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Integration and Identity – The Strategies of Young Europeans – Interpretative Tracks and Motifs

ABSTRACT

In the article, the question is raised whether human knowledge, abilities, emotions and socialization are capable of shaping social structures according to the idea of multiculturalism (which faces a critical situation), introducing the humanistic quality to the principles of coherence and integration.

With my own research results in the background (diagnostic polling and individual interviews), integration and identity are presented as strategies determined by aims, subjects (players) and profits (rewards). What has been indicated is the idea worth promoting in the field of pedagogy, in educational institutions and in whole societies, i.e., shaping the culture which re-builds the real power of group life. The postulate to shape such culture in multicultural communities is very hard to implement, but not impossible. The presented results of the studies conducted on a specific group of young Europeans – the participants of a short-term international voluntary workcamp – indicate and illustrate the development of cognitive functions, motivation and interactive activity of kindness-based character.

The interpretative tracks and motifs for the obtained results are sought in K. Illeris's holistic concept of learning and in other theories of various origin, not much known in the field of pedagogy: H. Simon's concept of bounded rationality and R. Aumann's theory of repeated games (otherwise called the theory of "conflict and cooperation" or "interactive decisions"). Applying two different approaches into the discussed issues – the theoretical and empirical, detailed and partially generalized approach – is cognitively interesting and useful in the practical dimension. This might help both to specify the stimuli which cause the

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evolution of human attitudes and strategies of acting and to design and organize education.

Keywords:

multiculturalism, culture, education, integration, identity, learning, game

INTRODUCTION

The process of integration of modern culturally diverse societies is neither easy nor widely accepted. Multiculturalism has ceased to be viewed as a chance for contemporary societies and, with growing frequency, it poses a vision of disintegration of cultural unity, regarded as the desired way in which particular states should function. Multiculturalism is a common phenomenon – unfortunately, it remains a wasted chance for joint creating goods of spiritual and material culture, multisided collaboration, or a condition for improving the living standards of people of various nationalities, races, religions, and cultures.

What ensures the integration of contemporary culturally diverse societies is the redevelopment of human awareness, especially of youth, whose attitude will determine the shape of the future. Youth are the most important pioneers of building the new world. In their activities, Karl Mannheim (1966, pp. 23–48) could see a chance for building a real power of group life anew.

With no doubt, it is education which plays the key role in the processes aimed at the integration and shaping of contemporary generations. It can offer equal chances for learning the life in community for representatives of all cultures, regardless of their nationality, religion, sex, disability and all individual qualities. In this way, they gain more cultural significance. Education can enhance changes in eliminating the phenomena of discrimination in social relations. It is a constituent of the concept of learning society, society of justice and progress – supported by wealth and cultural diversity (Wain, 1987), of emancipating subjects (Obuchowski, 1993), and changes in the sphere of work and production (Edwards, 1993).

METHODOLOGY OF THE OWN STUDIES

Pedagogy has the privilege of integrating the knowledge coming from different disciplines to organize educational practice effectively. The studies on the border of pedagogy and its supporting disciplines are of special cognitive and practical value (Palka, 2006). This is present here as references to psychology, sociology, as well as economy or management.

The interpretative tracks and motifs for the obtained results are sought in Knud Illeris’s holistic concept of learning and in other theories of various origin, not widely known in the field of pedagogy: Herbert Simon’s concept of bounded rationality and Robert Aumann’s theory of repeated games (otherwise called the theory of “conflict and cooperation” or “interactive decisions”), which uses Simon’s concept of bounded rationality. It is worth highlighting here that only some selected issues of these theories will constitute the basis for my research, which might result in some simplifications. The conceptual elements borrowed from these concepts help to show integration and identity as a set of strategies determined by aims, subjects (players), and profits (rewards).

The suggested (in this study) description and systematization of the indicators of integration and identity are similar to a particular type of model – the notional model (Sztompka, 1971, pp. 37–38). On one hand, it is a certain notional construct (system) referring to the real system (reality), but on the other – it is a set of theoretical (hidden or explicit) assumptions – the assumptions which simplify or idealize the reality. The fundamental value of the suggested model is presenting the relation between its particular elements either from the perspective of easy observation or of the role these elements play in managing one’s learning, life, and functioning.

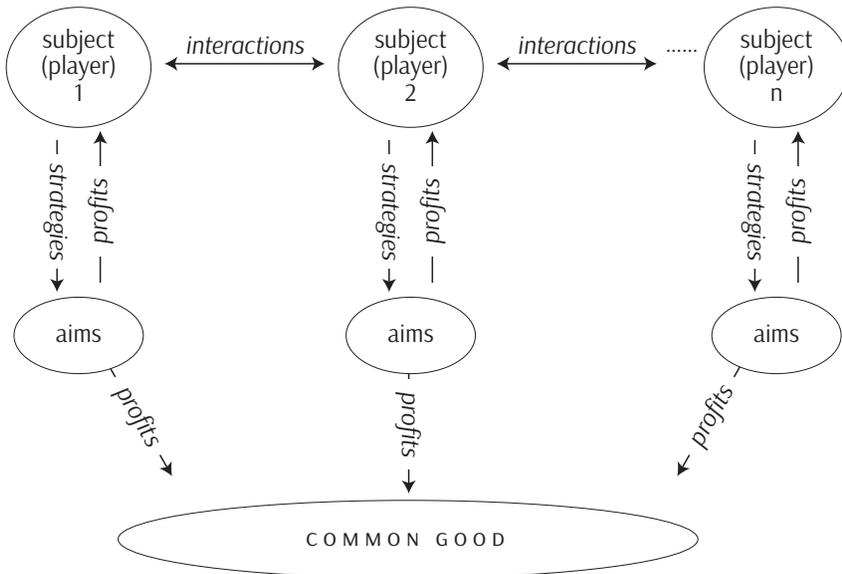


Diagram. Young Europeans in the process of learning the group life

Source: own elaboration.

In the applied research perspective, the categories of: learning, individuality, and game appear in the context of the question whether human knowledge, abilities, emotions and socialization are capable of shaping social structures according to the idea of multiculturalism (in a critical situation for this idea), introducing the humanistic quality to the principles of coherence and integration.

The presented research results concern a particular group of young Europeans – the participants of international short-term voluntary workcamp². Voluntary service has the nature of a specific social service, for volunteers – it constitutes a broad platform for developing their passions and interests, for collecting new experiences, including professional training (Szczurek-Boruta, 2016, pp. 19–33). The respondents were young adults. For sampling, the method of non-random selection was used: purposeful sampling (volunteers, Europeans, young adults) and snowball sampling (reaching a small group of respondents and then, through their mediation, reaching next individuals who they know in order to conduct interviews) (Babbie, 2010, p. 212). The studies comprised 259 people. The majority were women (82%). There were representatives of various European countries: Belgium (23), France (24), Estonia (10), Spain (25), the Netherlands (12), Ireland (13), Germany (23), Norway (12), Poland (23), Czech Republic (22), Serbia (21), Ukraine (22), Great Britain (16), and Italy (13).

The research aim and its object, as well as the determinants of this activity were decisive for the application of quantitative-qualitative studies. The triangulation approach was used – the strategy often applied in social sciences, which consists in combining various, complementary research methods, techniques, empirical materials and theoretical perspectives in one piece of research (Konecki, 2000). The studies were carried out in 2016 online, via international organizations and associations dealing with workcamps or directly by Polish participants of workcamps. Diagnostic polling and in-depth individual interviews were applied (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). The empirical material was collected with the help of an authorial tool – a questionnaire. It consisted of statements which enabled to evaluate the development of cognitive functions, motivation and interactive activeness of kindness-based nature of young Europeans. The statements also allowed for characterizing the identity and integration as the strategies of interactive decisions taken in daily life situations. The analysis of the collected quantitative data was carried out using the method of Pearson's correlation coefficient to specify the codependence between the

² International voluntary service is associated with the activity of Service Civil International (SCI), an organization founded in 1920. SCI has 45 branches worldwide and over 80 partner organizations. See: *SCI Annual Report 2013*, Antwerp 2014, retrieved from: http://issuu.com/sciint/docs/annual_report_final_2013 (accessed: August 4, 2017).

examined variables of statistical description; the qualitative data were analysed in the method of data reduction – content and theoretical encoding (Rubacha, 2008, p. 270). The majority (78%) in the examined group were volunteers, taking part in several programmes in different countries: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, India, Jordan, Kenya, Lithuania, Nepal, Germany, Nigeria, Palestine, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, the USA, Great Britain, and Italy.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Educational activities are aimed at better future and shaping the society which will ensure the best conditions for human life and development. Modern life takes place in culturally diversified, multicultural environments. This involves facing such global phenomena as: terrorism, political destabilization in numerous regions, growing social differences, religious and intercultural conflicts, increasing brutality of social or political life, cyber-violence, etc. The destructive force of these phenomena is reflected not only in the direct results of the undertaken actions, but also in more and more antagonized social discourses occurring in various areas of social life. An idea which is worth promoting within pedagogy, in educational institutions and in whole societies, is shaping the culture which reconstructs the real power of group life. What seems inspiring in this context is the standpoint of Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1966, pp. 35–36). Apart from showing the historical development of culture, the significance of work and collaboration, the relation between communication by language and the development of life, he indicates the rise of the subject's cognitive functions, the development of motivations created through culture and emotional life (based on kind-hearted emotions), the application of knowledge in various fields of practice. The postulate of shaping such culture in multicultural communities is extremely difficult to implement, but not impossible. The results will be presented now of the studies among young Europeans, who can become a model for presenting the development of cognitive functions, motives and interactive activity of kindness-based character.

The overview of the obtained results shows that the respondents acquire knowledge in various circumstances and from various sources: travelling 53.7%, personal contacts 48.8%, participation in international projects 46.3%, own observation 43.9%, and joint activity 39.0%. The most frequent motives for young Europeans' learning in social interactions are: curiosity 39.0%; evaluation, comparing the own culture with another 30.0%; learning how to be oneself 34.1%; willingness to cross the boundaries of the own culture 17.1%. The full bloom of

respondents' cognitive functions, emotions and motivations takes place owing to learning, which is a fundamental mechanism of life. According to K. Illeris's holistic concept of learning (2002), learning integrates within itself the inner processes of knowledge acquisition (cognition, emotions) and social interactions. The research results have shown that learning is diversified in the contents and essence. It involves natural learning in direct contacts, collecting experiences passed down by others, verbal transmission of knowledge, as well as self-education. What is important for young Europeans' acquisition of knowledge is participation in international projects. The data provided by The Gallup Organization confirm the fact that the mobility of students in international exchanges is steadily increasing (the average in the European Union is 40%³).

In acquiring and broadening knowledge, "going beyond" the primary socializing experiences (family, friends, acquaintances from the residence place) and entering a new environment (university community, community of a big town, group of Erasmus students, workcamp community) necessitate both bigger openness to cultural diversity and learning how to function in a group or team. The results of the conducted studies reveal some negligence on the part of formal education concerning the transmission of knowledge and providing opportunities for collecting new experiences in contacts with the representatives of different cultures. The share of school education in acquiring knowledge and experience is relatively smaller. 26.8% of respondents indicate school as a source of knowledge, 26.8% of respondents notice the contribution of non-school education to the process of learning, 22% appreciate the share of media. As the research results have revealed, the drawbacks of formal education are the following: the lack of sufficient knowledge of other cultures and their representatives, the lack of habits and skills of solving conflicts and collaboration, or the lack of educational opportunities of multicultural experiencing of the social reality. These issue should become a subject of further research aimed at analysing relations between these matters.

The knowledge of the world, both the scientific and colloquial, is constructed in processes of social interactions, in communication activities, but the world itself is also a construct, a social and human creation, which is learned, explored, inhabited and transformed by the human being.⁴

³ Research results provided by The Gallup Organization. Retrieved from: <http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx> (accessed: August 5, 2017).

⁴ This assumption is a manifestation of a radical form of constructivism and its assumption that not only knowledge is constructed but also social (cultural) reality. Ernst von Glasersfeld's radical constructivism is often treated as a part of the epistemological variety of constructivism, which exists apart from social and cognitive constructivism.

People constantly interact with others, they acquire information from the environment and are exposed to the influence of other people. More than ever before, modern interaction processes are more complex, multidimensional, complicated, full of tension and contradiction. These processes comprise direct interpersonal interactions, interactions between the individual and material, social, media elements, the images of the world, and socializing influences.

Subjects apply the acquired knowledge in various fields of practice. This might result in the quality of contacts among workcamp participants. The majority of respondents evaluate the contacts positively – 87.8%, for 43.9% they are neutral, and for 19.5% – negative. The experiences of young Europeans in the conditions of workcamp daily life are ordered by the principle of significance (present in the concept of Berger & Luckmann, 1966), indicated by direct interests or, on other occasions, by the general situation in a group, team or community.

As the research results show, long-lasting mutual cultural contacts in the multicultural social space of workcamps result in both conflicts and integration in many different platforms: sharing a living place 61.0%, collaborative work 58.5%, spending leisure time together 46.3%, learning 29.3%. Young Europeans learn to act together motivated by stimuli and tasks. What becomes an object of special attention in the conducted discussion is game. In compliance with the theory of repeated games (Aumann, 1989), the reality might be treated as a set of many different games taking place simultaneously. The subject (individual) treats the reality as a game space. It is assumed here that the notion of game has its foundations in the sociocultural activities of contemporary young people, it is a metaphor of the subject's attitude to the surrounding reality. Particular subjects (players) undertake games to optimize profits (defending their own standpoint, making decisions, tightening the bonds, etc.). In the course of the game, the axiological foundations of human behaviours are redefined. The need and, at the same time, obligation to fulfil common tasks in workcamp conditions leads to integration, but also to emerging unwillingness. In these conditions, the individual, social and cultural identity is shaped.

The complexity of young Europeans' construction of their self-image is reflected in the order in which the set of self-definitions has been organized according to a subjective hierarchy. The content analysis of young Europeans' self-reflections allows for distinguishing numerous categories in identifications referring to the notion of "I/Me". These notions are of physical character (age, sex, appearance) or individualistic one (stressing one's own individuality); they can indicate the feeling of bonds with the nation, a particular place, Europe, or can point to symbolic specifications of roles – in family, peer group, etc. (Szczyrek-Boruta, in print).

In their self-image, the young also indicate other categories of self-definition, self-creation in the interaction with the outer group, social or cultural world, in particular interactions with others. The respondents declare that they are ready to learn the culture of the “other” – 48.8%; ready to go beyond the limits of their own culture – 46.3%; ready to act together – 39.0%; open, ready to learn from “others”, ready to abandon stereotypes (34.1% in each category). They also point to some intramental qualities (kindness-based features promoted in T. Kotarbiński’s concept of culture): helpfulness 43.9%, kindness 36.6%, openness 34.1%, empathy 24.4%.

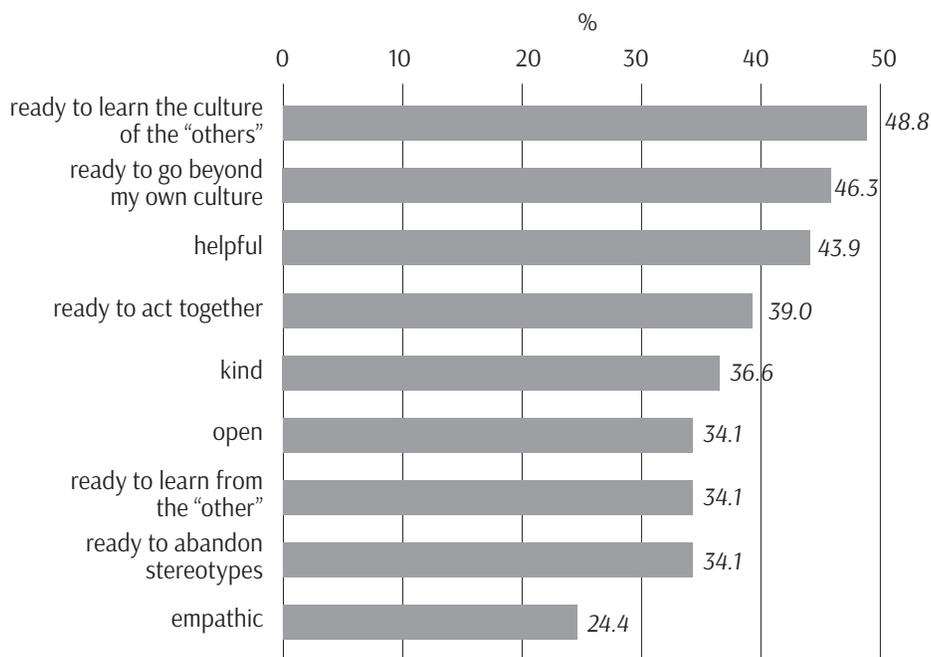


Figure. Identity of young Europeans – the categories indicated by respondents in the answer to the question “Who am I” – I am...”

Source: own elaboration.

In the socially constructed space dominated by individualistic tendencies, the examined young Europeans make choices within the identifications and narrations (constituting these identifications) which are a synthesis of the dialectical relation between what is personal and what is social in their individual identities. What seems an impulse for self-identification of social subjects and a valuable source of information about them is interactive activity. Identity as a cognitive practice

is crystallizing and transforming unceasingly in the course of acting. It can be understood only in the context of the culture created by humanity.

The results of my own studies point to the relations between integration and the aims ($r=0.319$ for $p<0.05$), subjects (players) ($r=0.371$, $p<0.05$), profits (rewards) ($r=0.223$, $p<0.05$) – clear dependence,⁵ as well as the relations between identity and the aims ($r=0.335$, $p<0.05$), subjects (players) ($r=0.467$, $p<0.05$), profits (rewards) ($r=0.376$, $p<0.05$) – clear dependence. The results confirm the thesis that integration and identity are strategies determined by aims, subjects (players) and profits (rewards). In daily situations, a game (many different games) takes place and its particular participants – young Europeans – solve conflicts, undertake collaboration and shape their identity in order to optimize their profits.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted discussion has been aimed at showing integration and identity as a strategy determined by aims, subjects (players) and profits (rewards). Applying different approaches to the discussed issues – the theoretical and empirical, detailed and partially generalized – is cognitively interesting and useful in the practical dimension.

The obtained detailed research results, references to the theoretical assumptions and some attempts at interpreting the results justify the statement that shaping the culture which reconstructs the real power of group life is an idea worth promoting in pedagogy, in educational institutions and in whole societies. This postulate in multicultural communities seems very difficult to fulfil, but feasible.

The potentialities of young Europeans are situated at the base of such culture. The culture of workcamp has the group-forming and community character. Through community activities, social actors co-create social structures, providing them with the humanistic quality of the principles of unity and integration. The analysis of the collected empirical material allows for concluding that the culture which reconstructs the real power of the group is conceptualized by: the resources of knowledge concerning the own and other cultures to which individuals reach and from which they draw interpretations; the norms and orders regulating the belonging to social groups and ensuring solidarity; identity (the competences which make an individual capable of acting).

⁵ The interpretation of the value of r correlation coefficients according to J.P. Guilford: 0.20–0.40 low correlation, clear dependence (Guilford, 1960, p. 171).

The results of the studies conducted among a particular group of young Europeans, the participants of international short-term voluntary service, point to the development of cognitive functions, motivation and interactive activity of kindness-based nature. In their acting, the young are guided by limited rationality. As economic subjects they aim at maximizing many goals which should be compliant. As they have no sufficient knowledge and calculation capacity, they do not follow the principle of optimization (making the best choice out of the possible) but the principle of satisfaction – they make a sufficiently good choice, which fulfils various requirements and (often contradicting) aims (Simon, 1990, pp. 1–19). In the case of young Europeans, cognitive operations and learning to take decisions are limited not only by values and culture, but also by unconscious reactions, skills and habits.

The theory of repeated games (also called the theory of “conflict and cooperation” or “interactive decisions”) is a cognitively interesting tool for describing phenomena which are neither fully predictable nor understandable. Such phenomena are dealt with in pedagogy. The theory might help to answer the question why some individuals, groups, communities are successful in collaboration but other engage in conflict. It may also be useful in specification of the stimuli enhancing the evolution of human attitudes and strategies of acting, as well as in designing and organizing education, which can be viewed upon as a dialectical game between cognition, experience and acting.

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