SABLIĆ, MARIJA – PEKO, ANĐELKA

Eastern Croatian Youth's Perception of the Multicultural Reality

In most democratic societies, schooling is recognized as a key means by which young people are educated for multicultural reality. It has long been recognized that young people have a key role in the process of strengthening democracy and promoting cosmopolitan citizenship. The main aim of this paper is to examine students' attitudes towards their nation and to determine social distance to certain European nations and their willingness to participate in different relationships with other members in certain life situations. Specific problems of this research are directed at determining young people's social distance to members of their and other nations regarding respondents' gender and type of faculty. The research examined attitudes of 164 students of the University J.J. Strossmayer in Osijek at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Teacher Education. In order to determine young people's attitude to own nation, formed under the influence of social processes in wider, international context, we have used Bogardus scale of social distance and attitude scale related to young people (dis)connectedness to their nation. The research results indicate that social distance, in a number of examined categories, is smaller than in previous pieces of research, although having the same orientation. Taking into consideration the importance of interculturalism in Eastern Croatia, it is essential to create an extensive institutionalised approach to this issue.

Introduction

Croatia, just like other countries in transition, is subjected to difficulties, challenges and contradictions arising from a desire to become a part of new social integration models, imposed by the society of late modernisation. Communism, in which we lived up to 1991, stated that we were all equal, but in practice it eliminated all specificities, while marginalising intercultural problems. After all incidents and changes occurring in the last two decades in Croatia, our European democratic orientation is strongly connected to multicultural perspectives. Interculturalism, as a global movement, sets two main tasks in Croatia today: the first is strengthening Croatian cultural identity, and the second is creating a basis for cultural pluralism directed at a successful coexistence of different cultures, maintaining their key characteristics. In fact, if we consider a demographic structure

and various regional differences, Eastern Croatia is a multicultural community. According to a 1991 census, 27 nations lived in this area, Croatians being the dominant residents (Stanovništvo prema narodnosti, *Census* 2001). During the Homeland war in Croatia, caused by the Serbian war of aggression, and especially after it, the ratio of certain nationalities was changed (Stanovništvo prema narodnosti, *Census* 2001). The war and its consequences had a great influence on young people. According to the official data in 1992, a huge number of 496, 000 school children in total, were forced to leave their homes. 20 per cent of registered refugees were preschool children and 35 per cent school children (*Barath* et al. 1996). In many aspects Serbian aggression had characteristics of a disaster (*Barath* et al. 1996). The demographic structure has remained the same in terms of the ethnic groups represented, but in very different proportions, which means that Eastern Slavonia is a multinational and multicultural community. Preschool children, who were refugees in 1992, are today students with different life experiences. Young people's life experience is formed under the influence of matters created in their own society, as well as matters occurring internationally. Together they generate objective social reality, which influences the formation of their attitudes towards their own and other nations (*Eriksen,* 2003). We can get a more complete picture of young people and nations when we consider their attitudes towards certain nations and their willingness to interact with members of different nations in everyday situations. This relation type is usually expressed by a category of social distance, which denotes a degree of closeness and distance towards certain persons or groups. In the last 20 years measuring social distance has become quite frequent in Croatia. The starting point in today's analyses was a 1989 research (*Katunarić*, 1991), which, just like GfK agency's research in 2002 (*Malenica,* 2003), was conducted on a national level. The aforementioned researches show a high level of accepting contacts with the Croatians (more than 95 per cent). In regard to the category *"they should be forbidden to reside in Croatia"*, three major groups stand out (the Serbs, Albanians and Roma). In the abovementioned researches more than 70 per cent respondents chose this category. According to Munjiza and Peko (2004), young people in Eastern Slavonia had a high level of acceptance for the Croatians (more than 90per cent), whereas the most evident social distance was expressed for the Serbs, Albanians and Roma (70per cent). Sablić (2005) looked into social distancing of secondary school pupils in Eastern Slavonia and their attitude towards their and other nations. The results of this research also indicated that 70per cent of them stated that the Serbs, Roma and Albanians should be banned from Croatia, while 95 per cent considered relations with the Croatians extremely acceptable. Young people's attitude towards their own nation is a significant indicator of national awareness and their national identity; it can be formed and modified with the change of social reality (*Chernilo,* 2006). Therefore

it is important to constantly re-examine this attitude, especially in the times of crisis and periods in which controversial tendencies develop in Europe and Croatia. There are different empirical studies on ethnocentrism structure, which were carried out using different scale and in various social contexts. Due to the complexity of attitudes, feelings and motives influencing the formation of relationship with our own nation, one-dimensional or even two-dimensional concept of ethnocentrism cannot be created (*Lazere,* 2005). Defining ethnocentrism, Kellas (1991) claims that ethnocentrism is basically a psychological term, even though it is generally used in studies on social and political processes. It is actually connected to a psychological favouritism of own nation and members of other nations in the sense of having more favourable attitude towards own nation, and a less positive one towards members of other national groups. According to Amin and Moore (2003), media and schools have the biggest influence on the development of ethnocentrism, as well as science, which produces or justifies the existing ethnocentric "truth". Thus ethnocentrism gains in strength due to the development of science, technology and communication systems in Europe, and due to education as well, which is not only overloaded with European issues, but also with approaches to "others" from European experience only.

This paper looks into the formation of young people's attitudes in Eastern Slavonia towards their and other nations in the context of contemporary social processes. Have the students, a population commonly inclined to openness and challenges of difference, closed themselves off into their own nation or are they open to variety of international issues and contacts with other cultures and traditions which integration processes require? Furthermore, the paper examines whether students' attitudes differ in regard to their gender and faculty type.

Method

Participants

We collected data from the participants at three faculties (N=164) of the University J.J. Strossmayer in Osijek: the Faculty of Electrical Engineering (N=59), the Faculty of Law (N=59) and the Faculty of Teacher Education (N=46). The sample consisted of 103 female and 61 male students. The reason for a bigger number of female students can be explained by the fact that in Croatia a teacher's profession is mainly dominated by females.

Materials and procedure

Social distance. Bogardus social distance scale was used in the research. One more indicator, whose discriminatory characteristics were tested in earlier studies, showing ethnic openness / distance was added to Bogardus scale. It is a question exa-

mining acceptance / rejection of members of other nations who have leading positions in politics and economy. Although this question does not examine the acceptance of social interaction with members of other groups, we believe it can be a good indicator of social distance particularly due to a high level of ethnicity politicization in Croatia. In such conditions head positions in politics and economy have a strategic importance in controlling the main resources in society, especially if there is no efficient system of rational control of these positions.

Attitudes related to a (dis)connectedness of young people with their nation. The research also applied a scale of attitudes related to a (dis)connectedness of young people with their nation (Radin, 1988, Baranović, 2002). The scale contains 11 statements (attitudes) which describe young people's attitude to their nation, to certain aspects of their national connectedness. The statements are set in a continuum of national – cosmopolitan and openness – distance. Their acceptance is measured by estimating each statement on a 5-point scale (1= I strongly disagree and 5= I completely agree).

Results and discussion

Social distance
In order to get a more complete picture of students' attitudes towards their nation as well as members of different national groups, we have examined their attitudes towards specific national groups and willingness to participate in various relations with these members in everyday situations. The research examined degrees of closeness or distance for 10 national and ethnic groups: the Croatian, German, Italian, Hungarian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Slovenian, Albanian, Serbian and Roma. We were interested in students' attitudes towards nations whose members are a national minority in Croatia and in some neighbouring countries.

Table 1

Acceptance of relations (%)

National group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Croatian	82,9	90,0	90,9	93,9	93,9	87,8	72,0	3,7
German	38,4	51,8	75,6	84,1	75,0	77,4	81,1	4,3
Italian	35,4	51,8	71,3	80,5	70,1	78,0	84,1	3,0
Hungarian	27,4	28,0	72,6	76,2	64,6	78,7	79,9	3,7
Bosnian	25,0	26,8	66,5	76,2	61,0	73,0	76,2	5,5
Montenegrin	21,3	20,1	61,6	67,7	57,9	72,6	81,8	7,3
Slovenian	20,7	28,0	57,9	68,9	56,1	71,3	77,4	14,6
Albanian	18,9	14,6	60,4	67,1	56,1	72,6	77,4	7,3
Serbian	17,7	22,6	56,1	66,5	56,1	73,8	70,1	15,2
Roma	15,9	9,1	48,2	57,3	48,8	69,5	67,1	12,8

1 = lead people in economy and politics;   5 = work colleagues;
2 = marriage partners;   6 = acquaintances;
3 = close neighbour;   7 = visitors to Croatia;
4 = friends;   8 = banned from Croatia

Table 1 shows the results of social distance towards members
of different national groups.

The distribution of answers indicates a few general tendencies. Table 1 shows that the Croatians are the first regarding the degrees of closeness in comparison to other nations. Following them are the Italians, Germans and Hungarians. This clearly indicates that students see themselves primarily surrounded by these nations, i.e. they express social closeness to them. Social ostracism (banned from Croatia) is relatively low. In spite of this, there are three groups which stand out because of their undesirability. These are the Roma, Serbs and Slovenians. One can assume that one of the key elements of this attitude are stereotypes. Stereotypes about self

and others can be regarded as a selection mechanism (in this research the Roma especially), which reduces the necessity of reality. On the other hand, in a complex multiethnic situation, like the one in Slavonia, stereotypes are programmes for determining ethnic closeness and distance, which enable individuals to maintain their identity "fluid" and to allow "others" into their group or to drive them even further away. The reason for a big social distance towards the Roma is usually a smaller number of contacts between the Roma and non-Roma members due to a specific way of their life. A great social distance towards the members of the Serbian nationality can be explained by the war (Serbian occupation of Croatian territory), as well as by some still unresolved economic-political issues between the Republic of Croatia and Serbia. When comparing the results of some previous research, which indicated the greatest social distance towards the Serbian, today's situation is significantly better. Only 15.2 per cent of respondents believed that the Serbs should be forbidden to live in Croatia, whereas Piršl (1996) stated that 73per cent of respondents chose the category "they should be banned from Croatia" when talking about the Serbian nationality. Baranović (2002) had similar results when in 1999 71per cent chose that category.

Years of crisis and war especially, influence social climate, which creates black and white social perspective in which the hostility for a nation in conflict affects all its members. Young people, being a part of such social climate, are determined by society's dominant value system and use it as a criterion in defining their attitude to other nations. Therefore a paradox situation is not surprising; they express greater social closeness to more remote European nations than to their former fellow citizens Serbs. At the same time, a low positioning of the Roma and Albanians indicates a more complex combination of situational influence. It actually points to other factors affecting young people's attitude toward certain nations, which cannot be explained by war circumstances.

The second significant aspect is the acceptance level of minority members as lead people in politics and economy. Although, by definition, it is a form of rational functioning, this aspect generates strong feelings of rejection. The answer distribution is similar to the one expressing acceptance of marital connections. When considering superficial relations like co-workers or acquaintances, the acceptance level is high.

Social distance in terms of respondents' gender

In order to check whether male and female respondents differ in social distance to certain national minorities, Chi-square tests have been calculated for items 2, 3 and 4 (marriage partner, close neighbour and friend). We have concluded that there are no differences between male and female respondents in social distance

to own nation, but it turned out that female students more often than male students responded that they would accept the Italians as marriage partners (*Chi-square = 6,42, p<0,05*). Furthermore, female students would more often be in a close friendship with the Italians (*Chi-square = 9,34, p<0,01*), Hungarians (*Chi-square = 6,65, p<0,05*) and Albanians (*Chi-square = 7,44, p<0,05*). The possible explanation for this higher level of close relations for female students can be a process of socialization.

Social distance and the respondents' type of faculty

In the same way we have examined whether students of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Teacher Education differ in social distance to different nations. We have again determined that there is no significant difference between the students of these faculties in social distance to their own nation, but there are differences in social distance to other nations. The students of the Faculty of Law, when compared to the other two faculties, expressed weaker interest in close friendships with the Albanians (*Chi-square = 6,95, p<0,05*). Also, significantly fewer students of the Faculty of Law stated that they would be close friends (*Chi-square = 10,80, p<0,01*) and close neighbours (*Chi-square = 9,04, p<0,05*) with the Hungarians and close friends with the Slovenians (*Chi-square = 8,29, p<0,05*) and close friends (*Chi-square = 9,53, p<0,01*) and close neighbours (*Chi-square = 12,76, p<0,01*) with the Italians. This data indicates the need for introducing additional intercultural subject matter into higher educational institutions since future lawyers and judges are expected to be fair, open-minded and tolerant at all levels.

Students' attitude to their own nation

Table 2 shows data for the most positive degree of scale "I completely agree" obtained in research by Baranović in 1999 and Sablić and Peko in 2010. The results are ranked according to the value and shown comparatively (for the period of 90s and now). According to the value of obtained data, it is clear that the most highly ranked are the statements which express strong connectedness to one's own nation and unconditional acceptance, as well as lack of criticism for their own nation and its members. Following are the statements giving priority to the feeling of belonging to a nation and the same attitude to the nation is expected from other citizens. The comparison of data from the 90s indicates almost the same ranking. The percentages of statements related to cosmopolitan attitudes (*statements 4- 42,7per cent, 6- 25,0per cent, and 9-40,9per cent*) are not at all higher than ten years ago, whereas the ones related to a strong connectedness to own nation are a lot higher than ten years ago.

Table 2 Students' attitude to their own nation [1]

	(I completely agree)	1999[1]	2010
	STATEMENT	%	%
1	Every nation should renew and treasure its national ideas.	32,5	62,2
2	All members of my nation should always and in every respect have more appreciation for their own nation than for other.	19,4	35,0
3	I feel, in the same degree, a member of my own nation and of whole mankind.	42,2	50,6
4	None of person's significant characteristics are a result of their belonging to a nation.	33,1	42,7
5	I feel a member of my nation and I give priority to this feeling.	18,6	39,6
6	Mankind represents the only real human community and therefore dividing into nations is harmful or senseless.	21,7	25,0
7	Nationally mixed marriages are doomed to failure.	4,7	3,0
8	One should always be careful and reserved with members of other nations, even if they are your friends.	7,6	6,1
9	It is essential for every nation to be open to the world and the influence of other cultures.	40,6	40,9
10	You should love even your nation's flaws.	17,8	25,6
11	Openness to the world brings to each nation more damage than benefit.	2,7	7,9

Although the attractiveness of cosmopolitan attitudes has significantly been reduced today, and the acceptance of national attitudes has increased, even of uncritical attitudes and those glorifying own nation, we can still notice that in the first five places are the attitudes which express closeness to own nation and the feeling of national belonging along with the openness to the world and the influence of

other cultures. According to Preston (1997), every identity (individual and collective) is produced and formed depending on the current moment and circumstances, while Giddens (1999) warns that today there are new mechanisms of a person's identity formation produced by contemporary institutions, which give it a dynamic character, i.e. a character of complex interaction between an individual and community. Today the process of identity formation, the relationship between a collective and individual identity, is more complex due to a modern way of life, advanced communication and inter-dependence of local and global influences. This is all manifested in multiple meanings of one's identity origin and content, as well as collective identities. These general characteristics of an individual's identity creation, which indicate its changeability and multiple meanings (individual, national, generation, etc.), can also be recognised in young people's identity formation in Croatia including their national identity.

Summary and Concluding Discussion

The social distance data for students show that respondents see themselves primarily surrounded by the members of their own nation. Social distance in various examined categories is smaller than in previous research, although the distance to the Serbian, Roma and Albanian nation is still considerable. Social distance towards the Slovenians has also increased in comparison to previous research. When considering the gender influence, we can observe that female students, more than male, express higher level of social closeness to the members of different national groups. This is especially emphasised for the members of Italian, Hungarian and Albanian minority. Taking into account students' social distance and the faculty type, it is surprising that the students of the Faculty of Law express more social distance to members of other nations than the students of the Faculty of Teacher Education and the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. The data analysis for attitudes toward own nation indicates that cosmopolitan attitudes are decreasing. The dominant attitudes among students are those expressing connectedness to their own nation. The research results identify the need for designing various programmes for cooperative learning, starting from the fact that educational institutions, either symbolically or for real, have become a unique place of different cultures gatherings, mutual teaching and coexistence. Such programmes should provide definitions and respect for all differences occurring in classrooms, schools, universities and communities. It is essential for academic community and civil society, as well as practitioners and experts, to create programmes which include issues related to democracy. It is also extremely important to emphasise the necessity of active involvement of all participants in education system along with implementation of intercultural issues at all levels of education. We should also emphasise the need

for systematic implementation and application of intercultural matters, necessary for life and work in multicultural societies, by using contemporary teaching methods within faculty curricula. Faculties have a crucial task in promoting and maintaining critical approach and openness to pluralism of community and the world around them.

[1] Results of the research conducted in 1999.Within the project Young People in Croatia on the Eve of the 3rd Millennium: Baranović, Branislava (2002), Young people in Croatia – between national identity and European integration, in: Ilišin, V., Radin, F.(ed), Young people on the Eve of the 3rd Millennium, Institute for social research in Zagreb, Institute for the protection of family, motherhood and youth, Zagreb.

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