

# PORTRAIT OF POLES AND LITHUANIANS THROUGH STUDENTS' EYES

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## Abstract

The article provides a brief historical background of Polish-Lithuanian stereotypes and provides the results of sociological research, which was carried out at the Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania. The main tasks of the article are to examine Polish and Lithuanian characters, their mutual relations and relations to other people, their attitudes to material goods and to their homeland. The author tried to define “How Lithuanians refer to themselves and to Poles”. The results of the research are divided into two parts. The first describes Lithuanian autostereotypes and stereotypes about Lithuanians. The second part provides data about actual Lithuanian stereotypes about Poles. As a result of the research, we confirmed most of the “classical stereotypes” about the two nations, but also found the new ones.

**Keywords:** *Stereotypes, Sociological Research, Poland, Lithuania, International and Interpersonal Relations*

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## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore the communications that exist between Lithuanians and Poles and vice versa, their mutual relations and relations to other people. The main tasks of the article are to examine their characters and cognitive abilities, attitudes to material goods and to their homeland and to define “How Lithuanians refer to themselves and to Poles”. For this purpose, during the sociological research, which was carried out at the Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania, questionnaires with clusters of opposite pairs of characteristics grouped by the respondents’ attitudes to other people, homeland, material goods, and themselves were developed and given to the students to fill out.

The results of the research are divided into two parts. The first describes Lithuanian autostereotypes and stereotypes about Lithuanians. And the main task here is to answer the questions:

- How do Lithuanians relate to other people?
- What are Lithuanians’ characters and cognitive abilities?
- Do Lithuanians respect material goods?
- What are Lithuanians’ attitudes to their homeland?

In the second part, we describe stereotypes about Poles and answer the following questions:

- How do Poles relate to other people?
- What are Poles’ characters and cognitive abilities?
- Do Poles respect material goods?
- What are Poles’ attitudes to their homeland?

## Definitions and the Basic Theoretical Concepts

At the very beginning, we consider the issues related to the stereotype categories, how they function in society, and the ways of their changing. Everyone is sensitive to the estimation of others, of how important they are, and interested in what others think of them and how they are

perceived. Proper understanding of themselves and their community significantly affects self-image, which impacts others' perceptions. Stereotypes have particular importance in situations where groups have close and frequent contact, for example, when they "have a common geographical space, socially and politically, which is shared by the state, or a group of neighbours" (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010: 112). The same can be said about students of different nationalities, who communicated in high school, or met at university. Of course, they are in the same group of students with different experiences and upbringing.

A stereotype is a collective belief supported by a group of people. Stereotypes are not derived from the direct experiences of people, but are a result of a tradition of dialogue and mediation (Berting, Villain-Gandossi 1995). A stereotype, as opposed to creative, rational thinking, is "a formal and simplified generalisation" (Hloušková 1995: 47). The word "stereotype" comes from the Greek words *stereos*, which means strong, rigid, and *typos*, which means imprint, track, reflection, and pattern.

The concept of a "stereotype" in the socio-political discourse of the west began with Walter Lippmann, when he used it to describe his original concept of public opinion in 1922. According to Lippmann, the definition is as follows: a stereotype – it is accepted in the historical community sample of perception, filtering, the interpretation of the information for the recognition of the world, based on previous social experience. The stereotype system is social reality.

In the interwar period, when the researchers turned their attention to the problem and subject of stereotypes, was "dominated by a very negative approach – stereotypes seen as difficult eliminate the (distorted) model of social peace, but after the war, attitudes towards stereotypes changed, and they began to be regarded as commonly used cognitive mechanisms, which cannot be eliminated. Currently, scientists recognise the universal and necessary use of stereotypes, suggesting that they simplify the picture of the world and overly generalise social phenomena" (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010: 112).

Stereotypes act as a cognitive schema. With their help, a person processes information and converts it, first selecting from their environment, from the social reality that it is important to him (man), and then applies the stereotypes and sorts them, adapting them to the context of the information received (Kurcz 1994; Maison 1997; Pietrzak 2000). It happens in this way: the recipient notes that the individual belongs to a stereotyped social category and assigns him all the features of this category. The rate of reaction and opinion is based on the stereotype, rather than real human experience. This means that when you meet someone new, you will automatically be aware of his stereotypical image and, if necessary, give a stereotyped response (reaction) to their actions. This is a single defence mechanism against the panic and fear of the unknown. Sometimes reality can be radically different from the stereotype, and this fact leads to cognitive dissonance.

There are some important facts about stereotypes, which were underlined by Berting and Villain-Gandossi (1995: 14): “stereotypes are not a concept, but only (much or less) a reflection of social phenomena; they do not belong to a person’s direct experience, but they are a consequence of tradition and simplification; stereotypes are an important integrating factor in society; and they remain unchanged over a long time and provide emotional attitudes to groups of people”.

There are several reasons for stereotype resistance (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010: 118). Firstly, it is difficult to change a stereotype because it is not clear if it was a real experience of a group or only a symbolic interpretation of an event. Stereotypes, to a fundamental degree, are derived from tradition, oral statements, and literature. This means it is difficult to modify them by historical evidence of academic knowledge.

Secondly, the patterns are closely linked with emotions. A stereotype is an expression of emotions and beliefs – an often-transmitted inherited unconscious representation – and, as such, poorly amenable to rational argument.

Third, the persistence of stereotypes contributes to certain psychological mechanisms of human perception. Attribution error (perception) is based on the fact that individuals and groups' behaviour is perceived differently depending on the emotional relationship to the group.

How to change stereotypes? A stereotype is a kind of cognitive structure that describes certain human communities' attributes, typing, which cannot be avoided, originating from the adaptation mechanisms of human cognition, and therefore it is not so easy to change them. Stereotypes are often based on incomplete knowledge and misconceptions about the world, created by tradition. Experts propose changing stereotypes through intergroup communication, collaboration and awareness.

### Stereotypes in Theoretical and Empirical Research

While working on the paper, the author relied on both theoretical and empirical kinds of research, which describe the main concepts and research methods of the topic. Among others: books that deal with the concept of nationalism and the formation of nations present different understandings of the term "nation" (Anderson 1997; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983); books which determine the importance in the world history of each, even "small European" nations, including Lithuania (Hroch 1971; 2003), which presents a reflection on national identity, concludes with the importance of nationalism and historical heritage; books which deal with the issues without which it is impossible to imagine research on stereotypes, including issues of national and ethnic minorities (Kłoskowska 2005) and the problem of border co-existence.

A close neighbourhood doesn't mean good relations between states and societies. Sometimes it is quite the opposite – frequent interactions become a source of conflicts. In the case of Poland and its neighbours, the situation "is special, as regular contacts between the inhabitants of countries are, in a sense, a new phenomenon – after years of interruption, they

became possible again thanks to perestroika and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union” (Konieczna-Salamatin 2011: 1).

The study of stereotypes is impossible without practical analysis. Some research comes from cultural, literary or historical studies. For example, in the book titled *National character of Poles and others* (Lewandowski 1995), besides describing the national character of Poles and some other nations and defining the place of Poland in Europe, the author proves the existence of certain features of the Polish nation, based on analyses of a collection of quotations from classical Polish literature. Another good example is research devoted to stereotypes, which include the study of the internal form of a word, semantic motivation, free and phraseological combinations (Masłowska 2012).

Some examples are from sociological and political studies. The research by Błuszkowski (2003) shows national stereotypes in the consciousness of Poles. Based on special tests which generated a map of nation-states, the researcher determined that a group of 21 nationalities rank as the most important to Poles: Americans, English, Austrians, Belarusians, Chinese, Czechs, French, Spaniards, Dutch, Japanese, Canadians, Lithuanians, Germans, Russians, Slovaks, Swedes, Turks, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Italians, and Jews. As we can see, Lithuanians, like other neighbouring nations, are important to Poles.

The result of empirical research about the interaction and mutual vision of different peoples, among others, through students' eyes, are present in the collections of papers, included in the (already) classic work *Narody i stereotypy* (1995) edited by Walas, as well as reprinted 25 years later with new and updated research as *Nations & Stereotypes 25 years after: new borders, new horizons* (2015). The first book is a result of the International Conference in 1993 and presents numerous articles about the role of national stereotypes in interpersonal, national, and international relations. The second is a result of the International Conference which took place in Kraków in 2014. The participants were selected in “national” pairs, (e.g. Venclova spoke about the stereotype of a Pole in

Lithuania, Miłosz about the stereotype of a Lithuanian in Poland; Bałuch and Baron discuss the mutual stereotypes of Poles in the Czech Republic and Czechs in Poland; Riabczuk and Michnik – Polish and Ukrainian).

As a result of the discussion, which took the form of an open debate, it was determined that the perception of themselves and their neighbours in Central European countries has changed over the past 25 years. This is not surprising, taking into account the social, economic, and social changes that have taken place in the countries of the region.

The historical and sociological origin of stereotypes about Polish-Lithuanian relations can be found in various books (Buchowski 2006; Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013; Kolarska-Bobińska 2003 and others) and in numerous articles from the early 1990s until the present day (Okińczyc 1995; Piwowar 2007-2008). In book *Litwomani i Polonizatorzy...* (Buchowski 2006) the author claims, that the negative image of Poland and Poles crystallised in the eyes of Lithuanians, and there were also very unfavourable Polish opinions about Lithuania and Lithuanians. Therefore, the study aimed to answer the question about the reasons for growing mutual prejudices: the author studied the origin of the myths, stereotypes, and prejudices; the mythology of the conflict from 1915-1922; the mutual perception of both nations in the interwar years and during the Second World War. Finally, Buchowski speaks about some new myths from the second half of the 20th century.

The 21st century research on the mutual perception of Lithuanians and Poles is presented in the second mentioned book entitled *Obok siebie wzajemne postrzeganie się Polaków i Litwinów (Side by Side, the Mutual Perception of Poles and Lithuanians)* which was published in 2013. The book presents results from a study based on four polls carried out in the summer of 2012 (two in the general population of Poles and Lithuanians, two among national minorities – Polish in Lithuania and Lithuanians in Poland). According to the authors, the results of the study are difficult to interpret because today “Poles know little about

Lithuania and Lithuanians little about Poland, and there are not enough personal contacts with the other country. As a result, it is difficult for Poles and Lithuanians to judge the other country” (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 7). Nevertheless, Poles accept Lithuanians and Lithuanians accept Poles in various social roles: as tourists, residents of their country, neighbours, bosses, friends, or citizens. More than three-quarters of Poles would have nothing against a Lithuanian son-in-law or daughter-in-law, while for Lithuanians, the acceptance of their child’s marriage to a Pole is a few percent less.

Most Poles (62 %) and Lithuanians (55 %) believe that they are similar to each other. People who consider another nation’s representatives to be similar to them are also better oriented towards it. People who rate a country better also better rate its citizens (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 13). Representatives of minorities most often notice the similarities between Lithuanians and Poles in both countries (*Ibidem*: 14).

It is worth noting that the issues of Polish-Lithuanian relations are written about by Polish and international foundations and research centres. First of all, we would like to mention the International Cultural Centre (Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury), a Polish national institution of culture specialising in the culture and heritage of Central Europe.

The International Cultural Centre (ICC) undertakes “a critical and multidirectional reflection on the notion of cultural heritage using interdisciplinary instruments” (ICC 2020). It is a powerful institution with activities geographically focused on Central Europe. Its mission is to deepen knowledge and understanding of “mutual heritage in an active dialogue with Poland’s neighbours and the world”, encouraging partnership and collaboration in the region in, among others, the field of stereotypes and prejudices. The already mentioned book *Narody i stereotypy* (1995) was published after lengthy sessions in 1993 entitled Nations and Stereotypes organised by the ICC in Kraków.

The other well-known institution – the Institute of Public Affairs (The Institute Spraw Publicznych) – is a leading Polish think tank and



independent centre for policy research and analysis providing research about stereotypes and prejudices. One of the most recent IPA publications (Czachur, Loew, Łada 2020) is devoted to Polish-German relations (*The Dynamic (im)Balance: How Germans and Poles Communicate with Each Other and About Each Other*). It is about cross-border communication practices between Germans and Poles, either directly (such as face-to-face or via other means of communication) or indirectly (as private persons or representatives of institutions).

As well as these Polish institutions which are working on stereotypes and prejudices, there is the activity of the Centre for Research on Prejudice from the University of Warsaw (Ośrodek Badań nad Uprzedzeniami Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego). For example, in some of the latest research from July 2020 (at the time of the Polish election), the Centre provides the results of the report “What is the relationship between aversion to strangers and political preferences?” about negative attitudes to foreigners in Poland (Puchała, Bulska 2020).

The relations between different peoples, mutual acceptance, and Poles' attitudes to different nations are also determined by public opinion polls. For example, one of the largest and best-renowned public opinion research institutes in Poland, The Public Opinion Research Centre (Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej), periodically studies and publishes reports entitled *Attitude to other nationalities* (such as CBOS reports Nr 37/2018, Nr 17/2019, Nr 31/2020) and *How Poles perceive their neighbours* (Nr 124/2015). There we can find the results concerning Poles' attitudes towards Lithuanians or an attempt to describe the Polish stereotype of a Lithuanian.

## Methodology

According to Jasińska-Kania (1992: 7), the goal of sociological research stereotypes could be the “general empirical determination of the level of proliferation in the minds of members of group-specific ideas and/or

opinions of other groups, the degree of repeatability and uniformity of these ideas, as well as factors influencing their diversity and possible modification”.

The identification of autostereotypes of Lithuanian students and their stereotypic relations to Poles is carried out in this study. For this purpose, two questionnaires were developed in English and given to Vytautas Magnus University students to fill out. The author carried out this work during the research stay in Kaunas, Lithuania, from 20 November till 4 December 2016.

The semantic differential method was selected for our study of stereotypes (cf. Bartmiński 1995: 258-268; *Trudne sąsiedztwa. Z socjologii konfliktów narodowościowych* 2001). The method is based on the fact that the content of the assessment of stereotypes is presented in the form of polarised characteristics (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010: 134).

Clusters of opposite pairs of characteristics (antonyms) were given to each respondent, who had to specify a number from “1” (a negative response) to “5” (a positive characteristic), which, in their opinion, best reflected their impression of a particular social group. In addition, Lithuanian’s autostereotypes were investigated. In each of the blocks, the survey questions were grouped by the respondents’ attitudes to other people, their homeland, material goods, and themselves (cf. Bartmiński 1995: 258-268; *Trudne sąsiedztwa. Z socjologii konfliktów narodowościowych* 2001). The total number of answers was 66, but we selected only those students who filled out all the answers. The total number was forty (40) students.

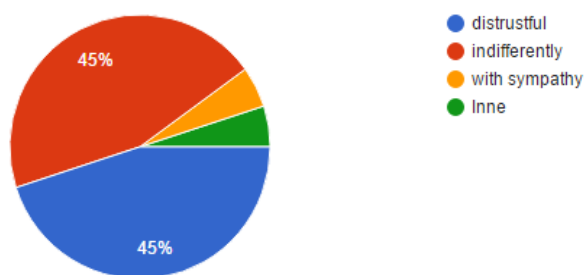
#### Sociological research results

Realising that “the analysis of stereotypes requires an interdisciplinary approach... in the past, this was the field of social psychology. But much more can be achieved through the systematic cooperation of literary sci-

entists, psychiatrists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists” (Berting, Villain-Gandossi 1995: 16) and, as a result, stereotypes “can be studied in different ways, from different points of view from different perspectives” (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010: 113), we are trying to determine the autostereotypes of a certain group of students concerning the neighbours and their own people.

According to Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk (2013: 11), who we have already mentioned, the result is the statement that “Lithuania has more frequent contacts with Poland than Poland with Lithuania” and can better answer questions about Poles than vice versa. Although, “Lithuanians have a worse attitude towards Poles than Poles have towards Lithuanians. Therefore, contacts and knowledge do not transfer to a more positive perception of a given society”. We decided that the first question in our own study would be: “In your opinion, how do Lithuanians generally refer to Poles?”, to find out the attitude of Lithuanians towards Poles. The results are (see Figure 1):

- 45 % – “distrustful” and the same percentage – “indifferently”;
- 5 % – “with sympathy”, with the same percentage of “other” (among these answers was “differently”).



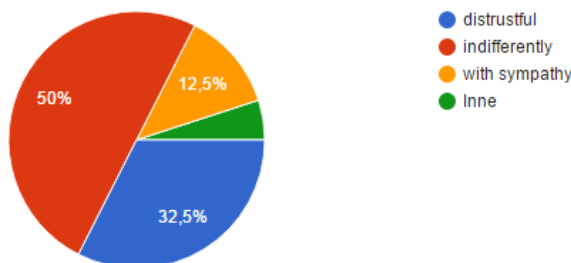
**Figure 1.** How do Lithuanians generally refer to Poles

These results are also confirmed by the previously mentioned Polish-Lithuanian relations study, which claims that “half of Polish and Lithu-

anian society feel neither dislike nor sympathy towards the other nation” (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 13) as well as the fact that “almost half of the inhabitants of both countries declare a neutral attitude towards the neighbouring nation”.

For the same question about how Poles generally refer to Lithuanians (see Figure 2), we get:

- 32.5 % – distrustful;
- 50 % – indifferently;
- 12.5 % – with sympathy;
- 5% – “other” (including “I don’t know”).



We see that the Lithuanian students think that the Poles show them more sympathy (12.5 % compared to 5 %).

**Figure 2.** How do Poles generally refer to Lithuanians

The study among small groups of students confirmed the results of the representative sociological research we have already mentioned: “However, Poles are definitely more positive towards Lithuanians than Lithuanians towards Poles: they more often think that Lithuanians are similar to them, they would also accept Lithuanians in various social roles much more willingly, and they consider Lithuanians in Poland to be well suited to Polish society” (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 13).

## Lithuanian Autostereotypes

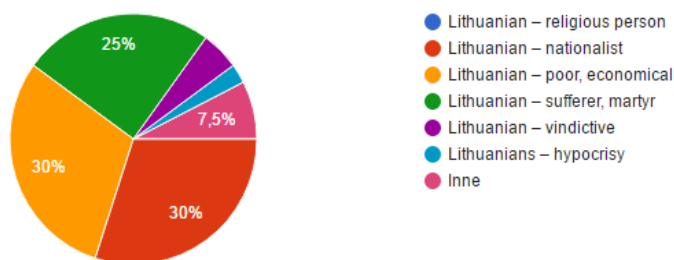
A stereotype is “a product of culture and performs important functions in internal group communication. The knowledge of a stereotype is a manifestation of autoidentification” (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010: 116).

Stereotypes about other nations help us to understand some basic ideas about our own nation (Bokszański 2001; Bonusiak 2002; *Polacy – w pułapce autostereotypów* 2009; *Mity i stereotypy w dziejach Polski* 1991). At the same time, stereotypes can “reflect the current position of this group on the peoples of other countries, relations with which are sometimes changed” (Berting, Villain-Gandossi 1995: 23).

However, seeking Lithuanian autostereotypes we asked students to select an option that best describes a Lithuanian (see Figure 3). We got the following results:

- 30 % determined a Lithuanian as a “nationalist”;
- 30 % – as a “poor, economical” person;
- 25 % – as a “sufferer, martyr”;
- 5 % – as “vindictive” and 2.5% – as “hypocritical”.

Nobody said that a Lithuanian is a “religious person”.



**Figure 3.** Lithuanian autostereotypes

We see that most of the students said that members of their group are nationalists while being people who love to complain and count their pennies (not sufficiently rich in material terms). Because the study was carried out in comparison with the other peoples of Europe, we can talk about self-perception as “we are poor but proud”. It should be noted that in comparison with Poles that are sure to have chosen the answer about patriotism, but at the same time about their religiosity. As you can see, the factor of religion has no role in the Lithuanian autostereotype.

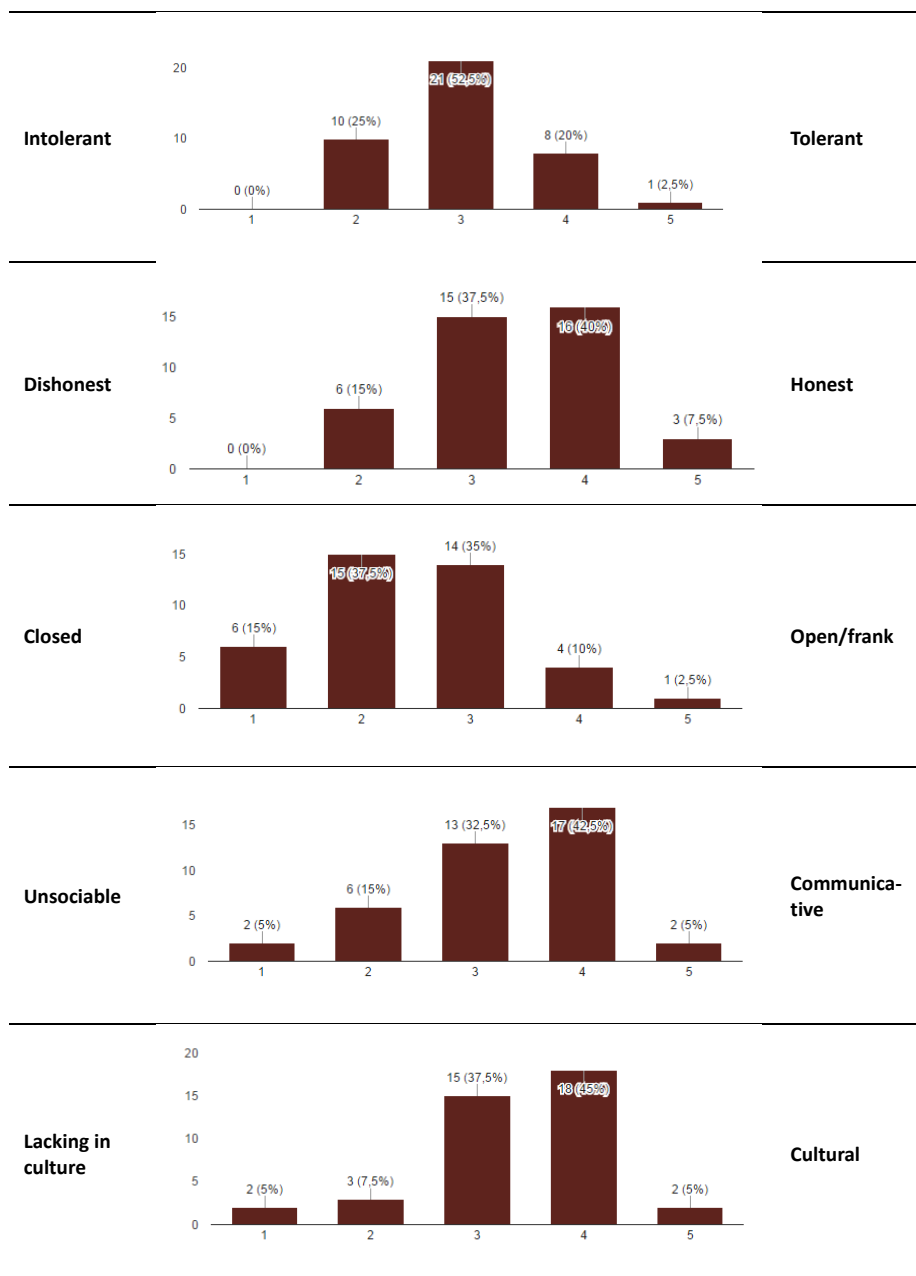
Next, we will describe the group in accordance with the parameters discussed earlier: attitudes to other peoples, to their homeland, to material goods, and themselves.

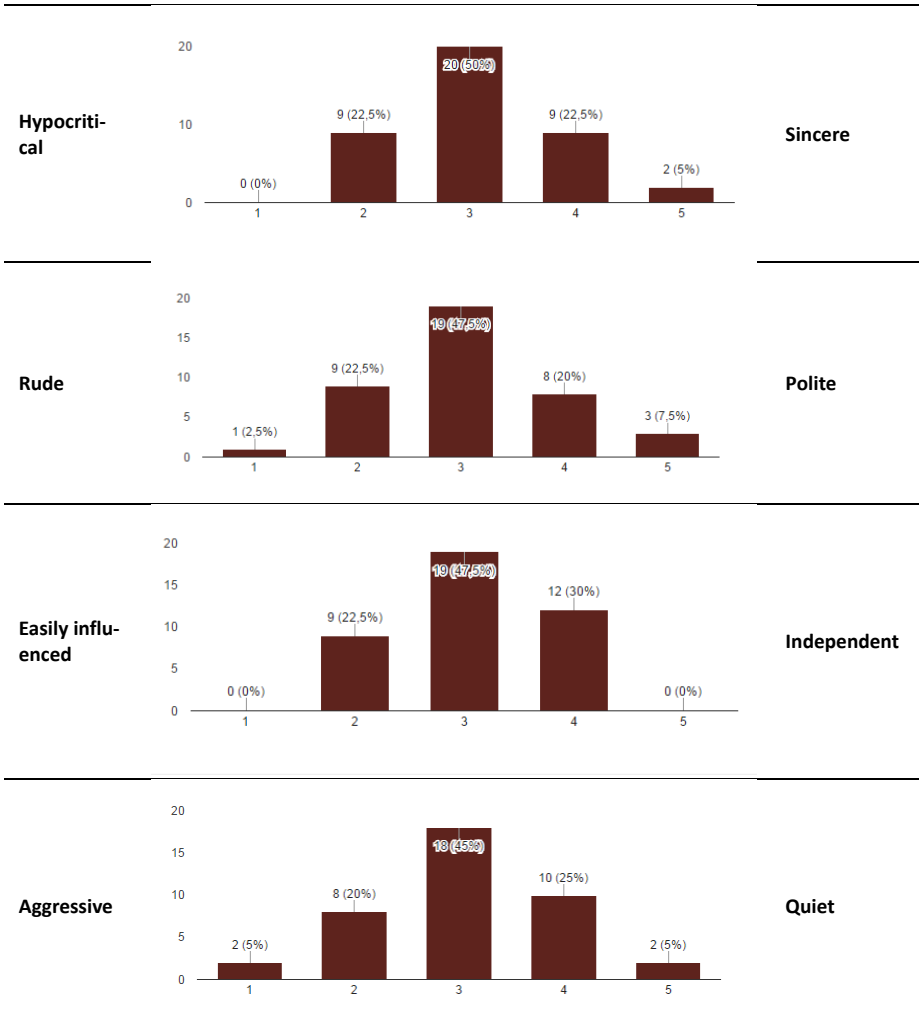
#### Part 1: Stereotypes about Lithuanians

According to Venclova, who writes about the problem of the Lithuanian stereotype, the whole of Lithuania is a “big village, where everyone is a brother and a friend” (Venclova 1995: 78). We conducted the survey using a questionnaire, but the sample was small, so our results do not represent the whole of Lithuania but are indicative of the small groups of students who study at Lithuanian universities.

In the first group of questions, we wanted to find out whether students share the opinion that “the man of Lithuania is distinguished by kindness of heart, lack of indifference and hatred, love for a person he values above political ambitions and economic interest, scientific truth, and aesthetic beauty” (*Ibidem*: 78), so it was appropriate to ask about the students’ attitudes to other people (see Table 1). We asked students to answer the question, *how do Lithuanians relate to other people?* The answer options for this question included the following pairs: intolerant/tolerant, dishonest/honest, closed/open or frank, unsociable/communicative, lacking in culture/cultural, hypocritical/sincere, rude/polite, easily influenced/independent, aggressive/quiet (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** How do Lithuanians relate to other people (their attitude)?





We see that most students find Lithuanians moderately tolerant (average of “3”). 40 % of Lithuanian students believe that their friends and relatives are “honest” (and 7.5 % “very honest”). Only 15 % think that Lithuanians can conceal their views and lie. We see that most students believe their nation representatives are honest. But honesty does not mean trust and openness. Therefore, the next question was regarding



openness (free to express their own opinions, share experiences, make new friends, and be frank).

Students doubted that Lithuanians are open to the surrounding world: 37.5 % consider themselves to be “closed” and 15 % as “very closed” people.

It could be one of the stereotypes that northern nations are more closed than southern ones: hard living conditions, earlier darkness most of the year, and cold weather causing such a type of the national character. I would also add some historical facts – having spent more than 70 years under Soviet rule, Lithuanians are used to hiding their own opinions and dissatisfaction about the political situation (although today there is a museum of totalitarianism in Vilnius, and the Soviet regime is equated to an occupation, at that time it was difficult to freely express their attitudes to the regime). From the beginning of occupied times, several generations of Lithuanians have been born, so the habit of not expressing one’s feelings to strangers could remain a national character, which later became a stereotype.

Nearly half of students (42.5 %) find their fellow Lithuanians to be “communicative”. And only 15 % of them determined Lithuanians to be “unsociable”. At the same time as students think the national feature of the Lithuanian character is being a closed person, they think of most Lithuanians as communicative persons. We think this means that they become genuinely open to communication within a small circle of friends and relatives and reveal themselves without being afraid to express their own opinions and talk a lot. As a result of this, the students answered this question in this way.

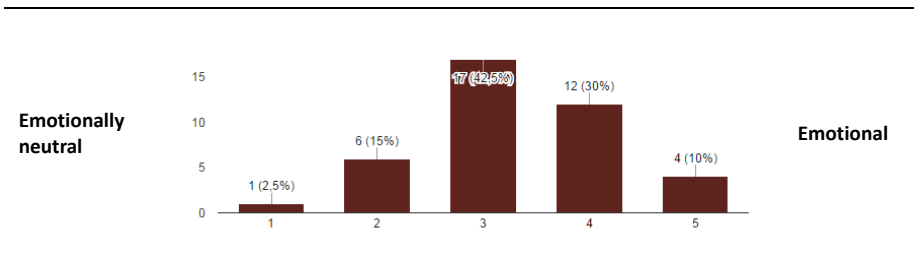
The majority (45 %) believe their fellow students are “cultural”. We believe that students who study at university and are accustomed to the scientific environment see polite attitudes from their professors and teachers. When in Lithuania, our personal experience was confirmed that the citizens of Lithuania are very polite in everyday practice.

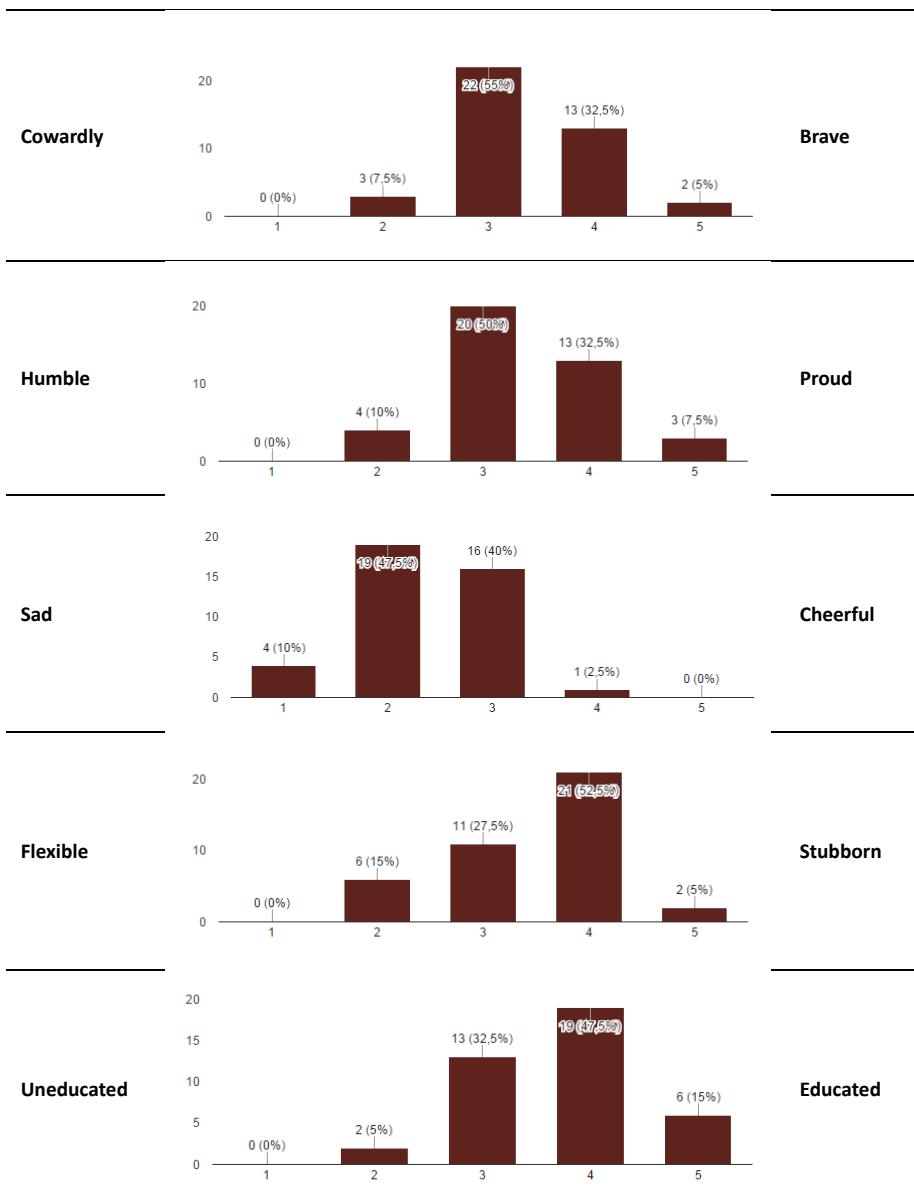
Nobody thinks that Lithuanians are “hypocritical”. The majority gave this an average score (“3” mark) – “neither hypocritical nor sincere”. “Sincere” was selected by 22.5 % of respondents.

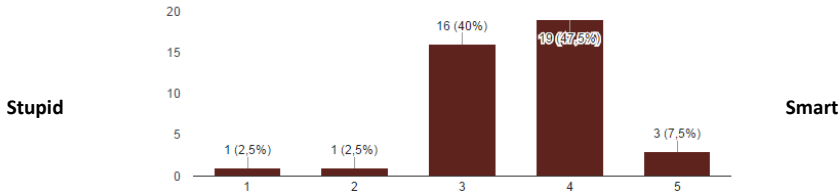
Students also had an unequivocal opinion on the courtesy comparison. Half believe that the truth lies somewhere in the middle, and 20 % that they are “polite” or “rude”. Quite ambiguous answers can be interpreted as follows: a person’s courtesy depends on their education and his or her personality instead of some national characteristic or pattern. A similar situation occurred for the next two pairs of possible answers (“easily influenced”/“independent mind”) and level of aggression (“aggressive”/“quiet”). According to the students, such ability is not specific on the grounds of nationality but depends on experience, education, and environment. According to the students, Lithuanians are not aggressive (20 %) or quiet (25 %).

Coming back to the above-mentioned author, Lithuanians living at the junction of two cultures – German and Slavic – “represent the golden mean: they are devoid of the shortcomings and imperfections of their neighbours” (Venclova 1995: 78). This is what we wanted to identify in our research: Do Lithuanian students think the same? The second group of questions was about Lithuanian features of character and mental abilities and includes questions about such pairs: emotionally neutral/emotional, cowardly/brave, humble/proud, sad/cheerful, flexible/stubborn, uneducated/educated, stupid/smart (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Lithuanians’ character and cognitive abilities







As we can see from the responses of the students, they find Lithuanians to be more emotional than emotionally neutral:

- 2.5 % – no emotions at all;
- 15 % – emotionally neutral;
- 30 % – emotional;
- 10 % – very emotional.

The rest (42.5 %) – “hard to say” (somewhere in the middle).

Students also clearly see their nation as “brave” (the answer “very cowardly” is not chosen at all, and 7.5 % chose just “cowardly”). Five per cent consider themselves to be “very brave” with 32.5 % as only “brave”. We think this stereotype has its origin in Lithuanian history: a long period of being in the middle between Western (Germany) and Slavic (Russia) peoples caused a vital need for Lithuanians to be brave warriors and defend their own land.

The respondents also think that Lithuanians are “proud” (32.5 %) and “very proud” (7.5 %). This is a new (and unexpected) idea, which is not a stereotype in its full sense because in the literature on the subject we did not find a suitable mention of “Lithuanian pride”.

There are some stereotypes in post-Soviet countries about the feelings of happiness and cheerfulness of the Baltic nations. In Russia, it is often said that Lithuanians and Estonians are gloomy because of the weather (which is not very sunny) and the day length (which is very short).

The students from Lithuania also think about their people as a sad nation: nearly half claim that they are “sad” (47.5 %) or “very sad” (10 %). Only 2.5 % noted them as “cheerful”.

At the same time Lithuanians are stubborn:

- 5 % marked them as “very stubborn”;
- 52.5 % – as “stubborn”;
- 27.5 % – somewhere in the middle;
- 15 % – as “flexible”.

We'd like to note that stubbornness is not always necessary “bad”. It could be a firm confession in their own minds or a strong point of view about some essential or vital questions.

Understanding the importance of education and good knowledge, students marked their fellow Lithuanians as:

- 15 % call themselves “very educated”;
- 47.5 % – as “educated”;
- 32.5 % – somewhere in the middle;
- and only 5 % – as “uneducated”.

We see that education is important and relevant to the Lithuanian nation. In fact, Lithuanian students often study abroad, participate in international exchanges, and attend seminars and conferences, for example, in other European Union countries. It is essential to continue this trend of being an educated nation; to keep the level of assessment of education and the importance of science as a priority for Lithuania in the future.

Being smart nowadays increases the chances of having a promising career or succeeding in business. So, nearly 50 % of students say their fellow Lithuanians are “smart” or “very smart”.

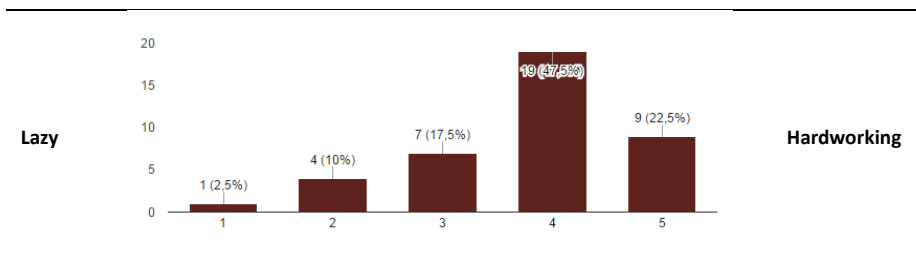
The third group of questions was about Lithuanians' respect for material goods and included questions about such traits as: lazy/ hardworking, helpless/ enterprising, prodigal/ economical, poor/ rich, drinker/ abstinent (see Table 3). Are Lithuanians workaholics? Students think definitely yes! 22.5 % call them “very hardworking”, 47.5 % just “hardworking”. Only 2.5 % think Lithuanians are “lazy”.

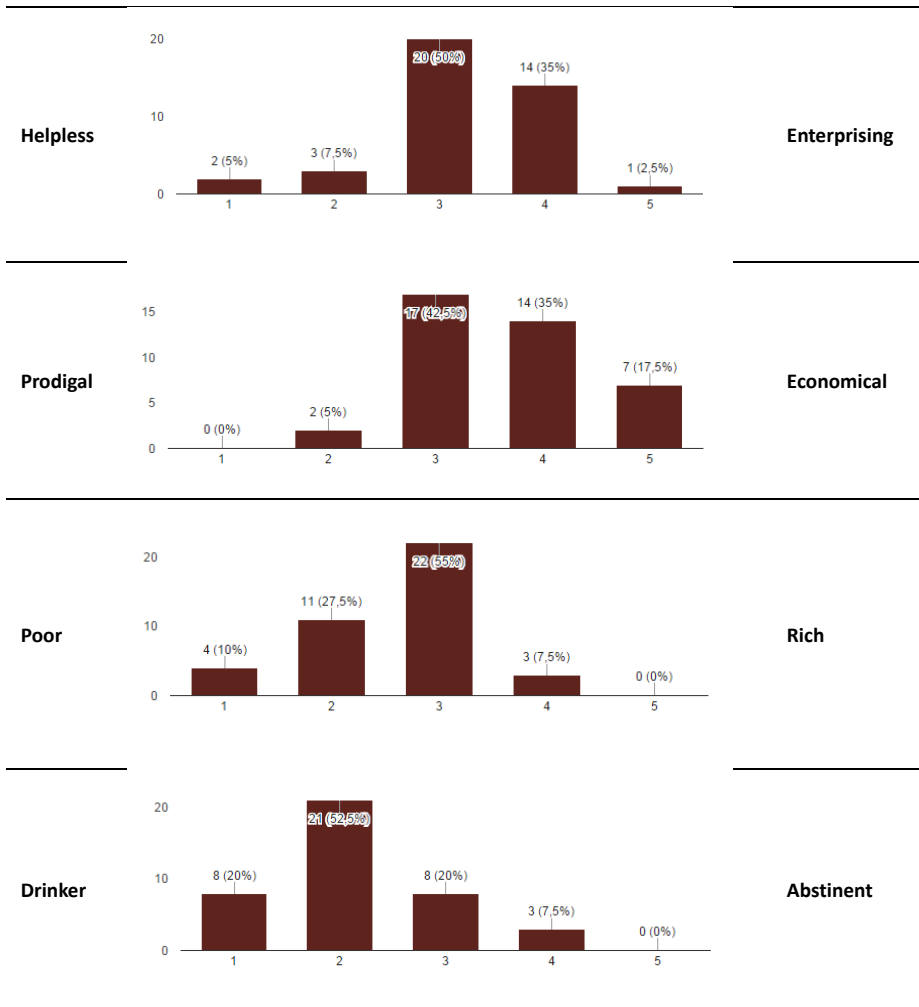
And this figure is very good in the sense that a hardworking nation will achieve more in its economy and education. Hard work will help Lithuanians find a worthy place among the other peoples of Europe. In the sources, we did not find an explicit mention of Lithuanians’ diligence, so we will not consider it as a stereotype of the nation. There is only information that Lithuanian products are known by other European nations (Poles): “Poles’ opinions about Lithuanian products are more restrained, but here, too, there are more positive than negative opinions” (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 13).

Lithuanians don’t need any help in their work; they are “enterprising” (35 %). Lithuanians like to save their funds: 17.5 % of respondents call them “very economical”, and 35 % “economical”. But despite this fact (economic people with savings), in the students’ opinion, Lithuanians are not rich. Moreover, 10 % think that Lithuanians are “very poor” and that 27.5 % of them are “poor”. Nobody chose the variant “very rich” and only 7.5 % said “rich”. This factor can be influenced by the increases in the prices of Lithuanian goods during the 2008 economic crisis.

One of the reasons (according to Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 51) was the fact that the Lithuanian market is smaller, which in times of crisis forces producers and traders to raise prices as production cannot be increased.

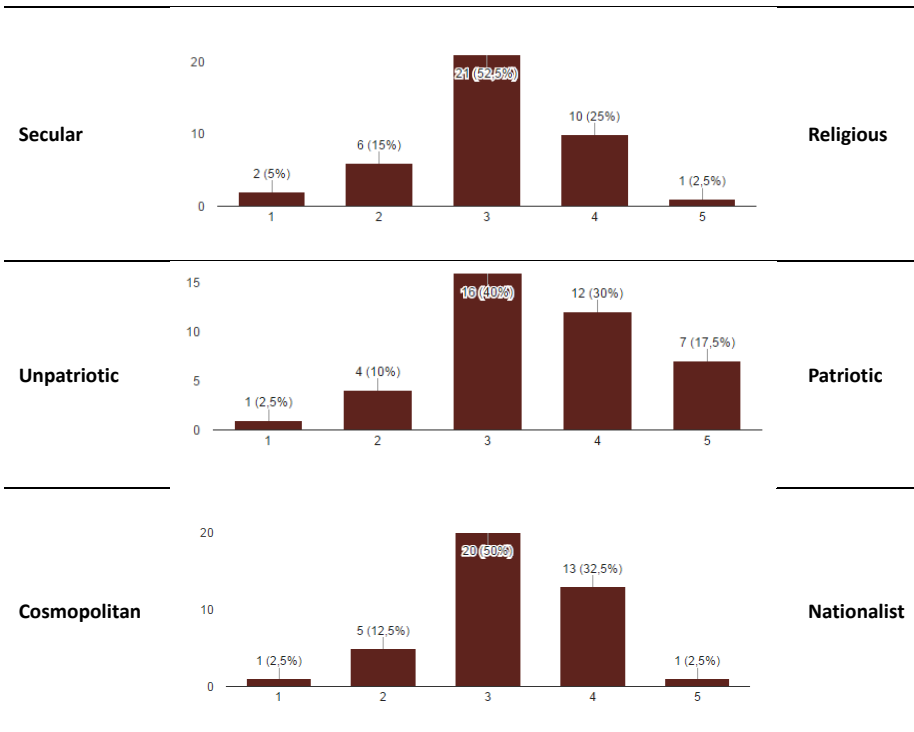
**Table 3.** Do Lithuanians respect material goods?





The fourth group of questions was about Lithuanians' attitudes towards their homeland and includes questions about such traits as: secular/ religious, unpatriotic/ patriotic, cosmopolitan/ nationalist (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** What are Lithuanians' attitudes to their homeland?

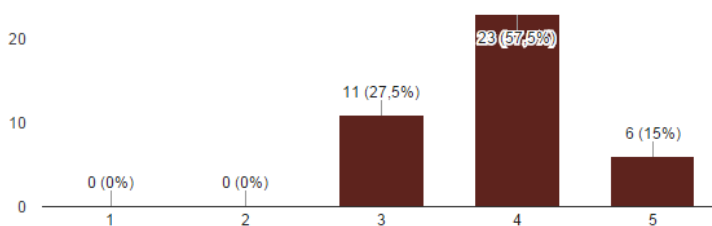


Lithuanians are neither religious nor secular. The responses are almost equally divided (with 52.5 % in the middle). Only 2.5 % think that their fellows are “unpatriotic”, while 30 % consider Lithuanians to be “patriotic” and 17.5 % as “very patriotic”. It is a good autostereotype about any nation. We think that, just as in the stereotype of a “brave Lithuanian”, this has its origin in Lithuanian history: being in the middle between Western and Slavic worlds, the representatives of this nation had to be patriots or defend it against invaders. Otherwise, it could disappear. Patriotism and courage are vital in such circumstances. Nevertheless, 40 % of students couldn’t say this directly and chose a neutral variant.



It is the same situation for nationalism. Only 2.5 % of students think that their fellows are “cosmopolitan”, with 32.5 % considering Lithuanians to be “nationalistic”. 50 % couldn't say it directly and chose a neutral variant.

The last question was about Lithuanian attitude towards their own appearance (dirty/clean). We can see the results in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** How Lithuanians refer to their own appearance

According to the students, Lithuanians try to be good looking and clean in their everyday lives. This fact is very important for creating a good first impression and a good personal image in general.

## Part 2: Stereotypes about Poles

The interaction between Lithuanians and Poles has a long history. These peoples were one state in the Middle Ages, common enemies and allies; fate has repeatedly allowed the strength of these relations to be tested. For example, in the older generations of both countries, with regard to their neighbours, there are still echoes of the dispute over Vilnius.

There is also a sizeable Polish community in Lithuania. As we wrote earlier, there is a survey of public opinion of the minorities of these two

peoples, and while the answers of the ethnic citizens are clear and unambiguous, in the case of national minorities the answers cannot be interpreted so clearly.

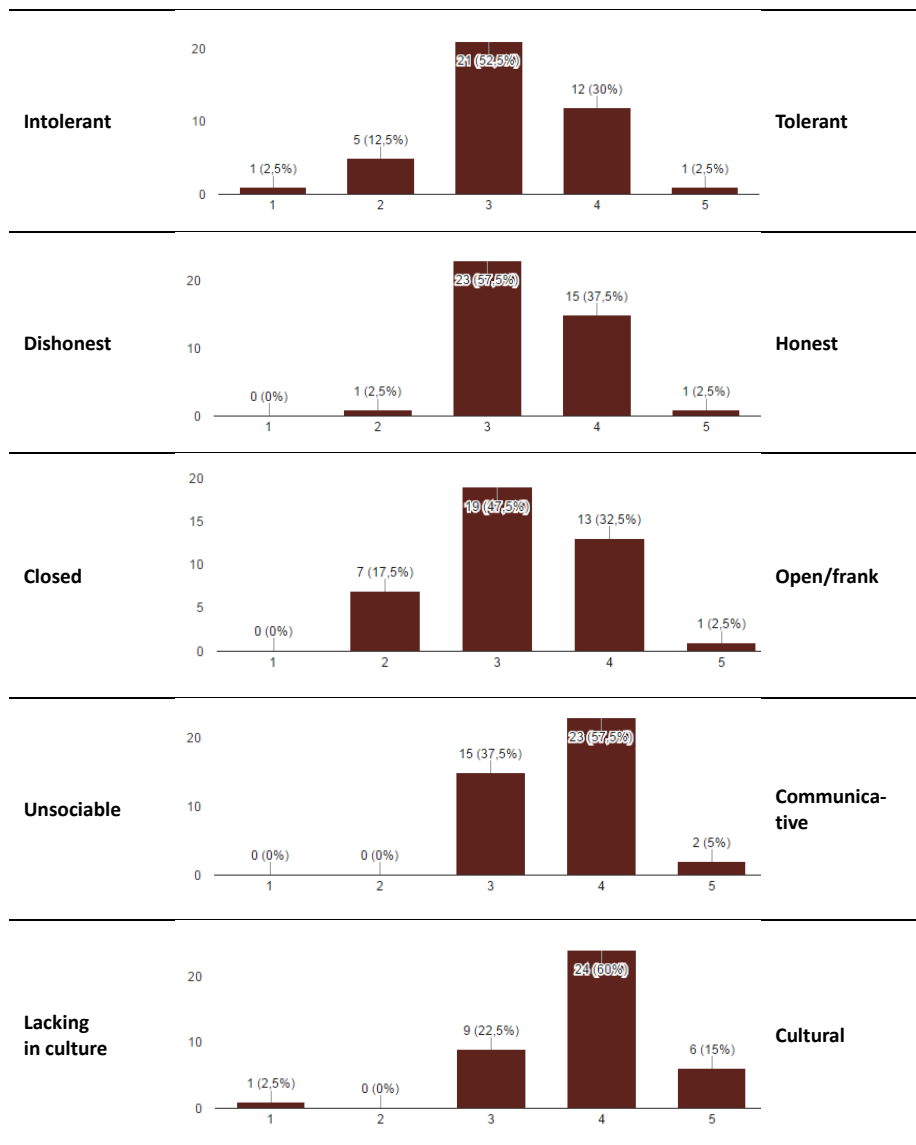
We decided to dedicate the second part of our research to students' attitudes towards Poles because, historically, these peoples are close and have a common history from when they were one state. By dividing the spontaneously mentioned answers given during public opinion polls, categorising into groups of associations related to the country and its inhabitants of economy, politics, history and culture, is most often used.

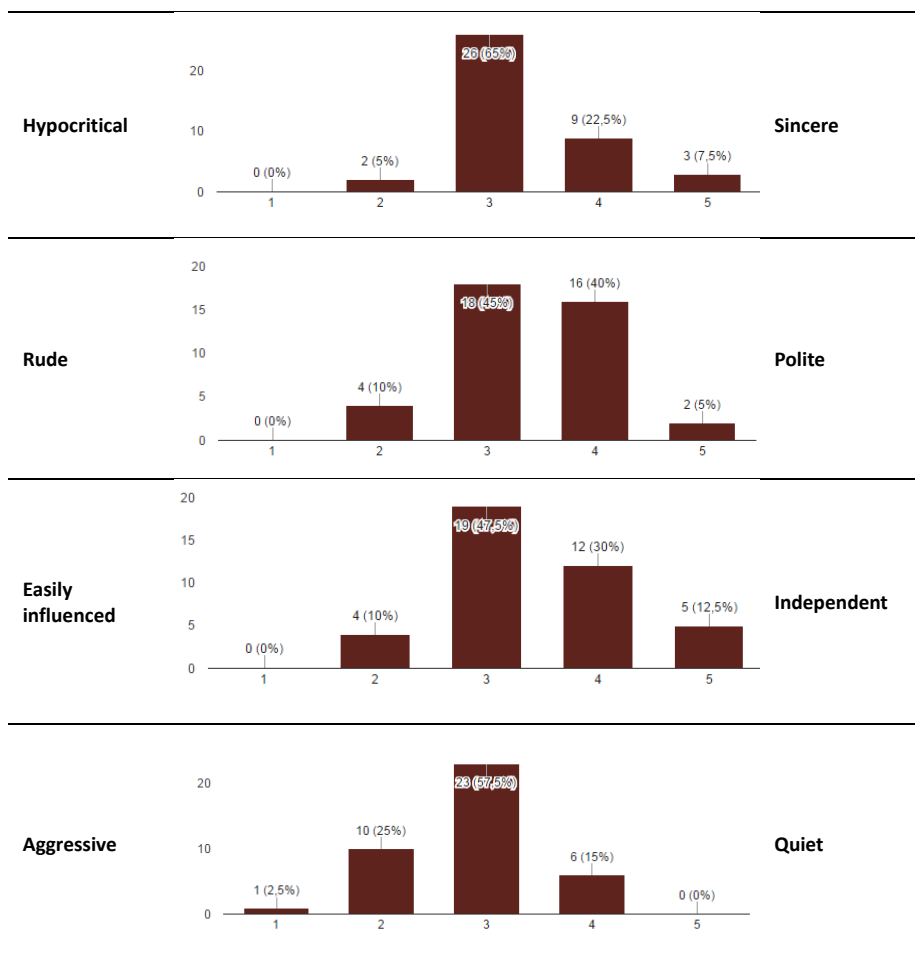
Lithuanians most often associate Poland as a neighbouring country. The largest category of "country and people" (68 %) also includes, but on a much smaller scale, terms related to tourism or Poles' characteristics. The second largest group of associations (17 %) is the "economy". Lithuanians mentioned shopping, cheaper products, or general good development. They definitely mention historical associations less often (5 %) – mainly those related to the common past – and political (8.5 %), which also includes the subject of minorities (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 40). Taking this into account, the second part of our research was around Lithuanian stereotypes about Poles.

We asked Lithuanian students to answer the question "How do Poles relate to other people?"

The group of questions includes the same ones as in the first part of our paper with such traits as: intolerant/ tolerant, dishonest/ honest, closed/ open or frank, unsociable/ communicative, lacking in culture/ cultural, hypocritical/ sincere, rude/ polite, easily influenced/ independent, aggressive/ quiet (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** How do Poles relate to other people (their attitude)?





For the first pair of characteristics, we can see that most students find Poles moderately tolerant (most answers are in the middle – 52.5 %). But in comparing intolerant/ tolerant, we see 15.2 % to 30 %, so Lithuanian students think Poles are not as tolerant as Lithuanians. It is hard to say what factor influenced this figure – the high evaluation of their own people or a negative experience of staying in Poland.

The next group of questions showed a positive attitude of respondents to representatives of the Polish nation. The students recognised Poles as

honest, open, and sincere people. 37.5 % of Lithuanian students believe that Poles are “honest” (and 2.5 % “very honest”). This is very similar to their marks for Lithuanians. Nobody thought that Poles are “very dishonest”, although 2.5 % call them “dishonest”. So, it is not surprising that in the next question about openness, students found Poles to be “open” (32.5 %) or “very open” (2.5 %) to the surrounding world. Here we need to remember that for Lithuanians, respondents chose 37.5 % to be “closed” and 15 % to be “very closed”. So, we can claim that the stereotypes about open and frank Poles and closed Lithuanians really exist.

Looking ahead (speaking about students' answers to a similar pair of characteristics – *Hypocritical* or *Sincere*), we will say that the students gave similar answers. Nobody thought that Poles are “hypocritical”. “Sincere” was selected by 22.5 % of respondents, much the same as in the case of Lithuanians. The majority of students in these questions gave an average (“3” mark) – “neither hypocritical nor sincere”.

More than half of students (57.5 %) find Poles to be “communicative” or “very communicative” (5 %). There were no answers about “unsociable” Polish behaviour. The Lithuanian students think the neighbouring nation representatives like to talk with each other and are really communicative. Do you remember that 15 % of the Lithuanians described themselves as “unsociable”?

At the same time, the majority of students found Poles “cultural” (60 %) or “very cultural” (15 %). This level is also higher than in the answers about Lithuanians.

Students think that Poles are “polite” (40 %) or “very polite” (5 %). Nearly half believe that the truth lies somewhere in the middle (45 % chose the variant “not rude or polite”).

We can see that students think about Poles as people who are difficult to manipulate: “independent mind” in 30 % and “very independent mind” in 12.5 %. Politeness and culture do not interfere with Poles standing on their own and defending a personal opinion. And, again, as

in previous questions, nearly half believe that the truth lies somewhere in the middle (47.5 %).

We find the same situation for the students' answers about the level of aggression ("aggressive"/"quiet"). The majority think the Poles are neither aggressive nor quiet.

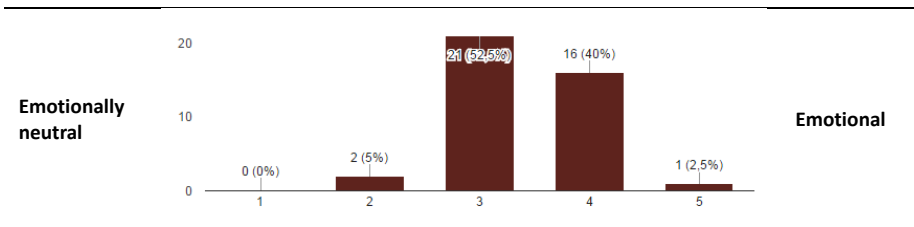
The second group of questions was about Polish character features and mental abilities. The results can be seen in Table 6.

As we can see from the students' responses, they find Poles more emotional than emotionally neutral: 2.5 % said "very emotional", 40 % "emotional". Only 5 % determined this as "emotionally neutral". The rest (52.5 %) said "hard to say" (somewhere in the middle).

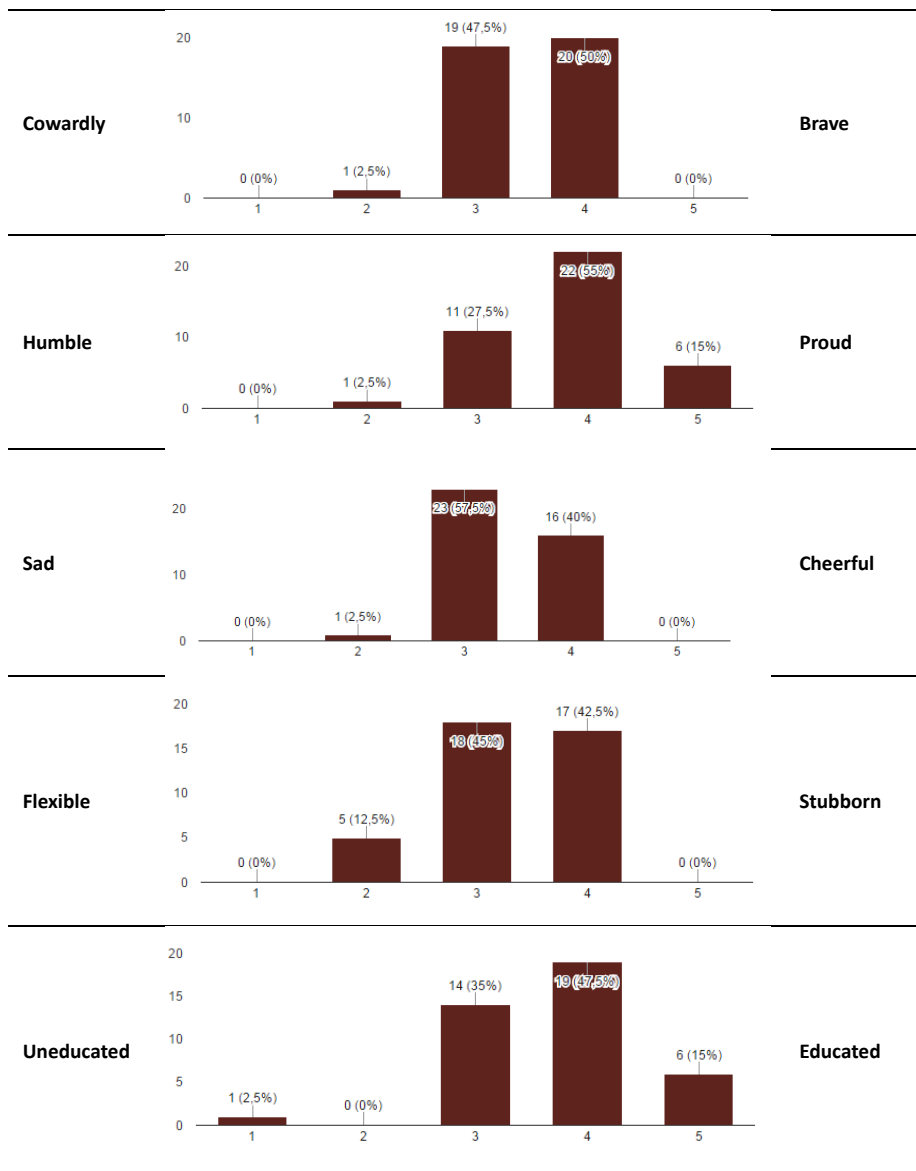
We think that Poles are more open and active psychologically, so most Lithuanian students reported them as very emotional people compared to their own restrained people.

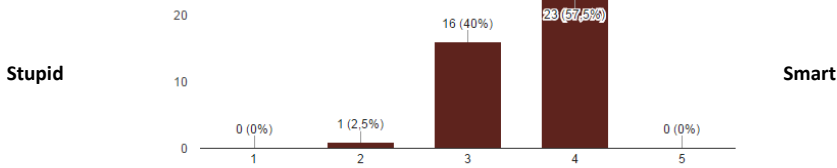
Students also clearly see the Polish nation as brave (as in the Lithuanian version, the answer "very cowardly" is not present at all, and even less (2.5 % compared to 7.5%) said "cowardly". Poles are "brave" according to half (50 %) of the respondents. Similarly, in our opinion, the common historical past, common heroes, and being part of a common state allowed Lithuanians to have an opinion about their Polish neighbours' courage.

**Table 6.** Poles' character and cognitive abilities



Portrait of Poles and Lithuanians through Students' Eyes





The respondents also think that Poles are more “proud” than Lithuanians (55 % to 32.5 %) and “very proud” (15 % for Poles to 7.5% for Lithuanians).

Perhaps these results are a confirmation of another well-known stereotype about Poles – that they are “Lords” (“sir”, “gentleman”), very proud, and respect themselves. Therefore, the answer that Polish people are proud is more likely to be the case in the students’ answers. It should be remembered that the students from Lithuania think of their people as a sad nation: nearly half claim that they are “sad” (47.5 %) or “very sad” (10 %). Only 2.5 % noted them as “cheerful”.

In answers about Poles, we have a very different and opposite situation: 40 % are “cheerful” and only 2.5 % “sad”. So, we see that Lithuanian students consider Poles not only as more emotional but also as more cheerful.

At the same time, Poles are not as stubborn as Lithuanians:

- 42.5 % (compared to 52.5 %) – as “stubborn”;
- 45 % – somewhere in the middle;
- 12.5 % (to 15 %) – as “flexible”.

With the importance of education and good knowledge, students marked Poles at the same level as Lithuanians:

- 15 % – as “very educated”;
- 47,5 % – as “educated”;
- 35 % (compared to 32.5 %) – somewhere in the middle;
- only 2.5% (to 5 %) – as “uneducated”.



In the information age, the lack of knowledge (and a good education) can cause a country's slow development, affecting the people in general. It is better to be a well-educated person than not. And it is good that, in students' opinions, their neighbouring Poles are well educated.

More than half of students (57.5 %) called Poles "smart".

We think that in addition to close economic (joint ventures, the single European market for goods and services) and tourism links, there are numerous scientific exchanges and programmes between these two countries, so it can quite easily be said that students may have attended scientific conferences in Poland. And to note that the level of attendance at such conferences is quite high.

Also, confirmation of Poles' reasonableness is that 66 % of Lithuanians are ready to choose a Pole as their boss. Also, 95 % of the Lithuanian minority representatives in Poland have no problems with working for a Polish manager (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 67).

The next group of questions was about Poles' respect for material goods. The results are represented in Table 7.

Poles like to work: 10 % of students call them "very hardworking", 52.5 % just "hardworking" With only 7.5 % thinking Poles are "lazy".

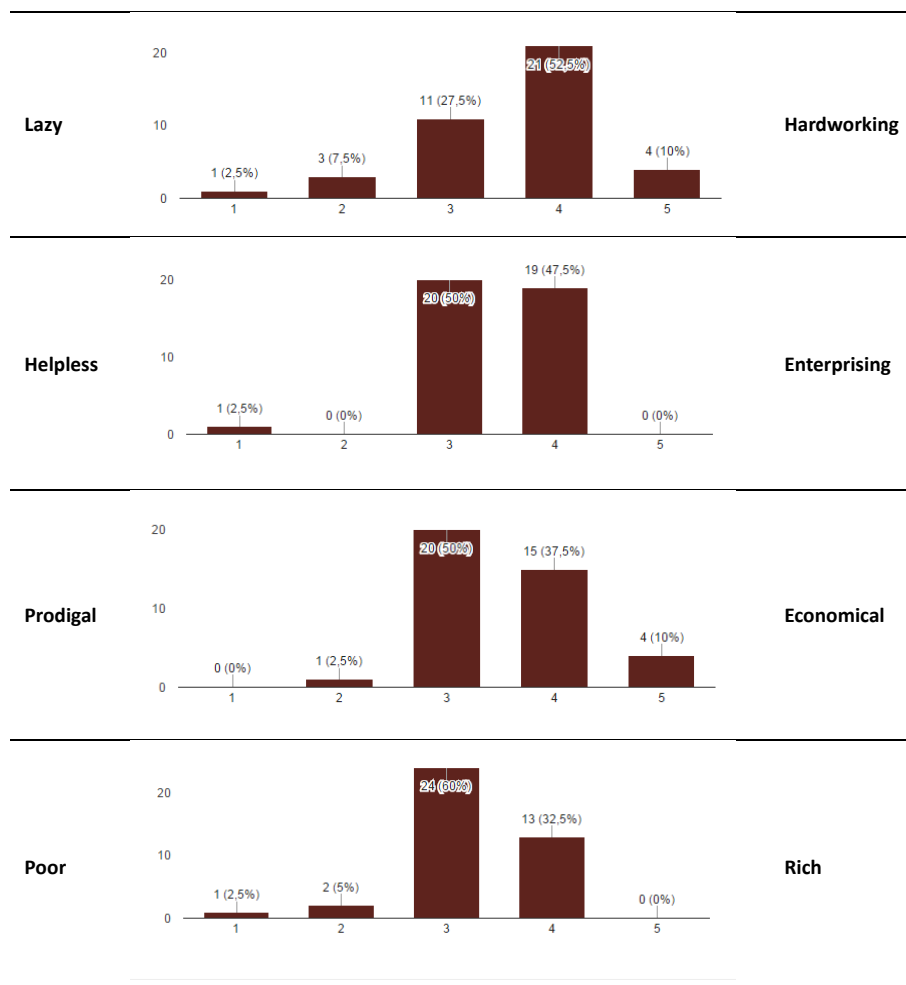
Here again, it is worth mentioning the "Polish boss", who 66 % of Lithuanians and 95 % of Lithuanian minorities in Poland are ready to tolerate. Similarly, Lithuanians are ready to have a Polish employee 82 % and 98 %, respectively (according to Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 67). We think these figures show that Polish people are really hardworking and smart; they are welcomed as both a boss and a worker by Lithuanian companies.

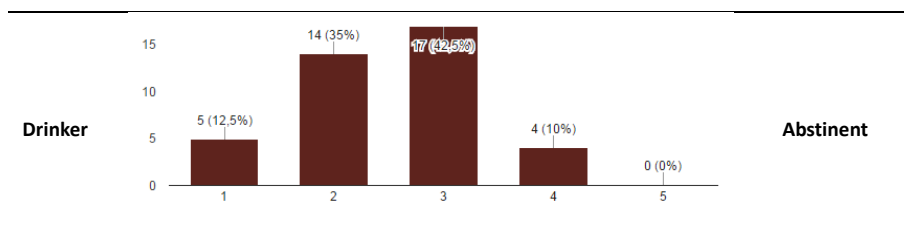
Poles are more "enterprising" than Lithuanians (47.5 % to 35 %). Only 2.5% of the students think that Poles are "helpless".

The fact that Polish goods are well-known and available in the Lithuanian market testifies to Polish entrepreneurship. Some Lithuanians used to cross the border specially to buy them. Most Lithuanians give Polish products positive ratings – more than two-thirds (68 %) find them

attractive. Socio-demographic characteristics do not make a difference in these assessments on either side of the border. The exception is that in Lithuania, Polish products are often found attractive by ladies who are currently at home (Łada, Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk 2013: 51).

**Table 7.** Do Poles respect material goods?





Poles like to save their money: 10 % of respondents call them “very economical” and 37.5 % “economical”. 32.5 % of Lithuanian students think Poles are “rich” (compared to 7.5% for Lithuanians). 2.5 % think that Poles are “very poor” (in comparison to 10 % for Lithuanians) and 5% as “poor” (27.5 % for Lithuanians). Perhaps this arises as a stereotype due to the echo of the 2008 crisis. The assessment of Polish products by Lithuanians may be influenced by the increase in the prices of Lithuanian goods during the crisis or after the introduction of the euro. Polish products have become cheaper compared to them. This led to more frequent Lithuanian supplies in Polish stores, which was also reported by the Lithuanian media. Maybe these facts caused the attitude to Poles to be one of a rich nation.

Students claim that Poles like alcohol:

- 12.5 % – as strong “drinkers” (but 20 % of Lithuanians);
- 35 % – as “drinkers” (52.5 %);
- 10 % – as “abstinent”.

We can see that students think their fellow Lithuanians have more trouble with drinking than Poles; nonetheless, it is the Polish nation that traditionally likes strong alcohol more than other nations.

The next group of questions was about Poles’ attitudes towards their homeland. Please see the results in Table 8.

Poles are “very religious” (45 %) or “religious” (37.5 %). Sometimes they are neither religious nor secular (15 % compared to 52.5 % Lithuanians).

As we can see, another well-known stereotype about Poles was confirmed in the Lithuanian respondents’ answers – “a Pole is a Catholic”.

Almost all the surveyed students emphasised the special attitude of Poles to the religion and religious traditions.

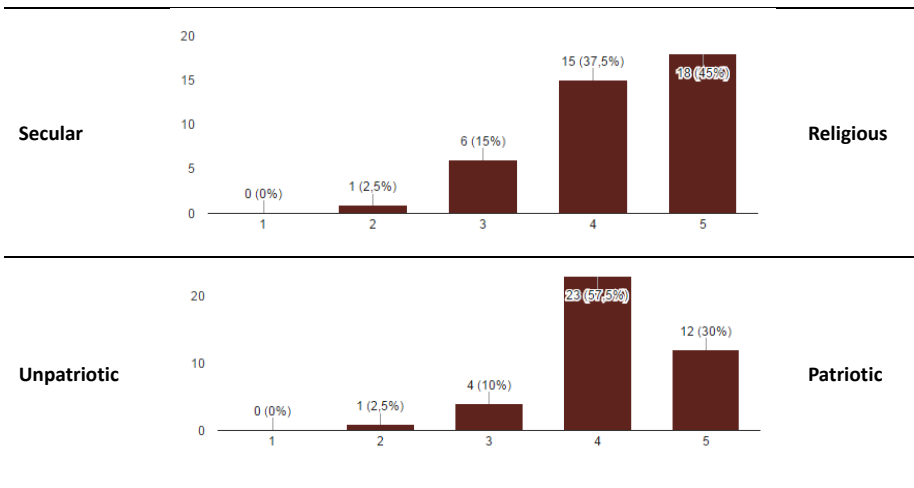
The students claim that Poles like their homeland and they are very patriotic:

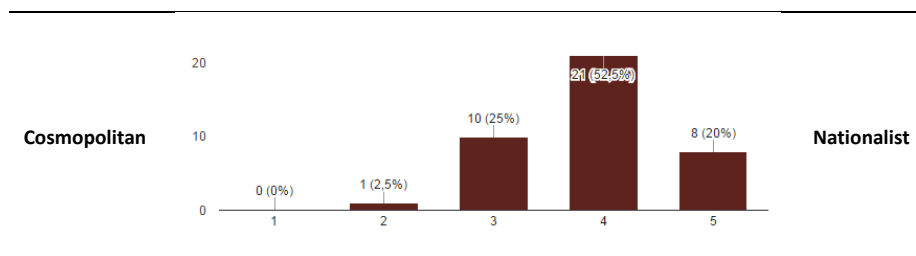
- 30 % are “very patriotic” (but only 20 % of Lithuanians for this indicator);
- 57,5 % are “patriotic” (in comparison with 30 % for Lithuanians);
- 10 % choose a neutral variant (in comparison with 40 %).

Similarly, as in the previous question (“a Pole is a Catholic”), the stereotype of “a Pole is a patriot” was confirmed.

The same situation occurs for nationalism. Only 2.5% of students think that Poles are “cosmopolitan”. 52.5 % consider them to be “nationalistic” (in comparison with 32.5 % for Lithuanians) or “very nationalistic” (20 %). 25 % can’t say, so they chose and proclaimed a neutral variant.

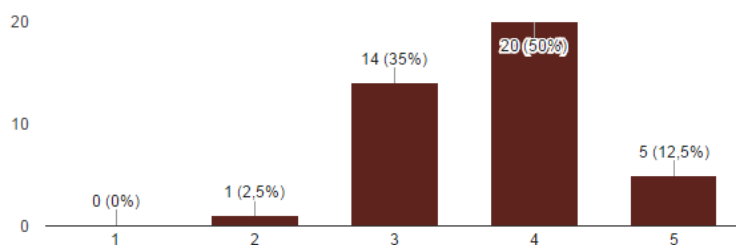
**Table 8.** What are Poles’ attitudes to their homeland?





The last question was about Poles and their own appearance (see the results in Figure 5).

According to the students' thoughts, Poles are good looking and clean in their everyday life. The results are almost the same as for the Lithuanians. We can only repeat that is very important in creating a good first impression for unknown persons and creating a good personal image in general.



**Figure 5.** How Poles refer to their own appearance

## Summary

In every nation, in every ethnic group, you meet many different character traits, good and bad. These are people's weaknesses and peculiarities, so it is difficult to talk about one of the dominant stereotypes. According to Budyta-Budzyńska, "ordinary people automatically and

involuntarily repeated opinions about others found in their environment. Participation in the study on the relation to other national groups forces them to self-reflection [because they]... need to take a position” (Budyta-Budzyńska 2010: 112).

Much affects the consolidation or modification of stereotypes, and the treatment of “others”: the mood, the situational context of mutual relations. For Lithuanians, who are studying or living or have a business with Poles, the perception is that nationality through the prism of a stereotype can be “corrupted”. In the first place, it is formed on basic sympathy or antipathy within a small group, their family experience.

Perhaps our survey about stereotypes of the particular ethnic group, for the first time in Lithuanian students’ lives, helped them stop for a moment and think about “accuracy and fairness ratings and the terms they use to evaluate and describe the group”. This helped them confront their experiences and impressions from contacts with Poles, with image, which operates in students’ environment.

Our research shows that Lithuanian students think that the Poles show more sympathy than they do (12.5 % compared with 5 %).

Speaking about **autostereotypes** we see that the factor of religion has no role in Lithuanian self-perception. Most of the students said members of their group are nationalists while being people who love to complain and are not being sufficiently rich in material terms.

### *Stereotypes about Lithuanians*

40 % of Lithuanian students believe that their nation is “honest” (and 7.5% that it is “very honest”). Only 15 % think that they can hide their views and tell lies. But honesty does not mean trust and openness. Students found doubts about Lithuanians’ openness to the surrounding world: 37.5 % consider themselves to be “closed” and 15 % as “very closed” people. Nearly half of the students (42.5 %) find Lithuanians to

be “communicative”, and believe they are “cultural”. Almost no one admitted to a lack of culture, or hypocritical. “Sincere” was selected by 22.5 % of respondents.

Such indicators as “sincerity”, “politeness”, “independence” or “level of aggression” have neutral meanings, so we cannot make any correct conclusions based on the median meaning.

As we can see from the students' responses, they find Lithuanians more “emotional” than “emotionally neutral”. Students also clearly perceive their nation as “brave” (the answer “very cowardly” is not present at all, and only 7.5 % said “cowardly”) and also think that Lithuanians are “proud” (32.5 %).

The students from Lithuania think of their people as a sad nation: nearly half claim that they are “sad” (47.5 %) or “very sad” (10 %). Only 2.5% noted them as “cheerful”. At the same time, Lithuanians are stubborn and well educated (more 47.5 % as “educated” and 15 % as “very educated”) and smart.

Are Lithuanians workaholics? Students think definitely yes! 22.5 % of students call Lithuanians “very hardworking”, 47.5 % said just “hardworking”. Moreover, they are “enterprising” (35 %) and have savings (17.5 % of respondents call them “very economical” and 35 % “economical”). But despite this fact, they are not rich (10 % said “very poor”, 27.5 % “poor”, with only 7.5 % saying “rich”) and have problems with alcohol.

Speaking about Lithuanians' attitudes towards their homeland, we discovered that they are neither religious nor secular but are patriots and nationalists. Regarding their own appearance, Lithuanians try to keep fit and be good looking (clean).

### *Stereotypes about Poles*

Lithuanian students think Poles are not as tolerant as Lithuanians. Students admit that Poles are more honest (in comparison with their an-

swers to Lithuanians' ones) and not so closed as their fellow Lithuanians: Lithuanians found Poles "open" (32.5 %), "very open" (2.5 %), "communicative" (57.5 %), "cultural" (60 %) or "very cultural" (15 %) and "polite" (40 %). Students think about Poles as people who are difficult to manipulate, and are neither aggressive nor quiet.

Speaking about Poles' character and cognitive abilities, students noticed that Poles are more emotional than emotionally neutral: 2.5 % – "very emotional", 40 % – "emotional". They are "brave" (50 %), "proud" (55 % "proud" and 15 % "very proud"), and "cheerful" (40 %). In the students' eyes, we see that in comparison to the Lithuanian, Poles are a more "happy nation".

At the same time, they are "stubborn" (42.5 %) but "educated" (15 % "very educated" and 47.5 % as "educated") and "smart" (57.5 %). The level of Poles' education was also higher than for Lithuanians.

Poles like to work (52.5 % "hardworking"), are more prosperous, and enterprising (47.5 %) than Lithuanians. Students think Lithuanians have more trouble with drinking than Poles; nevertheless, it is the Polish nation that traditionally likes alcohol.

We confirm the stereotype that Poles are "very religious" (45 %) or just "religious" (37.5 %). Lithuanians, according to this issue, are neither religious nor secular.

We also confirm the stereotype that Poles are "very patriotic" (30 %) or just "patriotic" (57.5 %) to a much bigger degree than Lithuanians (20 % and 30 %, respectively). It is the same situation in the sphere of nationalism – Poles are more "nationalist" than Lithuanians (52.5 % compared to 32.5 %).

According to the students, Poles (like Lithuanians) are good looking, clean in their everyday life.



## The Final Notes

To finish our survey, we can claim that the results were in some way predictable: we confirm most of the stereotypes but also found new ones.

Speaking about classical stereotypes about Lithuanians such as “a gloomy nation”, or a “closed nation”, we can say that it could be an echo of the stereotypes about northern nations in general. It is used to be assumed that they are more closed than southern ones: hard living conditions, the earlier darkness most of the year, and cold weather causing such a type of national character. It is not surprising that among the young generation, we found new (auto)stereotypes like: “Brave Lithuanian”, “Lithuanian is a patriot”. There is also a new (and unexpected) idea which is not a stereotype in the full sense, as we did not find a suitable mention about it in the literature, but the students observed new characteristics of “Lithuanian pride”.

Confirming Polish classical stereotypes (like “a Pole is a Catholic” or “a Pole is a patriot”), we found a positive attitude of the Lithuanian respondents to representatives of the Polish nation. The students recognised Poles as well educated and enterprising. And as personal characteristics, Poles are honest, open, and sincere people.

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