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Interethnic awareness as an important creator of cross-border connections and integration processes

Vesna Gomezel Mikolič

Science and Research Centre of the Republic of Slovenia - Koper,
Garibaldijeva 18, 6000 Koper - Capodistria, Slovenia

Abstract

Modern European integration processes and world globalization tendencies present a challenge to national communities also from the aspect of ethnic identity. If only an identification of individuals with one's own nation has been sufficient for the existence of a nation in a nation state, a higher level of identification will become more important in new conditions, such as a consciously formed attitude to one's own nation and national identity and an attitude to members of other national communities is reflected. National consciousness, which does not signify a romantic national zeal characteristic of a conflict situations, can be a solid foundation on which a national community will strive to make use of modern integrational processes as an opportunity to strengthen its own national self-confidence and equal cooperation with other ethnic/national communities. Contrary to this, it will start to take over other values and with this the identity of other national communities or super-national identity, which will be formed independently from it. Ethnic identity, i.e., national identity and national consciousness, is therefore indispensable for interethnic awareness which, in addition to the views to one's own culture, consists also of the views of co-existing cultures. Today's European contact areas can provide good evidence of the mutual influences of interethnic awareness and interethnic relations.

Keywords: political geography, ethnicity, nationality, interethnic awareness, territorial identity, Slovenia

Introduction

Contemporary processes in Europe and the world are interesting in regard to the development of ethnic identity. From this aspect it is also interesting to observe the frontier social communities. The issue of ethnic identity is mostly approached in an interdisciplinary way, which is also confirmed by the presence of experts from various fields at this geographical congress. At this point the geographical, social and anthropological aspects encounter a psychological dimension, that is an individual bringing one's own personal characteristic features and values comes to the fore. From the sociolinguistic point of view it is important first to discuss the problem of defining ethnic identity, when researching a connection between ethnic identity and language-communicative competence.

Defining ethnic identity

Ethnic identity is a distinctively multidimensional phenomenon, which is supported by many similar notions. Of course, there are different language options. In Slovenia these are the ethnic/national identity, a sense of belonging, the nationality, the national consciousness, the loyalty to an ethnic community and patriotism. *Ethnic identity in the wider context* consists of two levels: ethnic identity or a sense of belonging at a basic level and national consciousness on higher level. *Ethnic identity in a narrower sense* (ethnic/national identity) I consider as a feature of an individual who belongs to an ethnic/national community. This feature can be attributed to one by oneself or by others; ethnic identity exists independently of an individual's conscious decision. Therefore, ethnic identity is shown as a condition, where there is a passive relation between an individual, the carrier of identity and a community to which he belongs. *National consciousness*, which is on a higher level than ethnic identity, is shown as an active relation of an individual – in contrast to passive – to one's own national identity and nation to which one belongs. This is also multi-layered and we can consider the following as components of the national consciousness:

- Cognitive (knowledge, thoughts, ideas, judgements and evaluations of one's own national identity, of characteristics of a nation and its members and of national attributes),

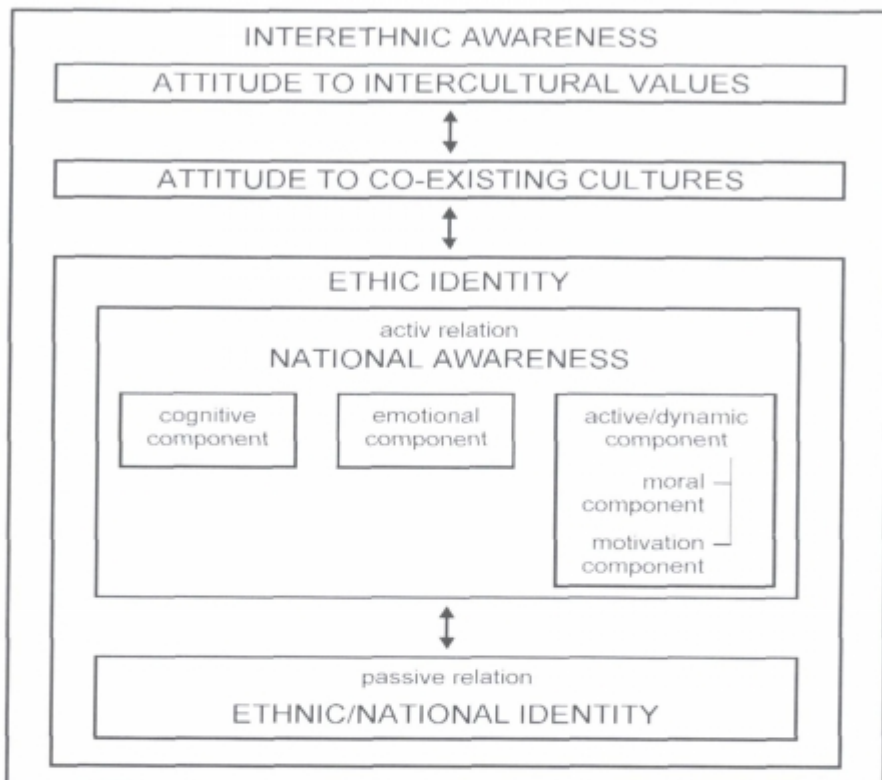
- Emotional (affection, emotional and value attitudes to one's own national identity, the nation, its members and national attributes),
- Active/dynamic (a tendency or disposition of an individual to be active in relation to one's own national identity, the nation, its members and national attributes, to support favorable ideas or to obstruct unfavorable ones, which is divided into motivation (an individual is active due to one's own needs, tendencies and wishes) and moral (an individual is active due to a sense of responsibility and obligation in relation to one's own nation).

In relation to the problem of multi-layered ethnic identity, it would be interesting to find out, which layers are more distinctive in certain circumstances. This question is very important when observing contemporary processes of globalization and integration.

Development of ethnic identity

Modern processes of European and world connection will undoubtedly signify a new level in the development of ethnic identity. Thus, far of a conscious identification of individuals with their own nation. If today an intercultural society is to become a goal in which different national, cultural and religious communities are to live together, not just side by side, but in continuous interaction based on mutual knowledge and recognition (Brander et al., 1995), then a higher, active level of ethnic identity, that is to say a national consciousness with all its components, will become more important. However, these are not extreme components of national consciousness, like a romantic feeling or a higher mission of a nation, nor national zeal, characteristic for conflict situations, but a consciously formed attitude to one's own nation and identity. Only on this basis can a nation or each member obtain a good level of national self-confidence with which it can make contacts with other nations without being burdened. Therefore, ethnic identity is indispensable for *interethnic awareness*, which besides the attitude to one's own culture consists also of an attitude to co-existing cultures and intercultural values. Without interethnic awareness there is no intercultural society, as only different national communities on the basis of mutual knowledge and recognition can become accustomed to characteristics of another community, can get rid of existing stereotypes and look at their own and other communities from a new perspective (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Interethnic awareness.

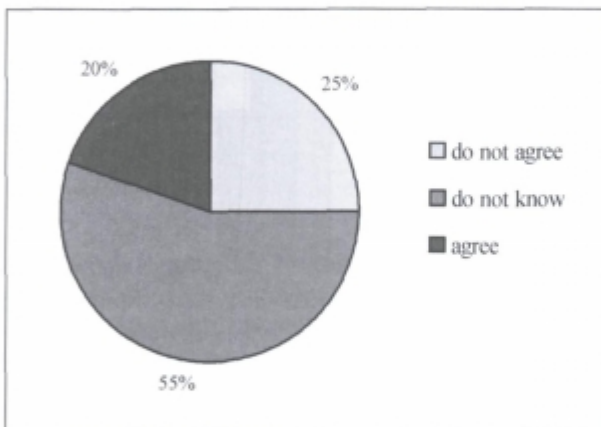


A case of students from Koper - Capodistria

The influence of interethnic awareness into interethnic relations in multi-cultural societies can be observed by interactions contact, many times in frontier areas, like Slovenian Istra, a nationally mixed area. There an autochthon Italian minority and some immigrant communities from former Yugoslavian republics live alongside the Slovenian community as a majority. In 1999 we carried out a survey among the young people in Koper, the main town of Slovenian Istra, which shows that interethnic awareness plays an important role in rejecting stereotypes and promotes productive cooperation among members of different national communities.

Within the framework of a wider research project 386 students from four secondary schools in Koper were asked to express their opinion on a series of statements, which relate to national consciousness and the attitude to other cultures and languages in the vicinity. We were interested in finding out how much they knew the culture of the Italian minority or if they consider it as a national community. The majority (55 percent) did not know the culture of the Italian national community and therefore had no idea about it (Figure 2).

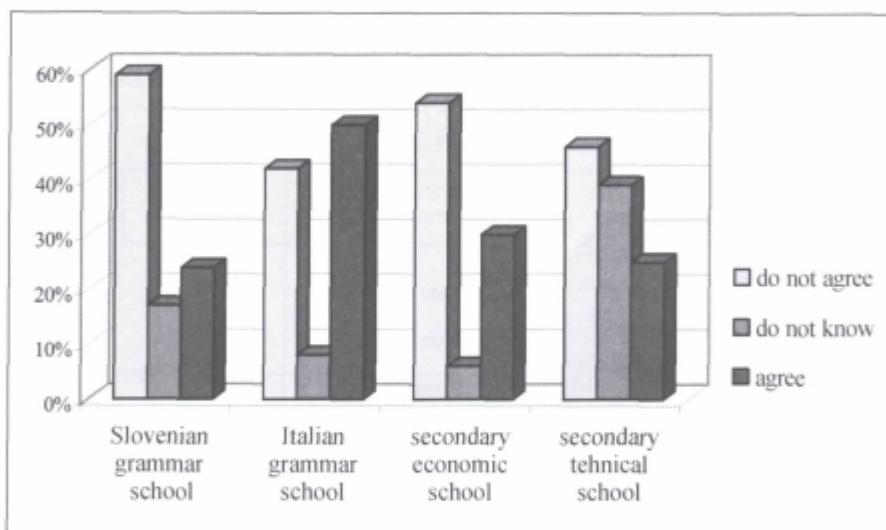
Figure 2. Do you agree that the members of Italian minority in Slovenian Istra do not differ according to their culture from the Italians of other nearby towns in Italy?



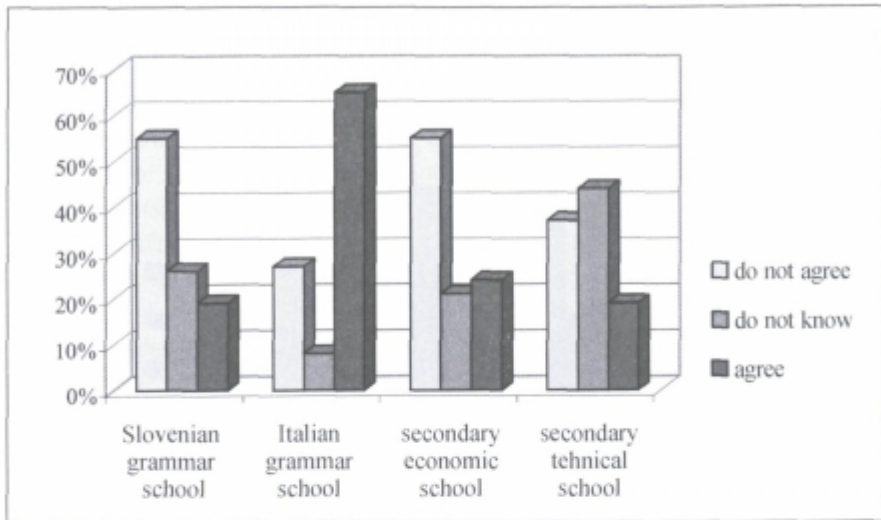
A great majority of those interviewed did not declare themselves for or against other statements related to problems of a nationally mixed environment. Many interesting differences were shown between the four secondary schools in Koper: Gimnazija Koper ('Slovenian grammar school'), Srednja ekonomska in družboslovna šola Koper ('secondary economic school'), Srednja kovinarska in prometna šola Koper ('secondary technical school') and "Pier Paolo Vergerio Il Vecchio" grammar school with Italian language of learning ('Italian grammar school'). Students who had no opinion mostly came from the secondary technical school, then the secondary economic school, following by the Slovenian grammar school and, the smallest number, from the Italian grammar school. Apart from these results the Italian grammar school stands out as the inverse, that is, those students agree with the statements. If we con-

sider the statement 'In Italian films Slovenian subtitles are not necessary at the cinema in Koper', we found it was those students from the Italian grammar school who had no opinion. By comparison to most of the students from the other schools agreed with the statement (Figure 3).

Figure 3. In Italian films Slovenian subtitles are not necessary at the cinema in Koper.



The students at the Slovenian grammar school, secondary economic and secondary technical school were in favor of the Slovenian language at the cinema in Koper. However, when asked about the frequency of Slovenian music on the radio, they were mostly against the statement 'There should be mostly Slovenian music played by Slovenian radio' (from 37 - 55 percent) (Figure 4). A great majority (65 percent) of students at the Italian grammar school agreed with the statement, 27 percent disagreed and there were only 8 percent of those who did not know what to say, which is very low compared in to the number of students at other schools, especially secondary technical school (44 percent).

Figure 4. There should be mostly Slovenian music played by Slovenian radio.

Similar differences were shown according to schools in relation to questions about stereotypes related to national or regional identity. Most students from the Slovenian grammar school (57 percent), the secondary economic school (45 percent) and the secondary technical school (30 percent) agree with the statement 'The Slovenians are more reserved than the Italians', but there is a large percentage who do not know what to say (Slov. gr. sch. 27 percent, sec. ec. 35 percent, sec. tech. sch. 44 percent). The results are different in the Italian grammar school, where most students, 54 percent disagree with the statement, 34 percent agree and only 12 percent do not have opinion (Figure 5).

Opinions about regional identity regional identity are similar to those on stereotypes related to national identity. Again the students from the Italian grammar school stand out, who mostly disagree with the existing stereotypes and where there are again fewest students who answered "do not know". This finding can be seen in the statement 'The Primorci (inhabitants of the Coastal area - Primorska) have a better relation with the Štajerci (inhabitants of the Styria - Štajersko) than with the Ljubljančani (inhabitants of the capital city of Slovenia - Ljubljana) (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. The Slovenians are more reserved than the Italians.

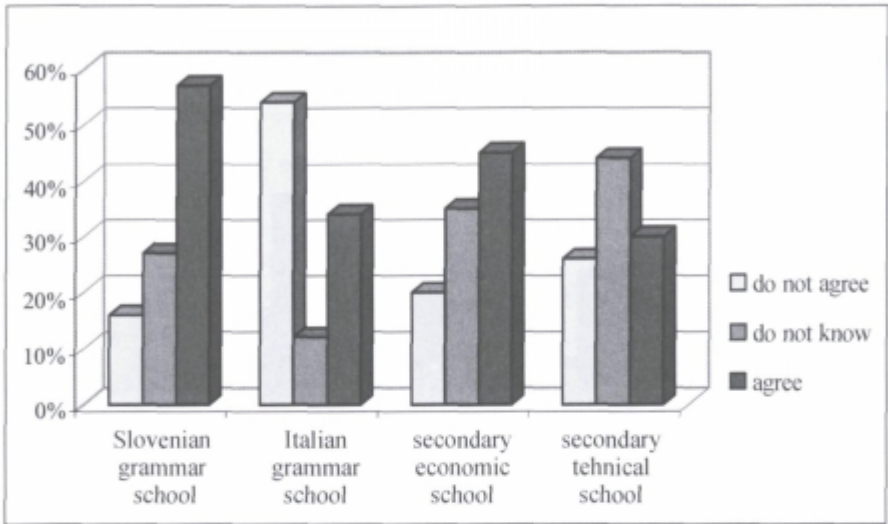
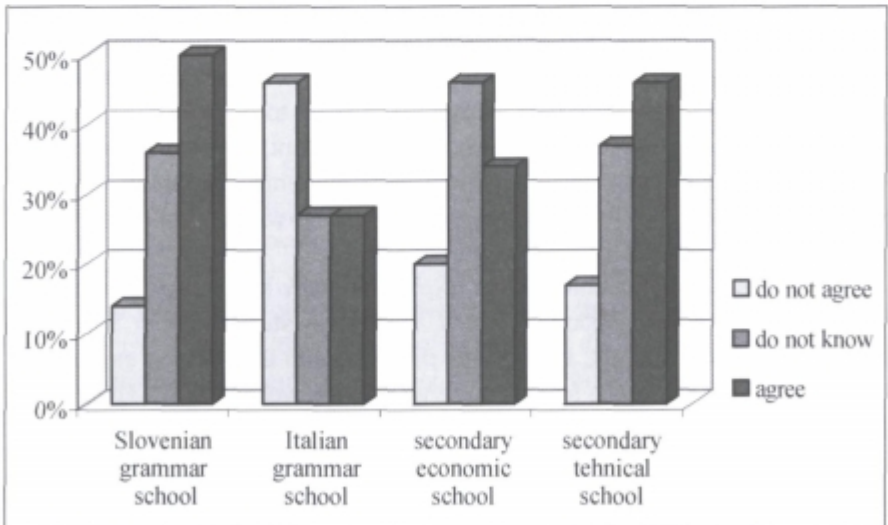


Figure 6. The Primorci have a better relation with the Štajerci than with the Ljubljančani.



Conclusion

More declarations for or against statements on ethnic questions is on one hand connected to greater intellect and broad-mindedness (in most questions there are the most undeclared students from secondary technical school, secondary economic school and then Slovenian grammar school), and on the other, a reflection of constant encounter with the questions of national minority and ethnic issues in general and close, everyday contacts with members of different national communities (at Italian grammar school, which is not only attended by members of Italian minority, but also the Slovenians and members of immigrant national communities, there is the smallest number of students, who answered do not know to questions related to ethnic issues, in comparison to other schools in Koper). It is this position of the students from Italian grammar school, characterized by everyday encounter with members of different national communities and awareness about various national identity of the students, which gives an opportunity for constant checking one's own ideas of members of other communities according to national or regional principle and for disproving such stereotypes.

Such positions, where there are everyday contacts between members of various national communities, are therefore, an important factor of higher national awareness, and on the other hand, being conscious of one's own national identity and national awareness condition the formation of such mutual relations between members of different national communities, which make creative co-existence, without groundless stereotypes and prejudices possible. Making such contacts and conditions possible to strengthen one's own national consciousness and interethnic awareness, should be a goal of every modern multicultural society. Such areas as nationally mixed Slovenian Istra is, can become a good example for the uniting Europe.

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Zavedanje medetničnosti kot pomemben dejavnik preko-mejnih povezav in integracijskih procesov.

Povzetek

Modern European integration processes and world globalization tendencies present a challenge to national communities also from the aspect of ethnic identity. If only an identification of individuals with one's own nation has been sufficient for the existence of a nation in a national country so far, a higher level of identification will become more important in new conditions such as consciously formed attitude to one's own nation and national identity through which also an attitude to members of other national communities is reflected. National consciousness, which of course does not signify a romantic national zeal characteristic for conflict situations, can be a solid foundation on which a national community will strive to make use of modern integrational processes as an opportunity to strengthen its own national self-confidence and equal cooperation with other ethnic/national communities. Contrary to this, it will start to take over other values and with this the identity of other national communities or over-national identity, which will be formed independently from it. Ethnic identity, i.e. national identity and national consciousness, is therefore indispensable for interethnic awareness which besides the attitude to one's own culture consists also of an attitude to co-existing cultures. Today's European contact areas can be a good evidence of mutual influence of interethnic awareness and interethnic relations.