<b>Alternative, indie</b>	32	21
<b>Nu Metal, Korn family</b>	23	11	Metal	22	20
Heavy Metal	18	15	<b>Reggae</b>	19	13
<b>Techno</b>	11	17	Punk	15	15
Punk, hardcore	10	12	<b>DnB</b>	10	22

Source: authors' calculations

There are two main language communities<sup>9</sup> in Latvia – Latvian and Russian, which can be seen as culturally segregated (Tabuns 2006). In Rīga, where 0.7 million<sup>10</sup> of the total population of 2.2 million live, 2/3 are Russian speaking. We explain the certain differences in their subcultural taste by the social and cultural segregation of the ethnic communities. First, it is expressed in the consumption of different sources of information (with differences in content). Second, it creates different practices. In the case of subcultures, the most important practice could be participation in the local scenes, and we suppose that local subcultures are divided along ethnic lines.

Even though all the genres originate from outside of Latvia, many local scenes in Latvia are somehow ethnically homogenous, exclusively 'Latvian' or 'Russian'. There can be a certain scene dominated by either, or there can be two musically similar scenes, but one is 'Latvian' and the other 'Russian'. The Latvian speaking community is larger and they have strong institutional and political support<sup>11</sup>. Usually 'Latvian scenes' are bigger and more diverse, while the Russian speaking community often does not have enough resources (human and political) to provide the critical mass for building and sustaining smaller 'sub-genral' (alternative, subcultural) scenes.

If we can detect differences in the case of *alternative, indie* music (Latvian pupils choose this genre more often than Russians), we would like to explain this by the different local scenes of *alternative, indie*, both in Latvia and in Russia.

Since the beginning of the nineties, the Latvian *alternative, indie* scene has grown rapidly: if 20 years ago there were no more than five (!) bands adhering to this musical genre and ideology, then nowadays there are about two hundred or more bands who play concerts and publish recorded music.

9 There is also a divided educational system – Latvian language schools and minority language schools (mostly Russian). Since the 2004 'school reform', 2/3 of classes in minority secondary schools are in Latvian or bilingual.

10 Central Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Latvia, <http://www.csb.gov.lv>.

11 For example in Latvia, Latvian is the only official language, which means a lot of restrictions on other languages in all spheres of public space, like broadcasting, the educational system, advertising, mass media, etc.

With rare exceptions, most of these *indie* bands are ethnically and/or linguistically Latvian. If we look at Russia's popular culture, as it is a more relevant for Latvia's Russian youth (Tabuns 2006), we can see that there *alternative, indie* music has a narrower audience or scene segment than in the Western countries.

The situation of Russian *indie* bands in Latvia generally applies to other subcultural genres or scenes too, including the most popular ones, except maybe *hip hop*<sup>12</sup>. From this observation, we derive our next speculation about the differences in the popularity of dance music styles (disco, *techno*, *DnB*, etc.) among Latvians and Russians: if Russians do not have here their own 'live music' scenes, they might more often than Latvians go to other places where music is played to spend their leisure time<sup>13</sup>. Russian speaking audiences socialise mostly in clubs where DJ's are playing, while Latvians also have the option of going to clubs where Latvian live bands are playing, where they meet their friends – band members or other fans.

## General divisions of taste

In this subsection, we will analyse taste from another perspective, taking as our criteria musical indicators, as opposed to social indicators.

Analysing the pupils who had named *hip hop, rap* as one of their favourite musical genres, we can see that the most frequently named favourite performers are international and local 'mega-stars'. Of these, strictly speaking, only some can be considered as representatives of the genre. This can most probably be explained by the popularity of the genre (in 2002, it was the most popular), so a lot of consumers of conventional pop music have probably named it too.

To separate the 'truer' *hip hop, rap* fans, we selected only those having the genre as the first choice. Their most frequently named favourite performers include a considerably higher share of the representatives of the genre, although others are represented too. Interestingly, the respondents surveyed in 2010 more often name local *hip hop, rap* performers. Bearing in mind that *hip hop, rap* in 2010 is not that popular as it was in 2002, but local artists in the genre are named more frequently, we can assume that this indicated the growing interest of local audiences in the evolving local scene<sup>14</sup>.

Similar analysis was conducted with other most popular 'subcultural genres'.

Data analysis indicates that these subcultural genres form in a way a rather homogenous group, in which no real differences can be found, except for *hip hop, techno* and *DnB*. With some exceptions, most subcultural genres are associated with the same performers, which can be characterised as 'classic rock bands'. They have been rotating in the mass media since the nineties at least and also fit in the *alternative* format: *AC/DC; Blink 182; Eminem; Korn; Linkin Park; Marilyn Manson; Metallica; Nirvana; Rammstein* and the likes. It does not matter, if the respondent (pupil) considers himself or herself a fan of *punk, indie* or *metal*, as most often their favourite performers are the same 'megastars' of international or local market of popular music.

12 Unlike other genres which are represented by only Latvian scenes, in hip hop we can speak also of a Latvian Russian (ethnic Russians who live in Latvia) scene, which, however, is quite separate from the Latvian hip hop scene.

13 It should be noted that 75% of Latvia's Russian community lives in large towns or cities, compared to 40% of Latvians (and 50% of Russians live in Rīga). This means that the majority of Latvians live in rural areas, while Russians are expressly city or town dwellers.

14 During these eight years, the local hip hop scene has grown considerably. If the first Latvian performers and records who became popular in wider circles (Ozols, S.T.A. and others) appeared in 2000-2002, then today the scene has grown and widened outside the borders of some hip hop artists in the capital city. A similar expansion of the hip hop scene, both regarding the number of performers and the impact on the whole pop industry, has taken place in Russia during the past decade.

Now we take the subculture fans' (selected only those having the certain genre as the first choice) ten most often named artists and look at how frequently they overlap with the choices of fans of other genres. In the 2002 questionnaire from 6 fans of subculture genres, 5 genre fans mentioned *Korn*, 4 genre fans mentioned *Limp Bizkit* and *Linkin Park*, and 3 genre fans mentioned *Marilyn Manson* and *Rammstein*. In the 2010 questionnaire, the maximum artist overlap was over two genre fans.

On one hand, it shows that the subcultural taste of the schoolchildren in 2002 was more united, as there were not such striking subgenre differences. Although they differ in the context of their chosen genre, they listen to the same artists. The 2010 data leads us to assume that the respondents' tastes are more segmented. *Linkin Park* or other popular alternative groups are no longer listened to by practically everyone. Now each fan of a particular subgenre basically listens to his or her music and groups.

There could be several explanations for these differences, including those that lie outside of the boundaries of the traditional-postmodern dichotomy. The segmented trend of the listeners can support both the first and second argument. Stronger segmentation can indicate a clearer formation of structures, as well as the atomisation of the individual into smaller units. In the case of Rīga's secondary school pupils, diversification of subcultural tastes is more likely to stem from the widening diversity of music on offer for consumption. For our part, at the level of social analysis we have to assume that the separation of listeners' tastes into smaller, more diverse fractions supports the individualisation argument. Our target group is a relatively homogenous section of society, whose biggest internal differences are sex and ethnicity (language), and if the data shows that in 2010 tastes have become more diverse in comparison with 2002, but that the influence of social factors has diminished (see subsection 'Social divisions at play?'), then we assume that this diversification is due to other factors, more likely to be 'postmodern' than 'traditional'.

Based on these results, some significant conclusions can be drawn, and some new assumptions developed. The two most important are as follows. 'Traditional subcultures' (*punk, metal, rock, hip hop*, etc.) are part of mass culture and together they constitute quite a homogenous taste group that most often is labelled as 'alternative'. The content of this 'alternative' taste is determined by the performers of the genre, which has the highest rotation in the global and local musical media. Analysis of the 'subcultural taste' does not reveal any substantial differences from the mass cultural consumption, neither in consumption channels, nor in contents; considerable overlapping between them can be noticed. The share of respondents whose musical tastes might suggest their affiliation with 'real' subcultures (because their favourite performers are outside the everyday mass media rotation or are not represented there at all) is statistically insignificant. It is clear once more that "... the majority of youth pass through life without any significant involvement in 'deviant' subcultures. Associated aspects of subcultural fashion and musical tastes may be adopted, but for 'respectable' youth these are essentially divorced from subcultural lifestyles and values" (Shuker 2001:207). However, it is clear now that certain subcultural elements of today's youth have taken over the larger part of the whole.

In the case of the most popular subcultural genres, locality might be of importance, and this is one of the differences in comparison with 'mainstream taste'. We can see this by analysing the artists mentioned by a particular genre fan – overall, local artists were mentioned less frequently in 2010 than in 2002. However, the number of local subculture artists has increased. There might be a growing tendency for a local consumer to support local subcultural scenes, especially if the scenes 'grow' and are incorporated into the local pop music industry, in other words, there is demand for 'locality'.

Grouping (clustering) of favourite genres and performers confirms the conclusions acquired by crosstabulation analysis of genres and the most popular performers among the fans of the particular genres. The genre preference groups are not homogenous in respect to preferred performers within the groups. The 'division lines' among the genre preferences do not concur with those of preferred performers. The empirical groupings of genre preferences and preferred performers follow different logics and principles of group construction.

## Discussion

### 'Taste' instead of 'subculture'?

When analysing culture in a deterministic way, for example, as being dependent on the socio-economic structure, Bourdieu classifies it into two groups: the dominant culture and subordinated culture. Through analogy we can look at subculture the same way, as the construction of this concept suggests: there is the culture (the dominant, mainstream, official), and there are many other cultures (subcultures). Looking at the content of culture or taste, Bourdieu talks about two basic types of taste: *taste of freedom* and the *taste of necessity* (1996). The first type is characteristic for economically independent classes and fractions, since they can invest enough resources in such impractical practices, as cultural enjoyment, while the second type is characteristic for the segments of society, whose cultural and economic capital are much poorer, and whose cultural competence and needs are much more functional and homogeneous.

The *taste of freedom* that Bourdieu describes has some similarities with the interpretation of subcultures in postmodern theory. While Bourdieu attributed individual freedom to choose and change the culture and styles only to the higher social status groups, however, subculture's postmodern discourse is already being applied to a wider range of social strata. These are some circumstances in modern Western world that are changing society in a certain direction, which is increasingly producing individuals who are able to implement the *taste of freedom*.

By accepting Bourdieu's criticism of the egalitarising convergence of society and culture, and postmodernism's disposal of the social fabric of determinism, one accepts that the notion of taste is becoming ever closer to the concept of subculture. Music has always been considered one of the subculture's constituent elements or 'symbolic subsystems' (Cohen, Ph. 1997), and if any of the other(s) would be eliminated, this factor would only increase the weight of that argument.

In the postmodernist version, it is particularly difficult to separate tastes from subculture, and it is also a matter of what's on offer – use of the term 'taste cultures' instead of 'subculture', as the individual becomes more and more relaxed and informed, as he composes his consumption and chooses what provides the greater satisfaction and pleasure. From the symbolic activity in the CCCS version, the postmodernist version of subculture becomes doubly symbolic. Therefore, using the empirically more easily detectable term 'taste', this may be more appropriate way to approach subcultures.

### Conscious vs conspicuous consumption and the use of term 'subculture'

The concept of subculture has been used for a long time now, and it is widely spread in everyday language and popular media. Various types of subculture, mostly concerned with music, are incorporated into mass culture, industry and capitalist market as diverse, but fairly equal styles and symbols, which this study once again confirms. The unifying name (format) for subcultural styles is 'alternative', which indicates only a symbolic deviance from the normality of pop culture. Deviance is manifested only through a spectacular or audible style, and in symbolic or conspicuous consumption.

In this sense, subcultural styles are very popular. Our research indicates that about half of the young people surveyed are fans of those 'alternative styles', which requires us to rethink the authenticity of this kind of subculture manifestation and return to 'subcultural' manufacturing, commodification, reification and similar ideas. This is another reason to critically review the use of the popular word 'subculture'. However, so far the academic environment has not been able to give up applying the concept, neither by modifying it with the prefix 'post' or hiding it in brackets. One or another it still is embedded in academic space. Whether the academic community continues to use it or not, the understanding of the categories of conventional culture (styles) and deviant culture or subculture remains. Therefore, it would be important to agree on the 'new' content of this concept.

This study confirms once again that what is recognised as a subculture is actually closer to reified cultural components or a lifestyle. This is notably the case in small countries, where it is obvious that these subcultures are ripped from the content of the global pop culture mass media. Basically, they are old, traditional or dominant subcultures, those of which we likely can not expect initiation of social changes. In a way, this type of subculture coincided with the Adorno's 'the resentment listener', which seeks the ideal music in past styles and finds inspiration exclusively there (Адорно [Adorno] 1999). They are rather conservative and double-symbolic subcultures. Much more interesting and 'authentic' are subcultures that are new, yet relatively free from mass media and potentially able to make social change. In small and peripheral countries, especially when they are ethnically split, it is difficult to talk about original subcultures and to imagine that they could occur. Here cultural processes can be influenced by a handful of activists. A small group can grow around them, which is more or less involved in their activities, but we prefer to call this 'miniculture', rather than a subculture.

## Conclusions

Examining assumptions about the impact of social structures on taste, we conclude that it still exists. In some cases, girls' musical taste is different than boys': girls are more likely to choose the most popular music (both in genres and artist preferences), and more often choose female artists, while boys more often choose 'hard&heavy&extreme' genres. Data comparison from 2002 and 2010 shows that the differences that existed in 2002, when the subcultural genres were more popular among boys, have almost evened out in 2010. Now the only difference can be observed in the case of hard music.

Comparison of musical tastes by the language of instruction in schools also reveals significant differences. First, the popularity of different genres differs in distinct subgroups; second, the frequency of naming Latvian (residing in Latvia or performing in Latvian) and Russian (residing in Russia or performing in Russian) performers among pupils with Latvian or Russian as their language of instruction in school differs. Along with international performers (which are dominant in the list of favourite performers, on average  $\frac{3}{4}$ ), pupils from both linguistic communities also name local artists, most often choosing performers that sing in their language. Besides the 'natural' desire to communicate in the native language (this pertains to the symbolic communication in the field of popular music), there are two other factors explaining why Russian pupils prefer Russian performers. First, Russia's mass media is the main information space for Latvia's Russian-language community. Second, Russia has a large pop music industry, while in the Latvia there are virtually no popular Russian musical artists, not to mention any influential scenes.

Interestingly, the latest data set reveals that artists of local subcultural scenes are mentioned more frequently than in 2002, although overall local artists in 2010 are mentioned less frequently than in 2002. We explain this with the tendency of subcultural localisation. For subculture to be identifiable and existent, it is desirable to be 'tangible' and physically close. However, this assumption requires further investigation using other methods and approaches.

Analysing the latent classification of respondents' taste, we conclude that the taste of pupils in 2002 is clearer and a more cohesive (it corresponds to the traditional nomenclature of the music genre classification), while taste in 2010 has more in common with the postmodernist argument about blurring borders of consumption and subcultures.

The quantitative study of Rīga's secondary school pupils' musical taste shows that attachment of tastes to social structures (argument of homology) has a weakened. However, in some cases it has enough weight, even within a group as homogenous as the secondary schoolers of the Latvian capital. Similarly, subcultural tastes have evolved from homogeneity in the direction of heterogeneity. Tastes have become simultaneously more genre-segmented and structurally mixed together.

## References

- Адорно, Т. В. [Adorno, T.V.] (1999). “Предисловие” & “Типы отношения к музыке” [“Preface” & “Types of listeners”] in *Избранное: социология музыки (“Введение в социологию музыки. Двенадцать теоретических лекций”)* [Introduction to the Sociology of Music. Twelve Lectures (Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie. Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen)] (11-26) Москва - Санкт-Петербург: Университетская книга.
- Bennett, A. (1999). Subcultures or neo-tribes? Rethinking the relationship between youth, style and musical taste, *Sociology* 33(3): 599-617.
- Blackman, Sh. (2005). Youth Subcultural Theory: A Critical, Engagement with the Concept, its Origins and Politics, from the Chicago School to Postmodernism, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(1): 1-20.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bryson, B. (1997). What about univores? Musical dislikes and group-based identity construction among americans with low levels of education, *Poetics* 25: 141-156.
- Chan, T.W. & Goldthorpe, J.H. (2004). Social Stratification and Cultural Consumption: Music in England, Working Paper Number 2004-04, Department of Sociology, University of Oxford.
- Hall S. & Jefferson T. (eds) *Resistance through Rituals (Youth subcultures in post-war Britain)*, London: Routledge.
- Cohen, A. (1997). A general theory of subcultures, in K. Gelder, S. Thronton (eds) *The subcultures reader* (44-54). London; New York: Routledge.
- Cohen, Ph. (1997). Subcultural conflict and working-class community, in K. Gelder, S. Thronton (eds) *The subcultures reader* (90-99). London; New York: Routledge.
- Daugavietis, J. (2005). *Rīgas vidusskolēnu muzikālās gaumes: atšķirīgais un kopīgais [The musical tastes of Riga city secondary school pupils: distinctions and similarities]*, unpublished master's thesis, Rīga: University of Latvia.
- Daugavietis, J. (2006). Muzikālās gaumes latentu klasifikāciju izpēte [Research of Latent Classifications of Musical Tastes], LU Raksti: *Socioloģija* 701: 71-82.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2005). Subcultures, Scenes or Tribes? None of the Above, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8(1): 21-40.
- Koroļeva, I., Sņikere, S., Trapencieris, M., Mieriņa, I. & Goldmanis, M. (2009). Jaunieši un atkarības [Youth and Addictions], in I. Koroļeva, R. Rungule & I. Trapenciere (eds) *Latvijas jaunatnes portrets: integrācija sabiedrībā un marginalizācijas riski [A Portrait of Latvian Youth Today: Integration in Society and Marginalization Risks]* (211-257). Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.
- Muggleton, D. (2000). *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style*. London; New York: Berg.
- Peterson, R.A. & Kern, R. (1996). Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore, *American Sociological Review* 61(5): 900-907.
- Peterson, R.A. (1992). Understanding audience segmentation: From elite and mass to omnivore and univore, *Poetics* 21(4): 243-258.
- Schildrick, T.A. & MacDonald, R. (2006). In defence of subculture: young people, leisure and social divisions, *Journal of Youth Studies* 9(2):125-140.
- Shuker, R. (2001). *Understanding Popular Music*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Tabuns, A. (2006). *Kultūras. Jaunieši. Mediji [Cultures. Youth. Mass Media]*, Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte.

**Ilze Lāce** is a researcher at the Advanced Social and Political Research institute (ASPRI) at the University of Latvia. She has completed her MA in sociology (2005) and is currently earning her PhD in Sociology at the University of Latvia. The main research interests of the ASPRI are social and political processes in Post-Soviet space. Ilze's main research area is regional development, specifically in relation to the migration choices of young people.

**Jānis Daugavietis** is a researcher at the Advanced Social and Political Research institute (ASPRI) at the University of Latvia. He has completed his MA in sociology (2005) and is currently earning his PhD in Sociology at the University of Latvia. The main research interests of the ASPRI are social and political processes in Post-Soviet space. Jānis's main research area is regional development, specifically in relation to amateur cultural activities.

### **Acknowledgments**

This paper has been strengthened by thoughtful comments from Benjamin Perasovic and Airi-Alina Allaste, and two anonymous reviewers. And thanks to John Whitmore and Josh Vanek too.