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Turning points in the relationship between young residents of a disadvantaged neighborhood and local deviant groups
A longitudinal case study

Abstract: The article presents a reconstruction of turning points in the relationship of teenagers from a disadvantaged neighborhood (DS) (Snyder, Angus, and Sutherland-Smith, 2002) with local deviant groups, obtained from data from a longitudinal qualitative study (Holland, Thomson, Henderson, 2004) conducted with the participation of several now-adult men who once lived in one of such neighborhoods in Łódź. The study revealed an intersubjective perspective on deviant activities of local peer groups and three variants of turning points in the relationships of teenagers with such groups ("rebounding"; "standing up for yourself"; joining an alternative reference group), along with the characteristics of the context that favored them. These form the core of the article, enriching the discourse on desistance from crime and inspiring a discussion about strength-based rehabilitation in an open environment.
Key words: desistence from crime, disadvantaged neighborhood, deviant groups, reputation turning points.

Introduction

The article addresses the need, highlighted in literature, to consider the heterogeneity of criminality in studies on the phenomenon of desistance from deviant activities (Kusztal, Muskała, 2022). It presents the results of a longitudinal qualitative

study (Holland et al., 2004) that enriches our understanding of the mechanisms of desistance from criminal behavior limited to adolescence[1].

The contribution of the article to resocialization discourses is twofold. Firstly, it conceptualizes the phenomenon of desistance from deviant activities from a symbolic-interactionist perspective, framed in terms of identity transformation. Despite strong advocacy within Polish resocialization circles promoting an understanding of breaking away from criminality as a result of identity changes (Konopczyński, 2009; Szczepanik, 2017), and the popularity of this perspective in the USA and Canada (Szczepanik, 2017), this concept does not find sufficient application in our research that explores the significance of specific events for the shift from deviant to non-deviant activities throughout life (Bernasiewicz, 2013; Bernasiewicz, Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz, 2015; Szczepanik, 2017). Secondly, empirically grounded knowledge about turning points in criminal careers typically takes the form of presenting critical events to which a "termination" meaning is attributed. Turning points captured in the experiences of several men in their youth residing in one of the Łódź tenement-based DS (deprived neighborhoods) are not presented statically but processually (Maruna 2001, p. 17, cited in Kusztal, Muskała, p. 205). In conversations with the participants, these biographical turning points are placed in a lifelong perspective, allowing for the discovery of a dynamic and complex configuration of their conditions – interactive, symbolic, spatial, and structural. Turning points presented in the study within such a comprehensive context are elements of the process of negotiating the subject's identity in relationships with "others," significant for his social "becoming" in the early stages of youth in an environment full of material and social constraints on his activities.

The result of the analysis – variant turning points understood in terms of identity transformation in the relationships of teenagers from DS with deviant groups – not only brings an interesting perspective to the discourse around the phenomenon of desistance from criminality. Its rich contextualization provides grounds for the development of spatially, class, and culturally sensitive resocialization models in an open environment.

Due to the empirical nature of the source of this article, a significant part is devoted to discussing the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the study. The result of the analysis – a variably ordered presentation of turning points illustrated by participants' statements and its synthetic summary – constitutes the core of the article.

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[1] The author refers here to the distinction between criminals who "exhibit behaviors violating social order throughout their entire life course" (life-course persistent offenders) and those who "violate it only during adolescence" (adolescent limited offenders) (Bushway et al., 2003, p. 130, cited in Kusztal, Muskała, 2022, p. 205).

Theoretical foundations for analyzing turning points in the relationships of boys from the deprived neighborhood (DS) with their peer groups promoting deviant behaviors revolve around the concept of resocialization

Deprived neighborhoods (DS) are living areas with a lowered level of social recognition, concentrating within their boundaries unfavorable processes that determine lower life chances and social advancement opportunities for their residents (Gulczyńska, Granosik, 2022, p. 39). Studies from various disciplines depict them as places accumulating numerous issues, with crime occupying a central position (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 1998, Mordwa, 2014).

The literature extensively explains the connection between residing in deprived neighborhoods (DS) and the risk of a criminal career.

Concepts attributing the increased risk of deviant behavior among their residents to experiences of structural and economic inequalities underscore the significance of unjust resource distribution (material, health, educational, prestige, control, etc.) in the city for the life chances of DS residents and encompass a wide range of conditions for this phenomenon. Particularly intriguing for educators are studies that elucidate symbolic determinants behind the inequalities in the distribution of goods or control in the city. Research documents the processes of stigmatization of DS residents in their (indirect) relations with politicians, decision-makers, and direct interactions with representatives of assistance, educational, or control institutions. Political, institutional, and urban discourses are burdened with "territorial stigma" (Wacquant, 2007), a symbolic construct consisting of negative attributes ascribed to DS residents. Its agency in decision-making processes at various levels highlights economic, educational, and social divisions among residents into "better" and "worse," consequently reinforcing a culture of resistance against authorities and representatives of formal power within underprivileged groups. The processes of marking facilitate the exclusion of juvenile residents of such places from projects aiming to change their surroundings[2], ultimately leading to the creation of "criminalizing spaces" (Cahill, 2019). This term refers to city fragments where the intertwining of social relations of youth from marginalized

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[2] Young residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods experience double marginalization in the processes of changes in their living areas. Firstly, their exclusion from participation in revitalization processes results from decision-makers attributing them a low ability to make decisions about changes in their environment due to their social background (classism) (Philips, 2004). Secondly, the planning of these processes reflects the widespread recognition of adults as competent to recognize and represent the views of all community members (Goodwin, Young, 2013).

groups with spatial forms of control and punitive state policies fosters processes of their criminalization[3].

The theories explaining crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods as a result of processes within the community (among residents) play a crucial role in this discourse, including the epidemic theory (Crane 1991; Furstenberg, 1993), collective socialization theory (e.g., Jencks, Mayer, 1990), and bond theory (O'Donnell, 1980). The first theory explains the increased crime risk in disadvantaged neighborhoods through socialization processes in local peer groups, which are more effective when the neighborhood has higher population density and stronger peer pressure (Crane, 1991; Furstenberg, 1993). The collective socialization theory emphasizes the role of social homogeneity among residents of such places (e.g., Jencks, Mayer, 1990). It explains the mechanisms of negative socialization of residents through intergenerational learning processes in communities where the lack of middle-class role models condemns young people to imitate or be molded by older residents representing low socio-cultural potential and/or deviant patterns of social functioning. The bond theory explains the relationship between living in disadvantaged neighborhoods and the increased risk of crime through the phenomenon of loyalty, economic dependencies in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and the barrier to the inclusion of their residents in the broader society, anticipated based on their previous experiences of discrimination in their relations with its representatives (O'Donnell, 1981).

The above theoretical positions are connected by a normative perspective. Descriptions of intra-neighborhood processes are formulated by relating them to middle-class values (lifestyle, the crucial importance of formal education in life success). In a different light, studies of socio-cultural orientation present disadvantaged neighborhoods as contexts conducive to criminal careers. They illustrate the interactive and symbolic layer of neighborhoods conceived as entities co-creating their unique local cultures, including certain variants of model social identities that residents negotiate in everyday communication. The processes of becoming a criminal are given significance as one of the variants of local careers.

The perspective of the presented study aligns with the last of these approaches. In understanding the influence of the local environment, primarily peer groups, on the involvement of young residents in deviant activities and abstaining from them, the social reputation theory has proven to be inspiring (Carroll et al., 1999; Emler, 1984, 1990). Mainly applied to explain cultural and communicative conditions of juvenile delinquency, it emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the subject's self-definition (private self) and how others perceive it (public self) for the regulation of human behavior (Carroll et al., 1999; Emler, 1984, 1990).

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[3] The Łódź studies have shown how "hanging out in the alleys" contributes to an increased interest from the formal control authorities, leading to an elevated risk of labeling them as formal deviants (Gulczyńska, 2013).

Its proponents promote the understanding of crime as an interactive phenomenon in which criminal acts are interpreted as the dynamic interaction effects of a social actor with a significant audience (Emler, 1984, 1990). Perhaps due to the significant importance of peer groups in adolescence and early youth, the social reputation theory is applied to explain the criminality of young people, predominantly males.

According to this theory, social behaviors are elements negotiated by individuals for their reputation and position in the group. Each community provides its members with patterns of practices, and engagement in these practices allows gaining recognition from the majority and consistent privileges. Reputation is thus continually negotiated, and the interpretation of group norms decides the patterns of negotiation. Although the same group mechanisms regulate behavior in criminal groups and youth groups united by passion, as both are contexts of social and individual "becoming" of the subject, especially in the former, each behavior can strengthen or weaken individual reputation as membership in them is unstable. Given the anticipation of the consequences of deviant behaviors, members of these groups are constantly "checked," their position challenged. This explains the particular care members take in presenting themselves consistently in the presence of the same audience, which constitutes a significant part of their interactional effort. The group, by creating circumstances threatening the individual's reputation, evaluates them and provides information about who they are, what privileges they have, and their position among those who are significant to them.

The patterns of reputation negotiation depend on the resources of the group's operating context. The poverty in disadvantaged neighborhoods (DS) is one reason for the development of status-building interactions in peer groups engaging in deviant activities. Supporting this argument are the studies of Daniel Cueff (2006), who illustrated the connection between the poverty of residential infrastructure and deviant behaviors in peer groups based on observations in French and Polish disadvantaged neighborhoods. The studies demonstrated that the material constraints in DS facilitate attributing meaning to the use of space and, consequently, the development of the communicative layer of their group activities. The high level of creativity in the latter, often expressed in forms that do not conform to the norms of the adult world, leads to conflicts (Cueff, 2006).

In summary, the reputation theory attributes significance to crime as a socially co-constructed act in group communication. The results of ethnographic studies in disadvantaged neighborhoods (DS) illustrating material and social constraints on the activities of peer groups of young residents justify the hypothesis of a higher likelihood of evolving tactics for negotiating social image in such places into deviant behaviors, effectively enforced by peer pressure.

From the perspective of resocialization, it is crucial to understand the properties of contexts in which the influential power of a deviant group in DS is nullified. The concept of a turning point introduced by sociologist Everett

Hughes (Hughes, 1958), further developed by Fritz Schütze (1997) to understand significant changes in a person's life and their incorporation into the biographical organization, allowed the discovery in empirical material not only of critical events triggering such changes but also the configuration of conducive conditions[4].

Methodology of own research

The outlined typologically organized turning points presented in the article were generated based on narrative interviews and casual conversations with men growing up in one of the neighborhoods in Łódź. They constituted a part of a larger research project – a longitudinal qualitative research (e.g., Holland, Thomas, Henderson, 2004) documenting the significance of the disadvantaged neighborhood (DS) in the life trajectories of its residents. From 2001 to 2019, the author entered the role of a researcher in this environment twice. During the first edition of the study (2001–2005), when the neighborhood was part of one of Łódź's enclaves of poverty, the author adopted the role of a socially engaged ethnographer who simultaneously lived in the neighborhood and conducted participant observation of the activities of a group of boys (14–20 years old). This included a complex consideration of their contextual factors (families, neighborhood community, representatives of institutions present in their lives). The researcher's role naturally evolved towards that of a "neighborhood educator" who organized the leisure time of the youth and, at their explicit request, assisted in difficult situations. The unique position of the researcher allowed for the reconstruction of the interactive dynamics of the process and areas of social exclusion of the study participants. In 2016–2019, the researcher returned to the participants of the previous study, conducting narrative interviews with ten of them and several casual conversations regarding the validity of drawn analytical conclusions. In four of the obtained stories, it was possible to identify changes in the biographical line of action reflecting the properties of turning points in the relationships of individuals with deviant peer groups. The narrators experienced identity transformations triggered by critical incidents, during which they turned away from deviant activities. In the linguistic layer, these stories manifested changes in two ways. The first was a clear delineation in the narrative of the "before" and "after" phases (e.g., in the preamble of the interview). In other interviews, there were reflective themes where interviewees contrasted themselves from the period "before" and "after," revealing elements of biographical work initiated by the interviews themselves.

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[4] Fritz Schütze derived from the concept of a turning point one of several processual structures of the course of life – "transformation," signifying an individual's biographical project aimed at changing identity Schütze, 1997).

A common element in both editions of the study was not only its participants but also its qualitative paradigm grounded in constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009). For the identification and understanding of turning points in the relationship of study participants with deviant groups, data from the first edition of the study served as a significant source of knowledge about the socio-cultural conditions of initiation into deviant careers and their interruption.

Results of the analysis

The core of the presentation of the study results consists of reconstructing turning points in the relationship of boys with local peer groups and their conditions, captured from the perspective of the narrators. Understanding the configuration of conditions that led boys from DS to deviate from delinquent behavior requires a prior discussion of their intersubjective theory explaining the evolution of group activities in the neighborhood into such behaviors.

The intersubjective theory explaining the etiology of delinquent behavior in peer groups[5]

In the participants' discourse on deviant practices in local peer groups, the agency of material and social barriers, as typical features of Łódź's city-center tenement neighborhoods at that time, becomes apparent.

For the study participants, material barriers included: unyielding construction materials during their childhood exploration of space (concrete, brick, glass, metal) and the inadequate utilization of courtyards that did not consider the needs of young residents (displacing play areas, hidden corners, drying areas with parking spaces, fenced green areas, etc.) (Gulczyńska, 2013). Social barriers involved conflicts with variously positioned Adults. These social tensions in the interactions of the study participants with them excluded the former from the courtyards, and the spatial expression of this was the gradual "expulsion" of groups of teenagers from the courtyards onto the street (areas between alley gates leading from the street to courtyards), where, in turn, they became the subject of increased control and disciplinary practices by "strangers" from outside the neighborhood (police, local probation officers, etc.). The minimal area available to them – under the gate and/or at the street corner—restricted the freedom of physical play. The inaccessibility of socio-educational services (geographical, economic,

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[5] The colloquial expressions appearing in the text (in quotes) represent *in vivo* codes, i.e., concepts used by the study participants, which are typical elements of theory grounded in qualitative data.

"conceptual"[6]) – the third barrier to creative activity in the neighborhood – only heightened the sense of being "condemned to the alley gate." In the small area subject to the control of entities "inside" and "outside" the courtyards, boredom and anger arising from unequal treatment, combined with imaginatively saturated group dynamics, intertwined to create a constellation of conditions for increasingly bold negotiations of identity within the groups. The participants vividly and often emotionally described these negotiations, expressing them with the term "odwalanie" ("shenanigans").

> **Filip**[7]: I grew up here. Here I did my bit of shenanigans and I went to elementary school. From middle school I was taken to an orphanage. After leaving there, I started hanging out with the guys here. One thing led to another, some drugs came up, life passed carefree... eh at games and so I was still rocking with company.

"Odwalanie" ("shenanigans") combined the functions of play, resistance (against unequal rights in the use of neighborhood space), and expression (identity negotiations). Understanding the relationship between the latter and the practices of "shenanigans" and the phenomenon of their escalation requires introducing the reader to the local culture of the majority of residents in the neighborhoods studied – the culture of the "district"[8]. The social expectations of this world regulated the behaviors of members of local peer groups in dynamic negotiations of their identity, where they had to establish themselves as "unyielding," "enemies of snitching and the police" and avoid the reputation of a "laps" ("ninny"). Someone "unyielding" did not succumb to degradation tactics from either "their own" or "strangers," building a reputation as a person deserving respect and a satisfying position both in their original reference group and in relations with others from the "district" (Gulczyńska, 2013). The coupling of material barriers with social barriers and the unavailability of educational and social support for young people in this place initially favored innocent, mischievous reputation negotiation models "as a child." Over time, with increasing feelings of "boredom" and/or heightened conflicts with selected adult neighbors, this evolved toward deviant behaviors (e.g., resulting in vandalism, disputes with neighbors, property destruction, minor

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[6] During the years 2001–2005 (the time of the first edition of the study), there were few community centers in the immediate vicinity. Their emphasis on compensating for educational or upbringing deficiencies discouraged the study participants from taking advantage of their offerings.

[7] The participants themselves chose identifiers for the purpose of all publications with the study results.

[8] In the empirical reconstruction of the "district" (original ethnographic study), analogies to Strauss's social world (Strauss, 2013) were captured. The concept of "social worlds" by A. Strauss was introduced into sociology for the analysis of the social affiliations of individuals. The criterion for distinguishing social worlds is communicative boundaries, not territorial structure or formal membership. It is a world of communication between people connected by a common activity. For a more in-depth understanding, refer to (Strauss, 2013).

thefts, experiments with intoxicating substances, etc.). The progressive nature of "odwalanie" ("shenanigans") created divisions within the original reference groups. The criterion was the degree of involvement/"easing off," whereby participants in groups became either heroes "in the center of events" or participants "on the sidelines." Over time, "getting into drugs" highlighted these internal divisions. Those for whom it was an insurmountable stage in the evolution of "shenanigan" practices had to develop a specific buffer protecting them from peer pressure, which involved creating smaller peer or friendship groups with selected members of the original reference groups.

> **Gniewko**: With Solmyr and Chudy, we formed a trio that didn't want to get deeply involved in all of that, you know? We stuck together, we were the kind that could spend time with both these types of folks, but when drugs came into play, it didn't attract us anymore.

From the perspective of the speakers, criminal careers in DS result from the escalation of youth involvement in increasingly spectacular forms of "shenanigans" combined with substance use, leading to local criminal careers expressed in three variants:
— from "shenanigans" to "crime" (disturbances, fights, etc.)
— "shady dealings" (involvement in illegal local distribution networks)
— crime for satisfying one's addiction (criminal ways of obtaining funds for substance abuse).

In the case of the stories analyzed for this article, engagement in "shenanigan" practices and the duration of such activities varied, as did the scenarios triggering the processes of abstaining from them.

Turning points in the relationship of the boys with deviant peer groups

A turning point in the biographies of the study participants is an event that causes the world of the "district" to lose its power in favor of other, competing normative interpretations in the system of social and symbolic references for the youth in DS. This change manifested itself in the cessation or reduction of participation in risky forms of "shenanigans." From the research material, three variants of turning points and their determinants were reconstructed: "rebounding," "standing up for yourself," inclusion in an alternative reference group.

"Rebounding"

This is an example of a turning point that radically invalidates the "district" as a given. The symbolic beginning of the transformation of the individual and social "self" was an experience that escaped their control and the logic of the evolution

of "shenanigan" situations into a critical event revealing the absurdity of these practices.

> **Bajker**: I was immune, and here, all the older guys are surprised that I didn't stick with that life. I could continue stealing, live a good life. But then, I noticed it was heading in the wrong direction, so I distanced myself from them. It was at a disco... oh, and I remember once, still in elementary school, a guy, a year older, a year above, just came into our class, and we became friends, spent almost whole days together. He was practically my age, and when I started hanging out with him, I naturally entered the company of my peers, and things started going south with the older guys. Because it was always like, "Kid, don't hang out with kids." I remember they took me to a disco, and I said, "I'm not going with you because it always ends in a brawl." "Come with us to the disco, don't hang out with kids here." So, I went with them to the disco, and as usual, there was trouble. (...) And I got hit in the head by one of my guys, just because I ended up where I shouldn't have. He wanted to hit someone else but hit me. I said, "Enough! I'm not going out with you anymore!" I lost a tooth then, and I'll tell you, it was probably a divine intervention. Five years passed, and some of them are serving from seven to fifteen years, yeah? Just easy money. It hurt when I saw their new cars, clothes, how they were having fun... But even then, my honor wouldn't let me get close to them.

Bajker is a participant "at the center of events" with a reputation of "not giving in." Through his self-presentations, he earned a quick promotion in the original reference group and the privilege of "hanging out with the older guys." Following the principle of mutual loyalty, his commitment resulted in a strong position and "respect in the neighborhood," not only within the group itself. An accidental blow from a friend and the loss of a tooth question the validity of caring about reputation in a group promoting escalating deviant behaviors. The reflection triggered by this event contributes to the boy distancing himself from the group's expectations and diminishing its significance in regulating his own behavior.

This event seems to be a complement to the pre-existing doubt about the sense of participation in the deviant group, originating from two significant social relationships outside that group: with a friend and with a "guardian angel." The relationship with the friend, described in the first quote, offered an alternative (though not radically different) normative reference. The non-radical distinctiveness of social expectations and meanings in this new arrangement from those governing relationships in the deviant group is expressed through cognitive consensus (for both, the neighborhood was the primary normative framework used to evaluate others), while simultaneously suspending it in formulating mutual expectations. The latter were dictated by the rules of friendship. Agreement built on the same normative framework and similar social experiences facilitated the development of bonds, allowing them to create a buffer zone and effectively strengthen Bajker's resilience against the pressures of the deviant group. Thanks to the relationship

with his friend, the boy underwent a reputational change at school. The label "smart troublemaker" assigned to him underwent redefinition. Due to the positive social roles taken on by friends at school (such as being the official DJ at school discos), Bajker's image changes not only in the eyes of teachers but also among "older female colleagues," further reinforcing the efficacy of the friendship as a buffer against the influence of the deviant group.

The nature of the second relationship significant for Bajker's departure from deviant behaviors is revealed in the term used by the narrator himself – "guardian angel."

> **Bajker**: And I was supposed to tell you about this friend of mine. His name was Janek, and he was from our neighborhood but always a bit on the sidelines. He was a scout, played the guitar. Much older than me. Sometimes he'd drink vodka with us, but he always tried to explain things to me, like an older brother on the street. He always tried to steer me in the right direction, telling me that we were doing wrong. "How do you look…" he would say when he saw us drunk. "You want to find yourself a bird? Are you stupid? Did you see yourself yesterday? And do you think anyone likes it when you insult someone on the street or get into a fight with someone?" He really got on my case, you know? Look, now you see, I think he instilled in me that inhibition, then I had it. (…) I met him in elementary school, around the fourth or fifth grade on a scouting trip, and he was the troop leader. (…). This Janek – Dłużyński, I remember his last name – we called him "Długi" because he had long hair. He always moralized me, always! When we were at a party drinking vodka, he always got drunk to a certain point, never crossing the line. I never remember him rolling on the ground or vomiting. And he always gave me a guilty conscience the next day, you know? Look, now I remembered him… (…)I remember when I lived in Retkinia, after moving out from my mom's, he came to visit me. Indeed, he was my guardian angel on the street.

The relationship with the "guardian angel" is characterized by a unique educational message, both in form and content, tailored to the local culture ("he moralized us"). It is systematically conveyed by a friend who can meet the expectations of the "district" (such as by jointly consuming alcohol in the peer group) while impressing with attributes that demonstrate his involvement in alternative reference groups (playing the guitar, scouting)[9]. His simultaneous presence "inside" (knowledge of local culture rules and techniques of peer pressure based on the local system of importance, e.g., referencing the risk of being unattractive to "birds") and "outside" (scouting) resulted in citizenship in both worlds. This duality can be seen as the source of his educational influence ("he instilled in me that inhibition, and then I had it"). In the sense attributed

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[9] This situation appears to illustrate the variant of an alternative reference group, meaning one that, at a certain stage of social development, became a competition for the primary group and represented the norms of the broader society. For further details, refer to Gulczyńska (2013, p. 132, 246).

by the boy to his "guardian angel" in the changes in his attitude towards the "district," analogies can be observed to the concept of a "biographical mentor" described in biographical sociology; a significant figure who "provides a source of multidimensional support, shapes attitudes, and behaviors of their ward" (Golczyńska-Grondas, 2016, p.161)[10]. In his relationship with Janek, alternative interpretations permeated Bajker's cognitive perspective, fostering his questioning of what had been obvious up to that point.

The boy's participation in these two relationships and simultaneous belonging to the deviant group facilitated a continuous contrast of his self-image "here" and "there," likely prompting self-reflection. The absurd event, interpreted by Bajker as a "divine intervention," only added courage for him to turn doubts into decisions and actions consistent with them.

"Standing up for himself."

The second turning point was captured in Nikodem's story, a "sideline hero" who was mistreated by the leader and peers in his deviant peer group. Its characteristic feature was strong leadership expressed through the leader's effective management of peer pressure to unify the actions of individual actors.

> A: So, who influenced you back then?
> N: Well, the group, nobody wanted to stand out from the group. Marian was always the leader. He always did strange things... He provoked and said, "Oh, you can't do it, you're weak, a wimp." Minors are often susceptible to such trash talk. Now, I would say, "get lost, do what you want, leave, I don't have time, etc., I would just walk away." But back then, I didn't want to stand out from the group. If I said, "no, I won't do it," he would say, "You're such a wimp," and everyone would follow suite. I think the group gave him such power that everyone, even if something went against their interest or themselves, always looked at Marian, and it was clear what needed to be done. The yard boss...

In escalating "shenanigan" practices, the coupling of expectations towards individual interlocutors and peer pressure effectively enforced deviant behaviors because any acts of nonconformity were thwarted by the audience's response, consistent with the leader's demands[11].

> N: It seems to me that if only one person, like this Marian, encouraged me to try heroin, it wouldn't have been enough. If more people were doing something, I was

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[10]   The study documented the relationships between the presence of a biographical guardian in the life stories of former foster care residents and their life success. (Golczyńska-Grondas, 2016).

[11]   These scenarios of group pressure exemplify Strauss's "status forcing" – a type of communicative actions through which an individual is compelled to adopt a specific status. Such actions may include ridiculing or humiliating someone. Often, the individual gets prepared for certain positions, resembling aspects of coaching (Strauss, 2013).

more susceptible; I didn't want to stand out, especially since they were doing various things every day, such as smoking or playing soccer. I always tried to identify with the group and follow along with them.

At the time of the interview, Nikodem lives outside the country and is a happy husband and father. However, he describes the situation of "standing up" to Marian in more detail and emotionally than the moment of settling down in a foreign country.

> **N:** The situation with Marian, who probably also played a role in my life because he was a year older, always bullied us there, was the instigator of bad things. I remember a situation, I was maybe 14 years old… we were in a shed, and I had bicycle forks in my hand, and he, as usual, was causing trouble, saying that I would give him my bike. I said, "No, I won't give you the bike because now I will ride it," and he hit me in the face (2s). And then… I remember throwing the forks and saying, "No, damn it, you won't beat me!" and it just hit me that I am myself, that I am someone, and no one will torment me. And I beat him. From that moment on, he didn't mess with me anymore, and we weren't friends. That's when I realized that no one has to tell me what to do, that I am just myself. Everyone yielded to him and was afraid of him, but I could stand up for myself.

The event that nullified the leader's position and the group's in the system of identity references took the form of an individual act of liberation and acquired evident characteristics of a turning point. The growing disagreement in the boy against being humiliated and the desire to express resistance to the ways the leader wielded power in the group found an outlet in the form of a fight with the oppressor, in which the hegemony of the latter was broken. This moment was accompanied by shock and disbelief for Nikodem and a kind of enlightenment ("it just hit me"). The new self-definition triggered by "standing up" marks the beginning of biographical work and a change in the course of action. He felt stronger, which found reflection in his social identity. The leader, fearing the spread of knowledge about his degradation within the group, changed his attitude toward Nikodem, reinforcing the new image and subjectivity of the boy in future relationships. This turning point in this format was the result of a conflict-based work on one's own identity, with points of reference being the expectations of the mother and peers.

> N: I was never a leader; rather, I stood on the sidelines, observing. My mom taught me that. What did she teach me? To not go too far, to have certain principles. Of course, if she knew what I was doing, she wouldn't like it, but she was always there behind me… in my head, and I knew I couldn't cross a certain boundary, that there are certain limits.

The influence of the mother manifested through a strong commitment to loyalty, a condition of which was her perception by the son as a "caring mother."

N: (…) well, she tried to get it all together, in the sense that she worked, didn't drink, and we as a family were the most important. (…) And I was impressed that a single woman could take care of the home, cook.

The concept of "getting it together" by mothers is common in the language of several of my interlocutors. It appears as an antonym to "not having it together," expressing in other conversations an unstable economic and psychological balance in the family, which some of them either experienced themselves or observed in the homes of other friends or neighbors. The question arises: how did a "mother who had it together" buffer the effects of peer pressure and weaken her son's concern for reputation? Knowledge from observations or indirect accounts, originating from neighborhood discourse about "mothers who did not have it together," commonly normalized the struggles of some families with difficult living conditions, family problems, or balancing work with satisfying household duties. Sons attributed significance to mothers who functioned differently in this context, viewing them as women who "sacrificed themselves," "everyday heroines," which likely strengthened their loyalty to the expectations of these women and diminished the influence of peers.

N: "(…) I mostly avoided trouble. I didn't want my mom to have problems, to worry."

In Nikodem's internal dialogue with the "mother who had it together," we read an analogy to primary socialization processes in the relationship with the "significant other" (Berger, Luckmann, 1983). The mother's perspective on reality reflected itself in Nikodem's interpretations of risky scenarios of "shenanigans" and created a buffer in his relationship with the deviant group.

The ambivalence of Nikodem's stance towards dominant reputation negotiation patterns must have threatened his position in the group. Adam, a friend from the group embodying another variant of the "guardian angel," supported him in creating circumstances for correcting his image.

N: I remember playing basketball with Adam. He was taller than me, and I was always short; I was never good at basketball, but he gave me strength. The two of us would win against taller boys because we had such determination, a will to win. He motivated me, saying, "Come on, cut, you can do it, we have to win, come on!" He made me realize my worth, that we have to fight, that giving up is not an option.

In these acts of strengthening Nikodem's position in the group in a way different from the dominant one (sports rather than "shenanigans"), coaching properties (Strauss, 2013) become evident. By recognizing Nikodem as a partner

in activities crucial for negotiating reputation within the group and reinforcing his determination, Adam co-created a new social image for the boy. This countered the customary tactics of degradation usually applied to individuals who personalized their actions in the deviant group. Adam's work on Nikodem's social image allowed the boy to see himself as stronger and more attractive to others. Such a redefinition of the subject's identity was likely a causative element in the context of Nikodem's liberation from the oppression of the group. This liberation was facilitated by the simultaneous and gradual weakening of the power of the group's leader, who was falling into addiction.

Inclusion into an alternative reference group

The principle of regionalization in primary schools may promote social reproduction in areas of the city with lower socio-economic capital (Gulczyńska, 2013, p. 176). The "spreading" of local culture in the social life of schools contributes to the stigmatization of students from socially deprived areas and lowers their educational opportunities. The reconstructed process of change in Chudy's auto- and social identification, enabling him to depart from deviant behaviors, allowed for a change from a local school to a sports school located in another part of the city. He entered this school during junior high, as a result of a chance recognition of his talent by a representative of the professional football world. The school day extended into most of the day, reducing the intensity but not ending the relationship with the neighborhood group, where the boundary between play and deviance was fluid.

> **Chudy**: And the whole period was associated with that school, mainly the training sessions (...). There was also less time spent at home because new friendships had already formed, which were connected by this passion (...).

Starting the school there was synonymous with an invitation to an alternative social world (professional football). Chudy's talent and determination allowed him to achieve a satisfying position there, simultaneously expanding the geographic and cultural space of his social participation (relationships with students from outside the city center or even from Łódź).

> **Chudy**: (…) there is a difference between people from the housing estates and those from Downtown. When looking at the upbringing of such a person compared to us, the difference is colossal. Children from the estates consider themselves better, or something like that. Their social status is a bit higher than of people from Downtown, from those poor districts.

Getting to know "other people," observing new places (housing estates) led to a critical reevaluation of the primary reference group and his place in it, unleashing dreams of a better life. Chudy's image was formed by observing the lifestyle

of the families of new friends and the media dramatizations of the lifestyles of well-known footballers. His story captures sequences of changes leading to critical reflection and the substantialization of a biographical action plan. The class-sensitive perception of the city space acquired in this experience comes to the fore. In the retrospection of this experience, we identify an enlightenment, a kind of elevation of social consciousness, as a result of which Chudy develops a critical attitude towards previously attractive ways of spending leisure time, reflected in the change of his relationship with the "district."

> Chudy: I liked hanging out with them, chatting (...), but that was about it. Now I think I was lucky to have my passion, which took up my time, and the rest, I suspect, doesn't have too many memories because, considering all the crazy stuff that happened, some things stood out, but most of the time, it was monotony.

Chudy, through the continuous contrast of himself and his social entanglements "here" and "there," gains knowledge about "who and where he wants to be" and systematically translates it into a biographical plan of action (Schütze, 1997).

An interesting contribution to understanding the conditions of such evolutionary turning points was provided by a contrasting case – Filip. In a biographical collision with friends from "the better side of the tracks," whom he got close to during football training and visits to their homes, Filip did not perceive hope and opportunity but only felt pain and anger due to the redefinition of his own family as dysfunctional. The experience of difference dynamized the organization of his biographical trajectory pattern (Schütze, 1997).

> **AG**: You said there was some swimming, some scouting. What happened that those passions were there and then ended?

> **Filip**: I was 13, I felt grown-up, started smoking cigarettes (laughter). A change in company, a change in mindset... maybe that's when the maturing process began and hanging out with friends became about causing trouble, taking life into our own hands, showing how tough and disobedient we were to our parents. At that point, I already knew how they should raise me, and they were doing it differently. Others get things, and I don't. Other parents take their kids places, and mine don't. (...) I had friends who were different, kids from good homes, well-behaved and sorted. These were kids who had support, love, interest, or worry from their parents, and, well, they didn't get into trouble. I didn't have that, and I saw in my friends how their parents approached them, planning trips, excursions, and usually they would drive us to football practice (…). It was a time when I was broken, alternating between one group and the other. With those guys, you could go play football, go somewhere, mess around, and it didn't necessarily involve bending any rules. (…). However, I went my own way, sought an escape from it all in that bad company. I don't know how those passions faded away... skipping school, playing PlayStation, these things also did their part…

In comparing these two cases, the features conducive to the turning point in the format of joining an alternative reference group, as highlighted in Chudy's experience, became apparent. These included: a different social composition of the school (a school outside the district, private, dominated by children connecting the future with education and passion), circumstances enabling constant comparison of living conditions and quality of life in one's own place and socially and culturally different places of residence, a gradually crystallizing critical stance towards the predominant patterns of activity and life dominant in the DS, the combination of formal education with acquiring competencies potentially enabling social advancement, and a sense of agency in realizing life plans.

The cognitive process underlying these experiences is a change in the subjective perception of time, leading Chudy to label local group activities as unattractive and purposeless. This type of self-awareness reinforced his determination to pursue the biographical action plan, shaped through the experience of hybridizing social participation space, with significant support from the "mother who had it together."

Summary of analysis results

The article presents reconstructed variations of turning points in the relationships of boys from the disadvantaged neighborhood (DS) with local deviant groups, which played the role of primary reference groups in their socialization. The cognitive objective of this study was to identify the events initiating the repositioning of such a group in the personal hierarchy of importance and to capture the configuration of this process. In the analysis, a fundamentally differentiating property of turning points and the departure from deviant activities triggered by them– the "change trigger" – stood out. Systematic comparative analysis of cases allowed the identification of internal (group) and external (individuals outside the group and the world of "one's own people") sources of beneficial change in the narrators' relationships with deviant groups. Two variants of turning points were identified – radical (Bajker and Nikodem) and evolutionary (Chudy and Filip). The synthetic presentation of the research results is illustrated in the figure below (Fig. 1).

The radical turning point, represented in empirical material in the formats of "rebounding" and "standing up," took the form of a process of changes initiated by an immediately and publicly declared change in the subject's attitude toward the group. Although absurd events in Bajker's experience or extreme humiliation of Nikodem by the leader triggered a sequence of actions nullifying the deviant group in their personal hierarchies of importance, a prerequisite for a radical turning point seems to be the prior prolonged process of the subject's critical self-reflection enabling to give meaning to the above events as critical. Among the significant
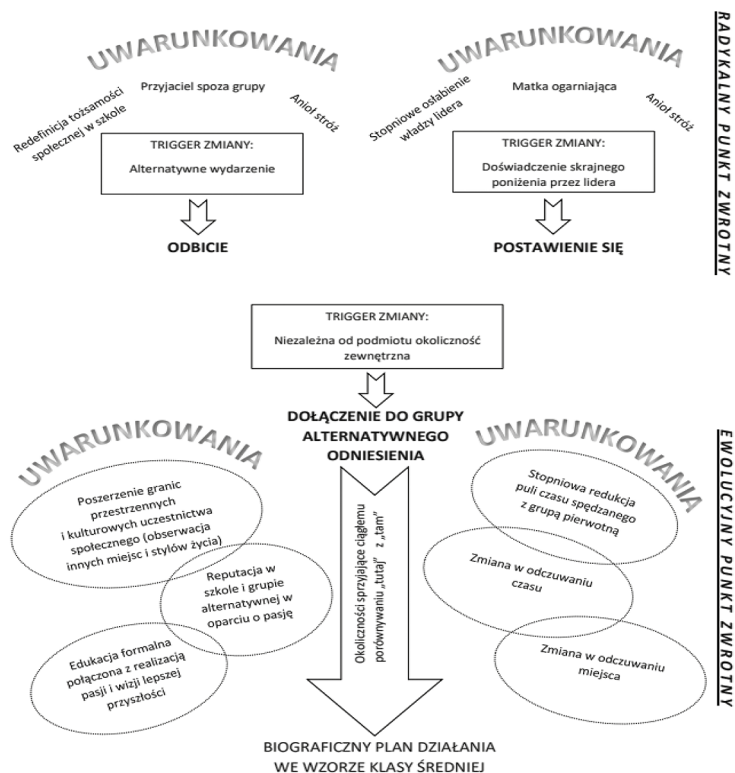
Uwarunkowania – Conditions; Redefinicja tożsamości społecznej w szkole – Redefinition of social identity at school; Przyjaciel spoza grupy – A friend from outside the group; Anioł stróż – Guardian angel; Stopniowe osłabienie władzy lidera – Gradual weakening of the leader's power; Matka ogarniająca – Mother who has it together; Trigger zmiany – Change trigger; Alternatywne wydarzenie – Alternative event; Doświadczenie skrajnego poniżenia przez lidera – Experience of extreme humiliation by the leader; Odbicie – Rebound; Postawienie się – Standing up for oneself; Niezależna od podmiotu okoliczność zewnętrzna – External circumstance independent of the subject; Dołączenie do grupy alternatywnego odniesienia – Joining an alternative reference group; Poszerzenie granic przestrzennych I kulturowych uczestnictwa społecznego (obserwacja innych miejsc I stylów życia) – Expanding the spatial and cultural boundaries of social participation (observation of other places and lifestyles); Reputacja w szkole I grupie alternatywnej w oparciu o pasję – Reputation in school and in the alternative group based on passion; Edukacja formalna połączona z realizacją pasji i wizji lepszej przyszłości – Formal education combined with the realization of passion and vision for a better future; Stopniowa redukcja puli czasu spędzanego z grupą pierwotną – Gradual reduction of the time spent with the primary group; Zmiana w odczuwaniu czasu – A change in the perception of time; Zmiana w odczuwaniu miejsca – A change in the perception of a place; Okoliczności sprzyjające ciągłemu porównaniu "tutaj" z "tam" – Circumstances conductive to ongoing comparison of "here" and "there"; Biograficzny plan działania we wzorze klasy średniej – Biographical action plan modeled after the middle class; Rawdykalny/ewolucyjny punkt zwrotny – Radical/evolutionary turning point

Fig. 1. Turning points in the relationship of the subjects with deviant groups. Own study.

conditions for such a change, we find: the importance of friendship outside the group, the high intensity of which, despite a short time of the relationship, was favored by cognitive consensus (referring to the district's expectations), a beneficial redefinition of the subject's identity in other contexts (e.g., school), the modeling influence of the "guardian angel" (biographical guardian, coaching), or the constant, unobtrusive presence of a constructive "significant other" ("mother who had it together").

The fundamental difference between the radical and evolutionary formats of turning points in the research material became apparent in their dynamics. The first is triggered by a sudden, emotionally charged event with the significance of a culmination point in a dynamic internal dialogue where different normative perspectives clashed for a long time, and its externalization became possible in a favorable configuration of conditions. This radical identity change did not protect Bajker or Nikodem from further episodes of participation in collective practices of "shenanigans." Their later youth reflected the pattern described by D. Glaser as the "zigzag path" between sporadic intervals of affiliating with deviant groups and avoiding them (Glaser, 1969, p. 58, cited in: Laub, Sampson, 2001, p. 54, cited in: Kusztal, Muskała, 2022 p. 204). Until early adulthood and the establishment of their own families, they sporadically participated in "shenanigan" activities in other groups, in which they found an "inhibitor" within themselves, "not fully engaging" and intelligently anticipating the threat of criminalization. Over time, they settled with their own families away from the neighborhood, and in interview threads where they present themselves as parents, we read about their concern for protecting their children from similar threats.

However, in the evolutionary format of the turning point, there are no signs of mental maturation to break with deviant activities, but a pragmatically dictated reorganization of the subject's action line. In given external circumstances, the subject learns from current experience "who he can and wants to be," concurrently gaining resources for this transformation during formal education (sports school) and informal education (constant contrasting of life "here" and "there"). They are supported by a "significant other." The evolutionary format marks the beginning of a lasting transformation, as a result of which a member of the deviant group successfully integrates into the world regulated by the rules of the broader society (Chudy). Filip's story, revealing the conditions of the reverse process, although triggered objectively in a similar configuration of conditions, highlighted the risk of intensifying the subject's relationship with the local deviant group when the evolutionary departure from it is devoid of the "significant other" component (e.g., "mother who had it together") or the connection of formal education with "passion" and resources enabling social advancement based on it. The evolutionary variant, with its external agency in creating circumstances conducive to departure (alternative reference group), takes on the characteristics of a slow redefinition process of the subject's identity and self-image in the future, possible through

continuous experiencing of the difference in the perception of oneself "here" and "there" and the impact of the above conditions supporting this beneficial transformation.

Conclusions

The study of the youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods (DS) abstaining from deviant behaviors limited to adolescence, viewed from a socio-cultural perspective, portrays this phenomenon as a process of identity changes (the concept of turning points, social reputation theory) influenced by the poverty of infrastructure and educational resources in the immediate environment, as well as the local culture regulating the group behaviors of youth. The variably organized depiction of turning points reconstructed in the dynamic context of their determinants fits into a processual, non-static conception of desistance from crime[12].

The high level of contextualization of the discovered processes of favorable identity change among representatives of the youth from DS provides inspiring insights for the development of strength-based, class- and culturally-sensitive models of resocialization in an open environment. These models are the subject of the author's current reflections and work.

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[12] Here, the concept of desistance from crime (Maruna 2001, p. 17, cited in: Kusztal, Muskała, p. 205) is invoked.

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