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*Hermann Gmeiner – the founder of SOS-Children’s Village*

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**ГЕРМАН ГМАЙНЕР – ЗАСНОВНИК  
СОС-ДИТЯЧОГО МІСТЕЧКА**

У статті розкрито гуманістично спрямовану сутність педагогічної концепції Германа Гмайнера (1919–1986) – засновника першого СОС-дитячого містечка у м. Імст (Австрія). Акцентовано увагу на втіленні ідеї сімейного виховання дітей у практику, труднощах і пошуках шляхів її реалізації. Констатовано, що поштовхом до створення першого СОС-дитячого містечка могло бути багато причин: і рання втрата матері, і доля молодшого брата

Антон, котрий виростав без неї, опіка сестри Ельзи, і той факт, що під час війни його врятував український хлопець, назвавши Германа братом, й особливо зустріч із 12-річним сиротою взимку 1947 р. в Іннсбруку, яка назавжди залишила слід у душі австрійського гуманіста і стала поворотним пунктом у його житті.

Концепцію СОС-дитячого містечка будував з власного досвіду. Цінностями виховання проголошуються любов і захищеність, відповідальність і налагодження соціальних контактів; дотримання порядку; відкритість СОС-дитячого містечка; підтримка дітей різного віку. Висвітлено широке значення опіки й виховання дітей-сиріт та дітей, позбавлених батьківського піклування, задоволення їх найважливіших фізичних і психічних потреб, зміцнення здоров'я та доброго самопочуття, забезпеченню можливості їх самореалізації та самовдосконалення. Охарактеризовано етапи прийому дітей до СОС-дитячого містечка.

Г. Гмайнер був переконаний, що єдино справедливим і правильним для знедолених дітей є створення «моделі сімейного виховання», яка зможе повернути їм не лише втрачений дім та сім'ю, а й можливість нормально розвиватися в умовах захищеності та любові. Незважаючи на нищівну критику та відвертий опір противників, Г. Гмайнер сміливо відстоює ідею СОС-дитячого містечка, у практичну реалізацію якої мало хто вірив. Його педагогічні ідеї оперті на практику, пронизану загальнолюдськими цінностями (людяність, гуманність, любов, мораль, довіра, взаєморозуміння та ін.). Сьогодні у СОС-дитячому містечку Імст розміщено 12 будинків сімейного типу, в яких проживають 42 дітей, функціонують дитячий садочок, центр опіки, який надає недовготривалу допомогу дітям та батькам у кризових ситуаціях.

Для вітчизняного освітнього простору педагогічні ідеї Г. Гмайнера є актуальними, заслуговують на всебічне вивчення і подальше застосування у розв'язанні соціально-виховних проблем в Україні відповідно до європейських вимог. Ідея СОС-дитячого містечка як соціально-педагогічної інституції може лягти в основу для подолання проблем опіки і виховання соціальних сиріт, дітей, позбавлених батьківської опіки.

**Ключові слова:** СОС-дитяче містечко; Герман Гмайнер; модель сімейного виховання; діти; опіка; виховання; загальнолюдські цінності.

## HERMANN GMEINER – THE FOUNDER OF SOS-CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

*This article describes the humanistically directed essence of the pedagogical concept of Hermann Gmeiner (1919–1986) – the founder of the first SOS Children's Village in Imst (Austria). Attention is focused on the embodiment of the idea of family education of children in practice, difficulties and the search for ways to implement it. It was stated that there could be many reasons for the impetus for the creation of the first SOS Children's Village: the early loss of the mother, and the fate of his younger brother Anton, who grew up without her, his sister Elsa's care, and the fact that during the war he was saved by a Ukrainian guy, who called him a brother, and especially a meeting with a 12-year-old orphan in Innsbruck in the winter of*

1947, forever left a mark on the soul of an Austrian humanist and became a turning point in his life.

He built the concept of the SOS Children's Village from his own experience. Love and security, responsibility and establishing social contacts, keeping order, openness of the SOS Children's Village, support for children of different ages – all these are proclaimed like the values of upbringing. The wide significance of custody and upbringing of orphans and children deprived of parental care, meeting their most important physical and mental needs, promoting health and well-being, ensuring their self-realization and self-improvement are highlighted. The stages of admission of children to the SOS Children's Village are described.

H. Gmeiner was convinced that the only fair and proper thing for disadvantaged children is the creation of a «family educational model» that will be able to return not only their lost home and family, but also the ability to develop normally in conditions of security and love. Despite the crushing criticism and frank resistance of opponents, H. Gmeiner boldly defended the idea of a SOS Children's Village, in the practical implementation of which very few people believed.

The pedagogical ideas of H. Gmeiner are based on the practice pervaded by common human values (manhood, humanity, love, morality, trust, mutual understanding, etc.). Today in the SOS Children's Village Imst there are 12 family-type homes with 42 children, function a kindergarten and a care center, which provides short-term assistance to parents in crisis situations. H. Gmeiner's pedagogical ideas are relevant for the Ukrainian educational space, deserve a comprehensive study and further application in solving social and educational problems in Ukraine in accordance with European requirements. The idea of SOS Children's Village as a socio-pedagogical institution can form the basis for solving the problems of guardianship and upbringing of social orphans, children deprived of parental care.

**Key words:** SOS-Children's Village; Hermann Gmeiner; family educational model; children; custody; upbringing; universal human values.

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## Introduction

Preserving childhood, achieving emotional well-being, creating all conditions for the further successful and personal development of a child are ones of the main tasks of any society and state. The child's right to be raised in the family is set forth in international documents (the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, etc.), and in the legislative acts of each state. The creation of optimal conditions for the support of socially unprotected categories of children, their integration into society is possible only if they are provided with family forms of upbringing.

In this context, the humanist-oriented pedagogical concept of Hermann Gmeiner (1919–1986) highlights the widespread importance of the care and education of orphans and children deprived of parental care, satisfaction of their most important physical and mental needs, strengthening of health and well-being, ensuring the possibility of self-realization and self-improvement.

The interest of Ukrainian researchers in the pedagogical ideas of H. Gmeiner is due to the modern problems of social orphanage, as well as argumentation and their solution in the post-war period. The study of the pedagogical heritage of Hermann Gmeiner required the examining of a significant amount of German, English, Ukrainian scientific literature, which diversifies the ideas of the Austrian teacher, the genesis and activities of SOS Children's Towns and its distribution in the world, the theory and practice of raising orphans and children deprived of parental custody, and differs in time and place of publication. We also studied and summarized the printed and handwritten materials of the Hermann Gmeiner Academy archive in Innsbruck, which made it possible to more fully reflect the various aspects of the life and career of the Austrian teacher.

#### **The analysis of the latest investigations and publications**

The works of Hansgeinz Reinprecht, Director of Europe's largest SOS Children's Village in Hinterbrühl, Secretary-General of the International Charitable Organization SOS Children's Village, deserve a positive assessment. For thirty-five years he closely worked with H. Gmeiner, travelled around Asia, Latin America, Africa, helped to create SOS Children's Villages. The life path of the founder of the SOS Children's Village H. Gmeiner is described in detail in the book «Herman Gmeiner: Adventures of Mercy» (1989) (Reinprecht, 1989). The author was present at many meetings with H. Gmeiner, which made it possible to objectively assess the status of the SOS Children's Village of that time. In his book «My Daughters, My Sons», H. Gmeiner sets forth the concept of raising children in SOS Children's Towns, shares experiences in raising sons and daughters, and describes his «father» status in relation to children from different countries and denominations. The author believes that he is strict and loving; His main duty is to provide the child with the home and replace lost parents (Gmeiner, 1987b).

One of the most significant works of our time is the book by journalist Claudio Gonzal «For children of this world. Hermann Gmeiner: father of SOS Children's Villages. Biography», published in 2009. It talks about the creation of the first SOS Children's Village, the current state, problems and prospects of activity, the attitude of contemporaries to the idea of H. Gmeiner, his followers. Short stories from the life of H. Gmeiner, his statements about the education and upbringing of children, love, faith, nature, problems of social orphanage, the integration of children in the social environment, interpersonal relations between children and adults, the content of the concepts of «freedom», «motherhood», «ideal and real», «how to achieve success», memories of countries in Europe, Latin America and others, in which he was in different years, letters to SOS mothers, friends, and employees were reflected on the pages of this book (Honsal, 2009).

An important aspect of our research is the dissertation of A. Vlasova, «Problems of professional training for teachers of children's villages in Hermann Gmeiner' inheritance», the subject of which are the principles and regularities of the process of professional psychological and pedagogical training of mothers-tutors of family orphanages in the SOS-Kinderdorf system (Vlasova, 1993, p. 2). L. Kharchenko, S. Tuntuieva have investigated the main activities of the SOS Children's Village in Ukraine (Kharchenko & Tuntuieva, 2012), L. Skrypnyk focuses on the SOS Children's Village as a form of social and educational support for children deprived of parental care (Skrypnyk, 2010). In the monograph «Pedagogical ideas of Hermann Gmeiner (1919–1986)», the author defined the preconditions and main factors of the formation of H. Gmeiner's personality as a pedagogical person, scientifically grounded stages in the development of his pedagogical ideas, revealed the theoretical and methodological foundations of children's upbringing in SOS Children's Villages, their relevance for the modern Ukrainian educational space (Karpenko, 2012).

Studying and generalizing the source base made it possible to recreate the preconditions for the formation of the worldview, find out the sources of influence on the personal development of H. Gmeiner as a pedagogical person, reveal his pedagogical ideas (principles, goals, content, forms, methods and means of education) and contribute to the theory and methodology of raising orphans, to the founding of the first SOS Children's Village in the city of Imst.

### **The idea of creating SOS-Children's Village**

The situation in post-war Austria was rather disappointing, especially for orphans, children with physical disabilities, unemployed, disoriented and anti-social young people who did not have any shelter and protection. H. Gmeiner understood that these children lacked warmth, friendship, joy, and normal human relations; on his own initiative, he began to analyze pedagogical problems, immersed himself even more in reading pedagogical and philosophical literature, and visited orphanages, children's and youth's homes.

H. Gmeiner wanted to replace the existing social education with care close to family, where the child can receive enough maternal love and the optimum provision of his life needs. He understood that his concept was not quite original – it was based on the experience of its predecessors. Of course, the idea of SOS Children's Villages called into question the generally acceptable method of guarding orphans at that time, but the institutions of H. Gmeiner should not be a challenge to orphanages of the old type, but a proposal for custody over orphans in order to raise them healthy and happy.

Taking care of one boy (orphan) for two years, H. Gmeiner realized that the child suffered most from a lack of maternal love. Subsequently, in memories of his mother, he would write about his reflections: «... and again the image of my mother, who constantly lived in my heart, helped me. After the war, when I was studying at the university and worked with young people in my free time, I met a lot of abandoned, homeless and forgotten guys. They could not just be left on the street.

Often these were children who lost their mother or she refused them. They didn't need anything but a mother I once had» (Gmeiner, 1987a, p. 8).

H. Gmeiner assigned a significant role in the idea of creating a SOS Children's Village to his younger brother Anton: «When the mother died immediately after his birth, this baby did not stay in our family. My mother's brother accepted Anton and did not want to return him later. My uncle had no children of his own, and many years passed when the father and my older siblings allowed this adoption. At first we refused this for a long time, although there were many of us in the family and we were poor. However, the brother lived there very well. My uncle loved him; he allowed everything and did not forbid communicating with us. At school, everyone knew that he was an adopted child and abused him. Once, 12-year-old Anton wept and said to me: «You know, Herman, you gave me then. Simply gave me away. And now I have neither brothers nor sisters. I feel lonely with my uncle. These words I remember all my life» (Honsal, 2009, p. 58).

So, there were many reasons for the creation of the first SOS Children's Village: the early loss of the mother, and the fate of his younger brother Anton, who grew up without her, his sister Elsa's care, and the fact that during the war he was saved by a Ukrainian guy, who called him a brother, and especially a meeting with a 12-year-old orphan in Innsbruck in the winter of 1947, forever left a mark on the soul of an Austrian humanist and became a turning point in his life.

H. Gmeiner built the concept of the SOS Children's Village with his own experience. He recalled that in childhood, besides the parents, the child has brothers and sisters, as well as a house, sees how people behave and communicate. In the program of open social care, he identifies the following basic principles:

1) instead of lost parents, the child should have a caring teacher («mother») who will be loving and ready to take care of him during his life;

2) the child must have siblings, therefore the mother bring up at once all children (from 7 to 9 people) of different ages and sexes. Siblings deprived of their parents remain together in the same family;

3) a new mother and her children, like a new family, must live together in their own separate home;

4) houses with families and their residents form a SOS Children's Village, headed by a director who regulates its activities and deals with the common problems of these families (Gmeiner, 1960, pp. 7–8).

Love and security, responsibility and establishing social contacts, keeping order, openness of the SOS Children's Village, support for children of different ages – all these are proclaimed like the values of upbringing in the SOS Children's Villages (Gmeiner, 1960, p. 63).

H. Gmeiner believed that abandoned and left alone children are in danger of being lost due to the despair that has taken them, or may even die. «Not to be disappointed and not to lose your life is a chance that I want to give you, and which gives you the SOS Children's Village as good as possible. Therefore, adults who have taken on responsibility for you and for your future, mothers and friends of the SOS

Children's Village, want to help in time to fully protect you from even greater loneliness, grief and sadness, and perhaps from a step into the abyss. Each of you should take care of the rest yourself – the teacher wrote. – After all, SOS Children's Villages and above all mothers of SOS Children's Villages take care of you before your independence. The frivolity, callousness, indifference of many adults struck your trust in you and others, but did not destroy it. None of you is a born loser. And the SOS Children's Village ensures that the doors in life are opened for you. You choose either to go through this door or, if necessary, use the help that you are offered» (Gmeiner, 1987b, p. 6).

H. Gmeiner was convinced that the only fair and proper thing for disadvantaged children is the creation of a «family educational model» that will be able to return not only their lost home and family, but also the ability to develop normally in conditions of security and love. Despite the crushing criticism and frank resistance of opponents, H. Gmeiner boldly defended the idea of a SOS Children's Village, in the practical implementation of which very few people believed.

In 1948, he turned to many state, religious and private institutions, which, in his opinion, could help in the realization of innovative vision. However, no one supported his utopian (as most thought) ideas. Subsequently, H. Gmeiner with pain recalled: «Something happened that I never thought about. Upon hearing my idea, everyone closed the door in front of me. I was where I thought people would be grateful for my plan, which made it possible to solve problems with young people. However, they considered me a fool. They constantly made fun of me. No matter where I went, they always refused me. No one took me seriously» (Gmeiner, 1987a, p. 10).

H. Gmeiner was also disappointed with the position of the Catholic Church, which did not want to help, because, they said, SOS Children's Villages did not have the status of a Catholic or even a religious organization. Such a response angered him, who was convinced that humanistic universal principles would contribute to the unification of all the religions of the world. H. Gmeiner repeatedly stressed that social work should not be influenced by religious, racial or political views. The teacher eventually realized that the fate of his project depended only on his own perseverance: «... when you love yourself and believe in yourself, you can do good. Help yourself and God will help you. I will try to implement my plan without the help of others, because I am convinced that I am right. Now I must act, otherwise I will be a bad person, a bad Christian». With his like-minded people, he nevertheless found a way to collect the money necessary for the construction of a SOS Children's Village after conducting the action «Give me only one shilling!» (Gmeiner, 1987a, p. 12).

### **Save Our Souls**

H. Gmeiner together with his comrades (Josef Estle, Ludwig Kuhl, Herbert Pfanner, Franz Muller, Maria Gofer, Gertr Troer, Hedwig Weinartner, Helen Didlow), having no support from the authorities, in April 25, 1949 establish the Societas Socialis (Public Union) – a separate community with a charter and organizational structure for the project, the protocol of which we managed to find in the archive

(«Protokol», 1949, pp. 1–2). This first official general meeting of the Public Union (Societas Socialis) was held under the leadership of Deputy Mayor I. Meier. As chairman of the meeting, H. Gmeiner gave a report on the preliminary successful activity of the community he headed. So that a newly-established institution could be distinguished from similar social institutions, H. Gmeiner called it SOS Kinderdorf (hereinafter referred to as SOS Children's Village). The abbreviation SOS means «Save our souls!», which immediately became the slogan of this orphanage, where children were supposed to receive protection (Schreiber & Vyslozil, 2001, p. 59).

A consortium of doctors, teachers, and social workers should jointly find an innovative solution to the problem of the custody of minors. Herbert Pfanner, a law student from Vorarlberg and a member of this association, legally documented the ideas of H. Gmeiner and presented them to the Innsbruck Public Security Administration. The charter of the Societas Socialis referred to the creation of a private organization to help orphans; building a house for them with a streamlined telephone connection for adoptive parents; the creation of the social organization «Mother and Child» to protect single mothers; establishment of a working association of educators, doctors and medical staff («Die SOS-Kinderdörfer», 1967, p. 3).

Subsequently, they had to approve the «House of Mothers» for the women's team, and also indicate in the charter the composition of the guardianship staff. H. Gmeiner intended to attract to the female team of the SOS Children's Village unmarried women or widows, from 18 to 40 years old, who had relevant professional and moral qualities. In the case of the marriage of the mother, she was forced to leave the SOS Children's Village («Mütterstatut», 1965, p. 11).

As soon as the «House of Peace» was completed in early December 1949, they began the construction of another four premises with the names: «Christmas», «Industry», «East Tirol», and «Easter». In order to rest after hard work H. Gmeiner organized a ski trip to the mountains for Christmas holidays – a real holiday for 120 children and parents, and also he held a Christmas Eve with like-minded people, including secretary Maria Gofner from the youth center, and a graduate of the gymnasium Fritz Haider, who later headed Austria's largest SOS Children's Village in Hinterbrühl near Vienna (Fuchs, Strasser, & Posch, 1995, p. 56).

Now, the idea of H. Gmeiner found a wide response from compatriots: people understood the essence of the project, believed in him; the number of friends of the SOS-Children's Village grew every day. His activity soon reached unexpected successes, surpassing all initial plans and plans. A few years later, the idea of H. Gmeiner spread throughout the world and was firmly established both in Europe and on other continents («Ein Kinderdorf», 1951, p. 1).

When in the early years of the SOS Children's Village, it could give a shelter to a few children, then later, after the completion of other premises, the situation changed for the better.

In 1950, H. Gmeiner planned to complete the construction of the four buildings already mentioned, despite modest means. The construction site involved mainly young people who worked on weekends or in summer. The construction of the

road and electricity was financed from the local budget thanks to the efforts of the mayor I. Koch. Allowed raising funds for homes and the road took a lot of volunteers' time. Regarding food and textiles, it was necessary to carry out the appropriate calculations and purchase the necessary things for the price of two to four shillings. At the end of the event, a flower parade was organized, for which all participants of the action prepared day and night. H. Gmeiner, together with the ski rescue service, decorated the cars with flowers, which G. Didl prepared with the children. At this time, the girls sewed clothes and made up the program of the event. The event ended successfully («Ein Kinderdorf», 1951, p. 1).

During June, July and August, psychologist Mrs. Clef conducted courses for applicants for the position of SOS-mothers in Heselger. After successful training, the first candidates for the posts of mothers were selected. Already in the fall, preparations were underway for the second action of Christmas cards, which already in November covered not only the lands of Tirol, but also Salzburg and Vorarlberg (Reinprecht, 1989, p. 64).

In August, the first issue of «SOS-Kinderdorf. Bote» («Bulletin of the Children's Town») was published as a newsletter for all members and patrons of the Public Association. The editor of the first issue was F. Haider, who had been working on the construction of the institution for a year. Early in the gymnasium, and later as a member of the youth group of H. Gmeiner, F. Haider often showed leadership skills. Subsequently (five years later), he led the publishing house of the SOS Children's Village, while H. Gmeiner invited him to lead the SOS Children's Village in Hinterbrühl – the largest one in Austria. Since 1956, «Kinderdorfbote» was edited by Albert Küller, who, under his leadership, brought together a whole headquarters of talented workers, photographers, translators, and others (Stadelmann, 1970, p. 81).

December 1, 1950 in the SOS Children's Village in the city of Imst was held a celebration in honor of the completion of the construction of all 4 houses. H. Gmeiner received from the architect Steinmeier the keys to the new houses («SOS-Kinderdorf», 2018). It should be noted that H. Gmeiner himself, together with specialists, chose an architectural composition for the SOS Children's Village: the SOS-family's premises were two-storied – on the first floor there were a living room, a kitchen, a mother's house, on the second – rooms for children, a bathroom. The house is arranged by the family to their taste, but funds for the purchase of inventory are allocated from the budget of the SOS Children's Village. On the territory of each premise there is an administrative building, which contains a library, a music room, a conference room, a director's office, and sometimes a gym. Unfortunately, for effective and broad care for children, there was often a lack of opportunities and resources, as H. Gmeiner later wrote in his book «SOS Children's Village. Modern organization of education for homeless children» (Gmeiner, 1960, pp. 19–20).

Today in the SOS Children's Village Imst there are 12 family-type homes with 42 children, a kindergarten, and 4 groups of children live with SOS mothers, but have close contacts with their parents and should return to them in the future. Since

April 2004, a care center has been operating here, which provides short-term assistance to parents in crisis situations («SOS-Kinderdorf», 2018).

### **Stages of admission of children to the SOS Children's Village**

Based on research, J. Aldgate (1989) assures that the family form of care can offer a lot to children and is undoubtedly the best for younger children, but the institutional form of care is an important alternative for some older children. S. Redfern, S. Wood, D. Lassri et al. (2018) assert that children represent a vulnerable group in society, many of whom are mistreated before being placed in a foster home. Problem behaviour can be the cause of a long search for an appropriate foster family and a difficult adaptation of the child himself. This gives us reason to assert that the decision on the placement of children, regardless of whether it is an institutional or adoptive form of guardianship, should be based on a comprehensive assessment of specialists taking into account the needs of children, so that in case of the need to allow professionals to more effectively respond to problems or destructive behaviour.

The child learns about the admission to the centre of the «world of the SOS Children's Village» from a certain distance, meets the children and is freed from the fear of the unknown. On the other hand, these contacts prepare for the future family, are taken into account during the building it. Rarely there may be protests that the new adoption of the child is a big twist to his or her fate, and it is very difficult for them to be the object of this situation.

The issue of identification is particularly relevant to other people's children, and in particular to those who have not grown up in their biological family since childhood, who may have never even had contact with her, and who have much greater problems than others. For this, it is necessary to consider aspects in a fundamental and psychologically deep way (for example, the continuity and limitation of his personality, the experience of certain skills), especially the question «Who am I? Why do not I live in my biological family as other children?» (Andersson, 2009). This question has systematic active components that cannot be removed. This is how the experience is enhanced that the child's thoughts are about something special, connected with the fear that something can happen, which the person himself expects (in particular that he will return to his biological mother).

Further contacts with the biological family are of particular importance in the development of the child and are provided from other institutions, even if the SOS Children's Village gets a big burden due to relatives. It is not often that such meetings, from the point of view of specialists, have a bad influence on the child, but then they can be limited. It rarely happened that, due to problems in parenting, the child had to be returned again. When this happened, then a monthly observation of this child took place in the center of retardation pedagogy at the SOS Children's Village. Here we are talking about psychopathic children who needed care in a special home or hospital (Reinprecht, 1989, p. 112).

When relocating to the SOS Children's Village, the child needs the following documents: birth certificate; vaccination document; medical card; personal bank account to help the child; passport; report card from school. As for youth, teenagers

from 13 to 15 years old are offered accommodation in a youth hostel, where there are about 15 people in one house. Young people learn to live together, solve everyday problems on their own, communicate with peers and parents, and help each other in difficult situations. They are visited by a psychologist or teacher who is assigned to this hostel (Hilweg, 1986, p. 65).

The admission of young people to the SOS youth hostel begins with a search for free space (part of the application from the SOS Children's Village or the Committee on Juvenile Affairs). Children – future residents of SOS-youth hostel – must meet the following criteria: be configured to live in a hostel, be responsible to the SOS mother, director, social workers, etc., be socially oriented to live in a group; strive to get school and vocational education; be sure to finish school; be able to build contacts. The youth can be admitted to the hostel directly from the Committee on Juvenile Affairs if they have an application for admission (description of the situation), agreement or conclusion of a court, and financial assistance. Boys and girls with alcohol or drug addiction are not accepted to this premise, they refuse to study and work, they are not mature enough for a relatively independent life (Posch & Thyringer, 1999, p. 32).

Before accepting children to the SOS Children's Village, two interviews are conducted: the first is to identify the feasibility of accepting a child, with the participation of leading psychologists, leaders or their deputies, social workers, parents or custodians; the second is a conversation between psychologists and a child, as well as clarification of the methods of working with him and the conditions of his stay. The second interview is conducted under the guidance of a consultant psychiatrist, where all participants in the educational process (youth, SOS-mother, SOS-director, social workers, teaching staff of the necessary youth direction, caregivers, etc.) participate. It also serves to sign an agreement between the youth and the SOS custodian (Posch & Thyringer, 1999, p. 34).

Working with young people, employees of the SOS Children's Village adhere to the principle of consistency and continuity. This is well illustrated by the experience of settling in a youth house. During the week, they clarify the issue of choosing a youth home and the possibility of a settlement, subsequently conduct an interview and accompanying them to the youth, after which he is discharged from the family and taken to the SOS Children's Village, where he is assigned a new custodian. It is important to keep in touch with the previous custodian, to obtain information and use it in work. As H. Goparaj & R. Sharma (2008) point out, it is quite difficult for former SOS mothers to share past experience with others, in particular, problems and shortcomings. They are guided by the principle that the shortcomings of the child should not complicate his life in the youth hostel.

An important point in the activities of educators is to prepare young people to leave the hostel. This process of preparation is individually oriented to the needs of each young person and in meaningful and in temporal plans. After completion of custody, most of the pupils maintain contact with the institution or SOS-mother. Meetings are held annually in the so-called «Café of class reunions». The wards are also

contacted on the occasion of their birthday. In addition, youth institutions of this profile are engaged not only in the care of young people, but also at the same time serve as an advisory center in solving their various problems. For example, the support center after leaving the ward of the SOS orphanage in Klagenfurt takes on further support in cases of crisis or other life situations.

Y. Unrau (2007) notes that an important aspect in preparing young people for independent living is relationships with their biological parents. They occur in different ways. It is believed that the natural family is a large rarity. There are organized trips to children's homes, they are provided with the necessary support. When a child for a short time was raised by his biological parents, then their influence can be seen in adolescence. Good contacts with parents play an important role in its development in an estranged environment and in the further «successful» life. These ideas were discussed at the seminar «Contacts with biological families: burden or chance?» in which I participated (26–29 April 2010) in Innsbruck. The subject of «communication» with biological parents is one of the tense, controversial and acute problems for «estranged» placed children and young people. M. Chepil (2016) states, communication between parents and children is not only the right and duty of parents, but also the elementary right of a young person. Contacts with relatives concern not only biological parents. Communicating with siblings, less often with grandparents or other trusted people of a previous life strengthens the child's self-confidence, but can also lead to numerous conflicts. Most children and young people are very satisfied before, during and after communication with their loved ones. However, there are children and young people who are under stress and return to old problems. To help children solve their problems, biological parents need clarity on the situation in which they need to be with their children. It sounded at the seminar during discussions of the following questions: What are contacts for? What should a biological family, custodians of children do and how should specialists act in order for children to communicate with their loved ones successfully? What prerequisites (environment, frequency, child's age, prospects, etc.) are needed for this? What is the thorough preparation (before and after) for communication? When should I stop visiting? What to do with children and young people who have no connection with their loved ones at all? Forms of education (professional assistance; role-playing and sculptural work, work in small groups; discussions on the experience of the participants) («Programm», 2009, p. 36).

Parents are involved in the custody process, and it is always about eliminating problems in the relationship between young people and adults. This also applies to the mothers of the SOS Children's Village, who are an important support for the young person. The active work of parents in the daily care of the youth direction means the constant telephone or personal exchange of custodians with families of now their children. To facilitate this work, different conferences, seminars, exhibitions, and just a weekend visit are often organized. In practice, it looks like this: the contact between parents and custodians of young people can be very close or remote; relations can be very difficult, due to distrust. Also, very often parents do

not agree with such upbringing of their child, or they do not care what happens to him at all. However, the specialists of SOS Children's Village, first of all, take into account the needs of children and young people. If the atmosphere of the conversation brings them pleasant feelings, does not cause negative emotions, but rather the desire to communicate more with their native parents, this is always supported.

### Conclusion

The analysis of historical aspects and modern practice gives grounds to assert that today H. Gmeiner's pedagogical ideas are relevant for the Ukrainian educational space, deserve a comprehensive study and further application in solving social and educational problems in Ukraine in accordance with European requirements. The idea of SOS Children's Village as a socio-pedagogical institution can form the basis for solving the problems of guardianship and upbringing of social orphans, children deprived of parental care.

The pedagogical ideas of H. Gmeiner are based on the practice pervaded by common human values (manhood, humanity, love, morality, trust, mutual understanding, etc.). Today, it can be asserted that in SOS Children's Villages of Austria it is common to establish contacts with relatives, friends, acquaintances and communicate with them in qualitatively new technological conditions. This happens with different categories of people in different ways: communication with friends, acquaintances, graduates of the SOS Children's Villages via a mobile phone, e-mail, the Internet, etc.; participation in various events (competitions, projects, volunteer work, travel, tours, etc.); communication with parents (biological, adoptive) – on the territory of the SOS Children's Village and beyond. It is not for nothing that H. Gmeiner often liked to quote one guy who wrote in a letter to him that they live in a SOS Children's Village like all normal people (Gmeiner, 1987a, p. 10).

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