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Identity behaviours and perceptions of mixed marriages by young learners from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine - A socio-pedagogical comparative study

Abstract: Pedagogical analysis of the issues addressed in the study adopts theoretical and methodological conceptualisations, referring to Paweł Boski's (1) theory of cultural identity based on values and practices in conditions of bicultural and multicultural socialisation, Tadeusz Lewowicki's (2) theory of identity behaviours, and (3) comparative analysis in international studies. The basis for outlining the sense of identity in local, regional, national, European and extra-European dimensions manifested by academic youth and their perceptions of mixed marriages was an international comparative study conducted from 2019 to 2021 in the Polish-Czech-Slovak-Ukrainian borderland. The analysis and interpretation of the collected empirical material indicate that – although there have been political transformations in the neighbouring countries, they cooperate in many spheres – both traditional ('constant') elements and new phenomena and processes, determined by the complexity and diversity of historical, cultural-social, cultural-personal and economic conditions, are preserved in the image of identity behaviour

manifested by students today. These shape with particular intensity the cultural identity of young learners in the years of early adulthood.

Keywords: cultural identity, identity behaviours, mixed marriages, young learners, Polish-Czech-Slovak-Ukrainian cultural borderland, comparative analysis in international studies.

Introduction: Who am I? Who are we? Dilemmas of individual identity construction in culturally diverse environments

The ongoing changes result in (self) formation of the cultural identity, which takes on the character of constructing, arranging its individual fragments to create a complete unit, which the subject carries out in constant reference to and in relation with the Other(s), in confrontation with an increasingly culturally diverse society/societies. Therefore, it is a perpetual, dynamic, contextually variable, largely future-oriented, multidirectional and transnational process. It requires, according to Jerzy Nikitorowicz, a creative effort on the part of the subject, alleviating tensions and contradictions between the constant elements (indigenous, inherited, anchored in the family and local community) and the variable elements – acquired, resulting from interactions and experiences of participation in culture (Nikitorowicz, 2005, p. 60-103).

The functioning of an individual in a multicultural environment involves, voluntarily and/or forcefully, the need for the individual to build a cultural identity in a constructive manner. It can manifest the following types in its horizontal (diachronic – variable) and vertical (layered, overlapping sequentially in connection with each other, mainly on the basis of indigenous values) dimensions:

- ethnocentric (inherited) identity – valuing a foreign, different culture through the prism of indigenous cultural standards (values, lifestyles, personal and cultural patterns) and at the same time affirming one's own regarded as exemplary culture,
- dispersed (multicultural) identity – a result of the confrontation of an inherited identity with a new, changing cultural reality, which leads the individual to acquire an awareness of belonging to a number of socio-cultural groups which exist 'next door',
- integrated (intercultural) identity – a combination of elements of the personal value system of the individual with the values of the culture of group(s) to which he or she belongs and in the lives of which he or she participates consciously and reflectively,

- virtual (culturally disoriented) identity – created most often as a result of an intergenerational split, a lack of (inter)cultural guides and interpreters or generational distance and rivalry (Nikitorowicz, 2009, p. 406-416; Nikitorowicz, 2013, p. 29-49).

The results of existing studies (e.g. Giddens, 2001; Golka, 2012, p. 209-223; Kyuchukov, Lewowicki and Ogrodzka-Mazur, 2015; Paleczny, 2017, p. 63-81; Nikitorowicz, 2018; Lewowicki, Ogrodzka-Mazur, Chojnacka-Synaszko and Klajmon-Lech, 2018) on the problem of the sense of identity manifested by borderland communities indicate that both traditional ('constant') elements, as well as new phenomena and processes, conditioned by the complexity and diversity of the circumstances (historical, cultural-social, cultural-personal and economic-financial ones), which co-determine with a particular intensity the developing identity of the young generation, can be observed in its image today. During early adulthood – as recognised by researchers who study the development of the sense of identity – the majority of the important experiences and those characterised by intense emotions in the life of an individual is related to both his or her self-image and duties. It is precisely the emerging sense of identity that enables the individual to continuously strive to recognise and define himself or herself, and thus to form an individual personal and social identity. The functioning of youth in their family, peer and educational environment, as well as in a broader, diverse cultural setting, becomes the source of their diverse identity experiences – a sense of cohesion, of separateness and continuity.

There has been little research conducted so far in pedagogical studies about the social, cultural and educational functioning of academic youth from selected Central and Eastern European countries in culturally diverse conditions. The current state of knowledge in this respect, presented mainly in the field of comparative pedagogy, mainly amounts to the presentation of expert opinions of the state and situation of higher education in a given country and the applied solutions.

An analysis of the identity behaviours of students from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine provides an opportunity for getting to know each other, mutual understanding and enrichment of our cultures (cultural sensitivity) and facilitates – due to the adopted culturalisation attitudes – participation in the culture of a neighbouring country and reduction of cultural distance. This type of research is also connected with the reflection on how the contemporary person actually understands the dimensions of culture, what role they play in one's life and to what extent they shape the cultural identity of both the individual as well as the society.

Theoretical and methodological objectives

In the pedagogical analysis of the issue concerning identity behaviours and perception of mixed marriages by young learners from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine, I adopted theoretical conceptualisations referring to Paweł Boski's (1) theory of cultural identity based on values and practices in a bicultural and multicultural socialisation. Cultural identity is viewed as 'a relational concept, which is the level of convergence in terms of values between the individual Self and a positive cultural prototype, or between its two aspects – one descriptive for one's own culture and the other evaluative' (Boski, 2009, p. 552; Boski, 2008a, p. 165-205; Boski, 2008b, p. 97-145). A reference to the suggested model in pedagogical analysis implies the possibility of cultural transmission under conditions of intentional learning (e.g. in the family, school/university, group of peers, local environment) as well as experience in the social discourse of a country and constitutes – compared to traditional conceptions of acculturation (Berry, 1994, p. 253-257; Wysocka, 2013, p. 69-96) – the most complex construct, examining integration in its five meanings: integration as a positive assessment of biculturalism; integration as bilingual/bicultural competence; integration as 'functional specialisation'; integration as a new quality being a merger of components; and integration as psychological autonomy in relation to both initial cultures (Boski, 2009, p. 542-547).

The outline (2) of the theory of identity behaviours (pol. teoria zachowań tożsamościowych, TZT) – developed by Tadeusz Lewowicki – has proved to be an important perspective in the search for regularities determining the formation of the sense of identity in changing conditions of cultural diversity, as it enables a holistic, as well as a comparative approach to the processes and phenomena occurring in multicultural environments. The distinctive areas (elements) of identity – the first one – encompassing one's historical background, identification with a particular territory and social group; the second one – determined by the distinctiveness of culture, language, transmission of tradition and knowledge about the spiritual and material heritage of the given community; the third – associated with the peculiar historical genealogy and the specific characteristics of the group(s) and the stereotypes functioning within it/them; the fourth – concerning the economic condition, the living standards of the group(s); the fifth – related to needs, life goals and axiological preferences; and the sixth – considering the context of politics, worldview, society and economy – become at the same time significant determinants of identity behaviours (Lewowicki, 1995a, p. 51-63; Lewowicki 1995b, p. 13-26).

Given the comparative nature of the research, a reference was also made to (3) comparative analysis in international research, entailing the process of selection of study trials in different countries and conducting an analysis of the studied phenomena according to appropriate criteria in order to state the same, similar or different degrees of intensity of the studied characteristics (Szarucki, 2010, p. 55). Moreover, the most essential prerequisites for data comparability were met, namely: conceptual comparability – the measurements refer to the same concepts and categories; statistical comparability – methods of data collection accepted in statistical research were used in every category; and comparability of interpretation – the surveyed categories were interpreted in a similar way in all countries surveyed, but at the same time the conditions in the selected countries were taken into consideration (Kordos, 2007, p. 28).

The main problem addressed in the research of the author is contained in the questions:

- What sense of identity and national identification is manifested by the academic youth from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine studying full-time in the surveyed, culturally diverse environments?
- How do students perceive mixed marriages functioning in their socio-cultural environment?

In accordance with the adopted methodological stance, the research activities carried out used a quantitative-qualitative approach and – based on the research procedures recognised within them – specific research tools. Their selection and/or construction (in the case of self-developed tools) followed simultaneously the theories adopted in the study and the resulting assumptions for the addressed issues.

The comparative research was conducted in 3 stages. Stage I comprised monographic (field) studies intended to explore the inherited and currently formed socio-cultural capital of the Polish-Czech-Slovak-Ukrainian borderland. In Stage II, quantitative research ('surveys'), based on standardised original tools, was carried out. Finally, in Stage III, qualitative research was conducted with the use of ethnographic observation, individual interviews and document analysis to enhance the data obtained on the studied areas.

In the analysis of the empirical material, a reducing and expanding manner of transforming the data was implemented, as well as the assumptions of an interpretation approach to analysis of the meanings of statements were taken into consideration in the context of: understanding the thoughts of the subjects, critical common sense understanding and

theoretical understanding (Kvale, 2004, p. 213-231; Miles and Huberman, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2009). A phenomenological approach was also applied in drawing up a complete description of the occurrences, moving from individual textural-structural narratives of the meanings and essence of the experiences of the individuals in question to a synthesis in the form of a universal description of cultural experiences, representing the group(s) as a whole (Moustakas, 2001, p. 147-149).

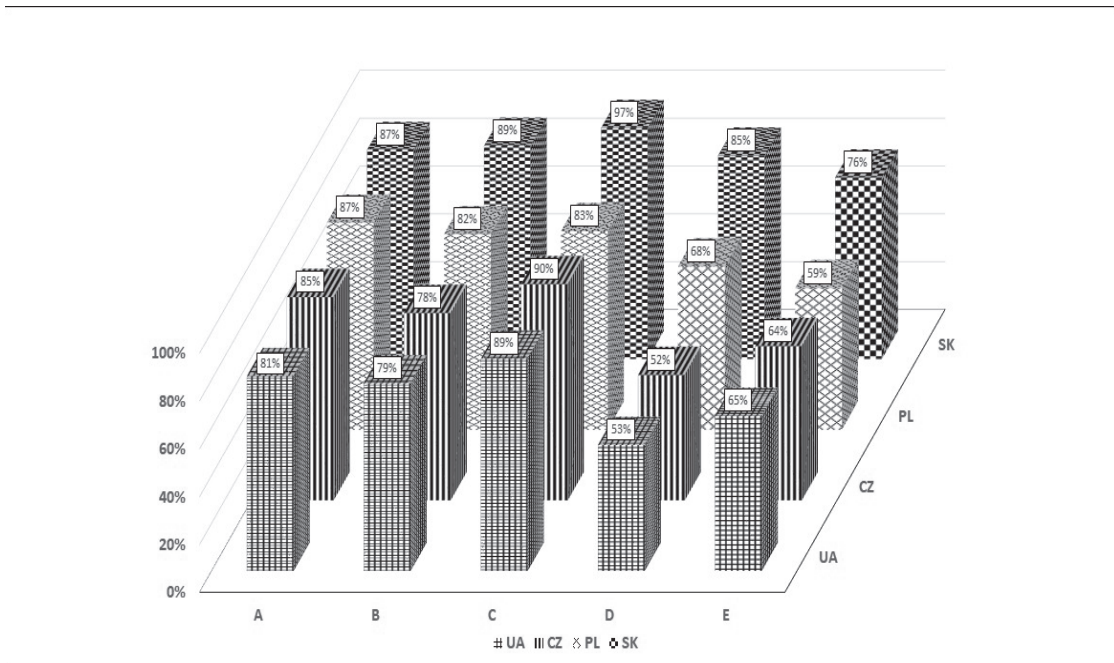
A total of 709 students participated in the research from 2019 to 2021, including 164 in Poland (97% female and 3% male), 166 in the Czech Republic (72.3% female and 27.7% male), 174 in Slovakia (90.8% female and 9.2% male) and 205 in Ukraine (85% female and 15% male). 7% of participants aged 17-18 years (48 people, including 46 in Ukraine), 46% aged 19-22 years (324 people), 27% (193) of participants aged 23-26 years and 20% of students aged 27 years and over (144 people). The study group is representative for pedagogy students, studying full-time at 1st and 2nd degree studies at the University of Silesia in Cieszyn (Poland), the University of Ostrava (Czech Republic), Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia) and the I. Franko State University in Zhytomyr (Ukraine).

Identity behaviours and national identifications expressed by students – towards a multidimensional identity

The functioning of academic youth in cultural borderlands is connected to a natural feeling of belonging to a specific social group (including, i.a. national or cultural groups) and enables self-identification, which is the basis for the differentiation between I-We and Others-They. The external (the attribution of belonging) and/or internal (self-determination) nature of identification, formed on a number of variously hierarchical levels, simultaneously shapes its sense of identity.

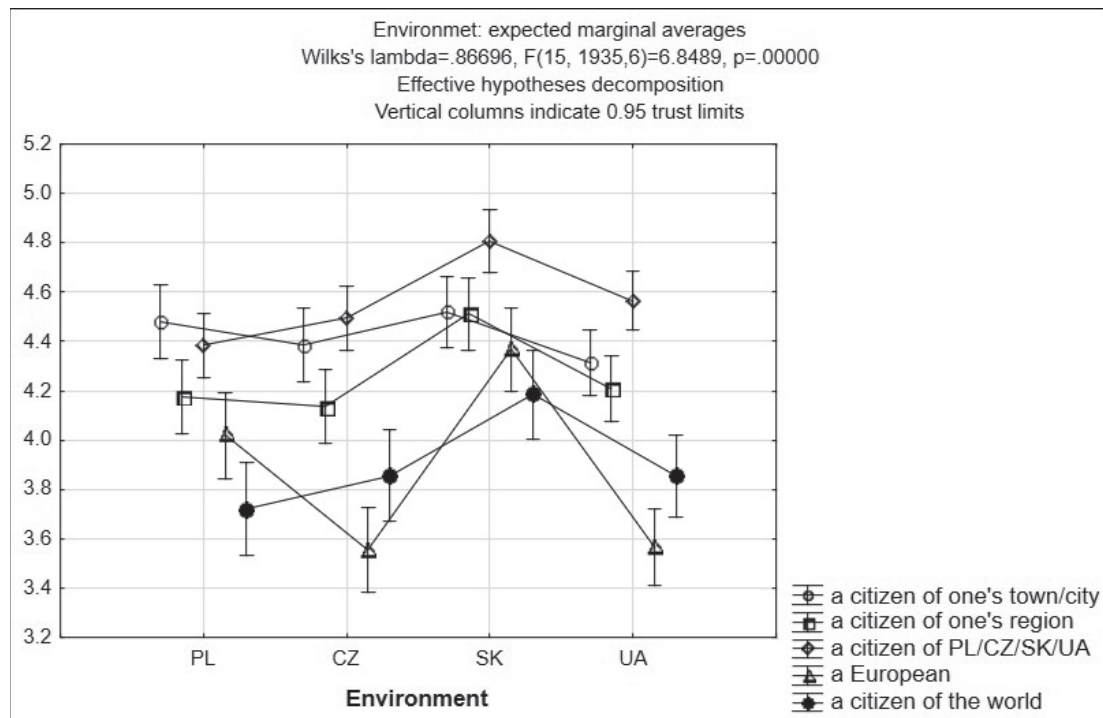
The declarations of the surveyed students (cf. Figure 1) regarding their sense of identity form, on one hand, a similar national (89.8%) – local (85%) – regional (82%) structure. Whereas, conversely – clear differences can be seen in the identification with Europe or the expressed feeling of being a citizen of the world, and this definitely applies to the choices indicated by young learners from Ukraine, Poland and the Czech Republic.

Figure 1. Declared sense of identity by students from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine (data in %)



Legend: a – I consider myself a citizen of my town/city; b – I consider myself a citizen of the region; c – I consider myself a citizen of Poland/Czech Republic, Slovakia/Ukraine; d – I consider myself European; e – I consider myself citizen of the world
 Source: own research

Figure 2. Declared sense of identity by students from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine (one-way ANOVA)



Source: own research

A thorough statistical comparative analysis of the study environments (cf. Figure 2) shows both similarities and differences in the sense of identity expressed by the students. A comparison of the declarations confirms the significant differentiation of the overall structure for the answers concerning their sense of connection with the region, their own country, Europe and the world, with a very similar local identification, with their town or city above all.

Academic youth from Slovakia is significantly more likely – compared to their peers from Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine – to declare stronger:

- sense of connection to the region (Kruskal-Wallis test: $H(3, N=709) = 19.74; p = .0002$),
- sense of being a citizen of one's country ($H(3, N=709) = 23.23; p = .00$),
- sense of being a European ($H(3, N=709) = 62.82; p = .00$),
- sense of being a citizen of the world ($H(3, N=709) = 14,41399; p = .0024$).

The existing discrepancies in the declared national identifications of individual groups of students point to a current tendency for the young generation to identify with different communities – local and regional ones in their homeland and, more broadly, the European one and beyond. The construction of their own identity by young learners is at the same time a shift from a uniform dimension of identity to the discovery and conscious choice of an enriched, multidimensional identity, determined most often by progressing, to varying rates and degrees, the processes of democratisation of public life. As T. Lewowicki points out, '[...] in such conditions many young people can identify more and more confidently with their country as well as with Europe. There is no need for radical choices, there is a heightened awareness of bonds, communities, and the need to collaborate at different levels and on different scopes of individual, social and transnational as well as above-state problems. The consequence of such is the formation of a multidimensional identity' (Lewowicki, 2009, p. 254-255).

Nevertheless – in the context of analysis of the obtained research results – the strong national identification of young learners from all countries constitutes an indicator of distinctiveness and connection to the national community. National culture is the deepest layer, which internally protects the sovereignty of the individual. Achieving this distinctiveness and autonomy, according to T. Lewowicki's theory of identity behaviours mentioned above, allows communities and individuals to fulfil their own aspirations

and provokes specific social actions of both individual and collective kind. National identification should furthermore be seen as another stage of taking root, which in effect makes it possible to go to the limits of one's own culture with the motivation to be open and discover other cultures. This stage of settling in is carried out on the level of the family and local, as well as regional heritage and proves to be indispensable as the world becomes globalised. The current results and their interpretation have supported the thesis formulated more than two decades ago by a culture sociologist – Antonina Kłoskowska (1996) – who, while focusing on experiencing by an individual of various aspects of his or her social identity, drew attention to the phenomenon of a peculiar nationalisation of social reality – Polish, European or global. Such nationalisation was to be expressed in the greater prominence of national symbolism in the infrastructure of everyday life. Furthermore, it can be presumed that another indifferent experience in the analysed process was – after the Velvet Revolution – the division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, or the regaining of independence by Ukraine in 1991. In these circumstances, it is understandable to seek the redefinition of national identity in the social consciousness. After many unfavourable experiences the time has come for an unambiguous identification, a noticeable increase in the number of people (especially young) who emphasise their national identity. This phenomenon – the stage of regaining and redefinition of one's identity – is explainable in the sense of mechanisms of social psychology and sociology, and remains in line with, i.a., the theory of identity behaviours (Lewowicki, 2009, p. 255).

The perception of mixed marriages

Marriage is considered to be the central point of family formation and construction. The phenomena connected with globalisation are beneficial not only for cultural cognition, but also for the establishment of close relationships, which can be legally legitimised. Numerous programmes in Poland show foreigners as 'friendly Others', curious about our country, settling in here and starting their families (Szafrńska, 2021). As a result, mixed marriages are nowadays no longer considered surprising and less and less often are met with rejection or stigmatisation. Marriages are entered into observing the rules of the country, in accordance with its customs, religious or legal precepts (Szukalski, 2013).

In Poland, an increase in the number of mixed relationships has been noted since the 1990s. It was the result of opening the borders, the developing process of European integration and the socio-political situation in the

world. There have been an increase of people entering the country for work and tourism, as well as waves of migration of Poles abroad. This progressive ethno-cultural diversification of the population and increased contact with culturally different people has naturally led to the formation of mixed couples and relationships, and – in the context of the conducted research – it is worth noting that these relationships used to generate significant controversy or even resistance in the past (Kasprzycki, 2013). According to the Bogardus' social distance scale, mixed marriages are considered to be a reflection of the greatest social closeness, and many researchers recognise them as one of the best indicators of social integration and cohesion (Brzozowska, 2017, p. 1).

The literature distinguishes mixed marriages in terms of various characteristics of the spouses, such as nationality, different countries of origin, ethnicity, race or religion. In the case of relationships between people of various nationalities or marriages of citizens of different countries, the terms 'binational' or 'cross-border' marriages are used (Rajkiewicz 2009, p. 170). Małgorzata Jodłowska-Herudzińska, on the other hand, applies the term: intercultural mixed marriages. The author emphasises that in such marriages a specific situation emerges – a 'meeting' of partners who represent distinct cultures and decide to get married, i.e. to live together, support each other and raise children (2001, p. 279-289). This 'meeting', i.e. the clash of cultures extensively described in the field of intercultural education, constitutes an important factor in the way mixed marriages function. Marital homogamy refers to the tendency to marry people of similar ethnic origin, nationality, religion, educational level or socio-economic status. The greater the similarity, the greater the homogamy, which is an indicator of cohesion of categories as well as the openness and strength of social barriers (Brzozowska 2015, p. 9). It is presumed that the level of spousal similarity – especially the similarity of cultural characteristics – determines marital satisfaction. Mixed marriages are therefore by default relationships of increased difficulty (Jodłowska-Herudzińska 2002, p. 174).

We were interested in how the surveyed students, representing four countries from Central and Eastern Europe, see the problem of mixed marriages. We posed the question of how mixed marriages are perceived in their environment (cf. Table 1). Overall, a majority of 307 responses (45.4%) indicates a neutral attitude towards this type of relationship. Respondents were significantly more likely to indicate a positive attitude towards mixed marriages, with a total of 284 students (42%) providing such statements. The perception of this type of marriage was viewed negatively by 85 students (12.6%).

Table 1. The perception of mixed marriages in the environment of the respondents

	Number of indications	%
Very positive	63	9.3
Positive	221	32.7
Neutral	307	45.4
Negative	68	10.1
Very negative	17	2.5
Total	676	100

N=676

Source: own research

There is a statistically significant correlation of low strength of association between the place of study and the student responses for $p=0.001 < 0.05$ Cramer's $V=0.285$. Slight discrepancies can be noted in the way mixed marriages are perceived by students from particular countries. Polish respondents most frequently indicated a neutral (39%), positive (36.6%) and very positive (11.6%) opinion. Slightly more than half of Ukrainian students also indicated a neutral opinion (52.4 %) and almost one in three respondents (33 %) a positive one, but it was considerably less common to express a very positive opinion (4.2 %). The highest number of neutral opinions was indicated by students from Slovakia (59.4%), with much less frequent positive opinions (just over 25% in total). However, respondents from the Czech Republic appeared to have the most positive attitude towards mixed marriages – here, positive evaluations dominated – overall more than half of the respondents (with 43.4% indicating a positive attitude and the highest number among all students 13.3% indicating a very positive one). Among Czech students, neutral ratings were marked by just over 30% of respondents.

Within the very negative ratings, almost half are from Ukraine and 1/3 from Poland. However, it should be noted that these responses were rarely marked overall, given by only 17 respondents across all countries. It was marked very negatively by 8 respondents from Ukraine, 5 from Poland and 2 each from the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Table 2).

Table 2. The perception of mixed marriages in the respondents' environment categorised by the responses of students studying in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine

Surveyed students from:		Evaluation of mixed marriages perception					In total
		very negatively	negatively	neutrally	positively	very positively	
Poland	Quantity	5	16	64	60	19	164
	Percentage	3%	9.8%	39%	36.6%	11.6%	100%
The Czech Republic	Quantity	2	19	51	72	22	166
	Percentage	1.2%	11.4%	30.7%	43.4%	13.3%	100%
Slovakia	Quantity	2	21	92	26	14	155
	Percentage	1.3%	13.5%	59.4%	16.8%	9.0%	100%
Ukraine	Quantity	8	12	100	63	8	191
	Percentage	4.2%	6.3%	52.4%	33%	4.2%	100%
In total	Quantity	17	68	307	221	63	676
	Percentage	2.5%	10.1%	45.4%	32.7%	9.3%	100%

Source: own research

N of valid observations: 676

$\chi^2=54.950$, $df=12$ for $p=0.01 < 0.05$

Cramer's V=0.285

Conclusions

The arguments presented in the study do not provide for a comprehensive image of both the identity behaviours exhibited by young adults studying and living in borderland environments and their perception of mixed marriages. They only serve as an attempt to capture, describe and interpret the characteristic features and trends regarding the matters in question, which at the same time are of significant importance for undertaking specific educational actions in culturally diverse communities.

The sense of identity of the surveyed academic youth in reference to P. Boski's theory of cultural identity based on the values and practices in conditions of bicultural and multicultural socialisation is relational. In this context, there is a possibility of cultural transmission in settings of intentional learning, such as family, university, peer group or local environment, as well

as experience in the social discourse of a country. The existing differences in the declared sense of identity and national identifications of individual student groups point to a current tendency for the young generation to identify with various communities – national (their country of origin), local, regional or, more broadly, European and beyond. The construction of identity of young learners is at the same time a departure from its homogeneous dimension to the discovery and conscious choice of an enriched, multidimensional identity, most often determined by the democratisation processes of social life, progressing at various rates and to different extents.

According to the surveyed students, neutral (indifferent) and positive perceptions of mixed marriages prevail in their environment. With the most positive views being expressed by respondents from the Czech Republic, and the least positive evaluations being reported by students from Slovakia. This difference is particularly intriguing as, until the end of 1992, the citizens of the current Czech Republic and Slovakia lived in the same, single state.

Given that the declarations of the Ukrainian students were collected in 2021, before the Russian aggression against their country – it can be assumed that the current picture of their sense of identity and the chosen identity profiles, as well as the attitude towards mixed marriages, would be different, similarly to the remaining academic youth from the analysed environments. Therefore, it is difficult not to agree with the opinion of Krystyna Szafraniec, according to which ‘the youth is a very good reference point for observing what is happening to society as a whole. It is the lens in which the various problems and tensions of the system are focused. It is a barometer of change and public attitudes. The situation of the young, their perception of the world, their aspirations and life goals are a measure of the changes that had already taken place and the distance yet to be overcome. Diagnoses of the young naturally make us think about the future, they introduce us to the kind of intellectual practice without which it is difficult to imagine practising enlightened and far-sighted policy – they constitute a natural point of reference for predictions’ (2011, p. 11).

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