

Chapter #5

MEANING OF FOREIGNERS AMONG ESTONIAN, LATVIAN, LITHUANIAN AND RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this pilot study was to explore Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian university students' conceptualizations and perceptions of foreigners. The present study examines similarities and differences between Estonian (N=118), Latvian (N=101), Lithuanian (N=101), and Russian (N=92) university students' understandings about foreigners by self-reported open-ended questionnaire. The applied categorical quantitative analysis of the data was the basis for statistical analysis of results. Results revealed that the meaning of foreigners among university students was conceptualized in society level as an exclusion of people connected with different nationality and language, whereby Russian respondents emphasized more differences in citizenship/nationality and three Baltic states respondents in cultural attitudes and values. Overall acceptance or unacceptance of foreigners tended to depend on the level – foreigners were more accepted in personal level and unaccepted in society level. University students in four study groups generally agree that foreigners have influenced them more positive than negative way, but reasons were different: Lithuanians stress more sympathy and helping behavior; Estonian and Latvian more enlargement of knowledge's with increase of tolerance; and Russian students' opinions were more connected with indirect influence by means of media, art and literature.

Keywords: concept of foreigners, attitudes towards foreigners, university students.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last century, immigrants have entered Europe in large numbers, leading to a drastic change in demographic build-up (McLaren, 2003) and the population of foreigners in the countries of the European Union has risen sharply in recent years playing a dominant role in population growth in some countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). The growth of immigration in Europe has been associated with an increase of anti-foreigner attitudes in a variety of European countries (Gang, Rivera-Batiz, & Yun, 2013). Immigrants (or foreigners) are perceived not only as outsiders in their new societies but also as a threat to the social, political and economic order as well as a threat to the cultural homogeneity and the national identity of the state (e.g. Scheepers, Gijberts, & Coenders, 2002).

The growing body of research on attitudes toward out-group populations in general and foreigners in European and outside European countries reveal that most people express negative attitudes toward foreigners (Bessudnov, 2016; Blinder & Markaki, 2018; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2009). Also, it was reported more prejudice toward foreigners perceived as culturally dissimilar as toward more similar foreigners (Asbrock, Lemmer, Becker, Koller, & Wagner, 2014).

Attitudes toward out-group populations are influenced by three major sources: individual-level characteristics (age, education, income, employment status and political orientation); country-level attributes (size of the out-group population, economic conditions, political climate of the host societies); and perception of the size of the foreign population (Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2008). For example, previous researches (e.g. Gang et al., 2013; Kaprāns & Mieriņa, 2019; Ostapczuk, Musch, & Moshagen, 2009) had showed that attitude toward foreigners were influenced by age and education – the more highly-educated and younger citizens tend to be more positive towards foreigners. Potential main reasons underlying the education effect include a different number of positive contacts with foreign people (Wagner, van Dick, Pettigrew, & Christ, 2003) and an increased commitment to democratic norms of equality possibly associated with a higher formal education (Condran, 1979). Research has indicated that higher education is the key for decreasing negative attitudes towards minorities, but few studies (e.g. Kim, 2004; Sakai & Koike, 2011) have taken university students opinions into consideration. Due to this, university students were respondents of the present study in order to get their perspective on this matter.

2. BACKGROUND

Estonian immigration policies are dependent on international law, especially EU law and Estonia has a rather developed legal system which is well adapted for solving immigration-related problems. The analysis of the immigration showed that while the immigration to Estonia is insignificant, in most cases people arriving are those from the former Soviet Union and the EU countries, and they are mostly “invisible” immigrants (Kovalenko, 2010). Despite the fact that Latvia is trying to implement European law in the area of immigration, the total number of immigrants remains relatively low. The migration of immigrants to other European Union member States is in the increase while Latvia is still not able to integrate and support its ethnic minorities (Mensah, 2010). Immigration is a new phenomenon in Lithuania, which increased after joining the EU with a particular flow of labor migrants. The main countries of origin of newly arriving immigrants are Belarus, Russia and Ukraine whereby there are also new migrant groups from China, Turkey, and Moldova. Lithuania is still a country of emigration with increasing flows of labor immigration and the beginning process of return migration (Leončikas & Žibas, 2010). Like in the EU countries, the effects of immigration are felt in Russian society, economy and demographics with students (from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazastan, Turkmesnistan, Uzbekistan and China) come the third after migrant workers (from Eurasian Unions) and fellow nationals in terms of number of immigrants arriving in Russia (Bisson, 2016).

In the era of globalization that accelerates personal and cultural exchanges across countries, understanding and respecting other cultures has become more important. This is true for the three Baltic countries and Russia as these countries had experienced new migration views. For example, intolerance towards foreigners is a problem in three Baltic countries young people – surveys (e.g., Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001) suggest that in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania adolescents hold relatively negative views

towards foreigners, whereby in most of the European countries' respondents had positive attitudes about immigrants. Previous studies among adults in three Baltic countries (Kapráns & Mieriņa, 2019; Paas & Halapuu, 2012) have identified differences in attitudes toward foreigners – Latvians and Estonians were less tolerant towards immigrants and Lithuanians were more tolerant.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

This research rises a new research question: What is Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian university students' understanding of foreigners? The research is important because previous research (Hjerm, 2001; Kapráns & Mieriņa, 2019; Ostapczuk et al., 2009) had indicated that higher education is one of the key factors for influencing attitudes towards minorities. The purpose of this paper is to analyze similarities and differences in conceptualizations and perceptions of foreigners among Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian university students.

4. METHOD

4.1. Samples

Four samples of university students participated in the study: 118 Estonian (89 of them were women and 29 men), 101 Latvian (96 of them were women and 5 men), 101 Lithuanian (67 of them were women and 34 men), and 92 respondents (women 64 and 28 men) from Russia (Table 1, 2). Totally, there were 412 respondents.

*Table 1.
Age profile of the respondents.*

Samples	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Russia
18-19 year olds	23%	39%	43%	21%
20-21 year olds	48%	40%	22%	42%
22-23 year olds	20%	11%	24%	26%
24 year olds and older	9%	10%	11%	11%

*Table 2.
Profile of the respondents according to the study field.*

Samples	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Russia
Social science	53%	73%	52%	32%
Information and technical	10%	0%	23%	21%
Human sciences	26%	17%	20%	35%
Political sciences	11%	10%	5%	12%

4.2. Instrument

Self-reported questionnaire consists of four open-ended questions in five areas: Meaning of foreigners (*What is a meaning of foreigners for you?*); reasons for acceptance of foreigners (*Are you ready to accept foreigners or otherwise minded people? Why?*); reasons for non-acceptance of foreigners (*What would you never accept concerning with foreigners or otherwise minded people? Why?*); and influence of foreigners (*Have you been influenced by foreigners or otherwise minded people? How?*).

4.3. Data analysis

The research data were received in written form giving responses to the presented open-ended questions of the developed questionnaire. Quantitative content analysis was chosen to schematically and objectively describe, classify and count the numerous responses of the respondents (Neuendorf, 2002). The responses of five open-ended questions were coded by two independent raters with each code assigned in distinct category. Inter-coder reliability between two of the researchers was 97%, with disagreements settled with a third independent rater. After manually coding, the frequencies (in percentages) of the categories were calculated for each open-ended question separately as mutually exclusive categories. Finally, several pairwise chi-square tests were used to compare the frequencies of the categories across four study group respondents' responses.

5. RESULTS

Table 3 summarizes the results of the quantitative content analysis focusing on the meaning of foreigners among four samples of Baltic state and Russian university students as calculated as frequencies of key categories and between-group differences of categories analyzed by the pairwise χ^2 -test.

Table 3.
Frequencies of key categories of meaning of foreigners (f) and calculation χ^2 for comparison between four samples of students.

Category	EE (f)	LV (f)	LT (f)	RU (f)	EE vs. LV (χ^2)	EE vs. LT (χ^2)	EE vs. RU (χ^2)	LV vs. LT (χ^2)	LV vs. RU (χ^2)	LT vs. RU (χ^2)
Different nationality and language	19%	24%	15%	51%	ns	ns	45.12	ns	15.29	28.11
Different citizenship or no citizenship	2%	6%	4%	28%	ns	ns	78.82	ns	54.78	56.76
Poor economic situation and physical state	6%	7%	30%	4%	ns	20.32	ns	15.03	ns	23.21
Different attitudes and values	30%	39%	39%	5%	ns	ns	22.88	ns	32.98	33.74
Marginalization of people	12%	14%	11%	11%	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Needs of individual people over the group	30%	11%	2%	1%	13.35	27.87	23.53	ns	ns	ns

Notes: Estonia (EE), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Russia (RU); statistically significant differences with pairwise chi-squared test in the level of $p < 0.001$

Research results showed that four samples of students conceptualize foreigners mainly in society level: (1) differences in nationality and language, and (2) marginalization, whereby Russian students emphasized more differences in nationality and language, and differences in citizenship; and three Baltic counties students evaluated more differences in

attitudes and values. Also, Lithuanian university students conceptualize foreigners more often in terms of individual physical differences between people and Estonians expressed their own individualistic personal viewpoint by separating self from other groups of people.

An analyze of reasons for acceptance of foreigners among university students reveal overwhelming positive attitude toward foreigners with emphasis to cultural enrichment (Table 4). Additionally, the reasons why young people in three Baltic countries accepted foreigners were different in personal level: (1) Estonian students were more prone to accept foreigners and otherwise minded people by expressing more often the attitude that all people are equal; (2) Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian students expressed more often the opinion to accept foreigners when there is a mutual respect, common values, moral and understandings between people.

Table 4.
Frequencies of key categories of reasons of acceptance of foreigners (f) calculation χ^2 for comparison between four samples.

Category	EE (f)	LV (f)	LT (f)	RU (f)	EE vs. LV (χ^2)	EE vs. LT (χ^2)	EE vs. RU (χ^2)	LV vs. LT (χ^2)	LV vs. RU (χ^2)	LT vs. RU (χ^2)
Acceptance: differences enrich culturally	31%	28%	30%	31%	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Acceptance: mutual respect and common values	14%	32%	36%	36%	8.05	4.05	4.08	ns	ns	ns
Acceptance without dangerous and violent behaviour	14%	12%	13%	14%	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Attitude: All people are equal	47%	20%	21%	19%	26.44	23.29	32.37	ns	ns	ns

Notes: Estonia (EE), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Russia (RU); statistically significant differences with pairwise chi-squared test in the level of $p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.001$

Results of analyze of reasons for non-acceptance of foreigners among three study samples are presented in the table 5. It was revealed that foreigners were less accepted on society level being not tolerant against aggression and violence, whereby three Baltic countries respondents tolerate less discrimination and religious extremism; and Russian compliance more cultural traditions and rules.

Table 5.
Frequencies of key categories of un-acceptance of foreigners (f) calculation χ^2 for comparison between four samples.

Category	EE (f)	LV (f)	LT (f)	RU (f)	EE vs. LV (χ^2)	EE vs. LT (χ^2)	EE vs. RU (χ^2)	LV vs. LT (χ^2)	LV vs. RU (χ^2)	LT vs. RU (χ^2)
Society level: aggression and violence	28%	22%	24%	30%	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Society level: discrimination and extremism	49%	56%	50%	17%	ns	ns	18.63	ns	6.96	19.39
Society level: people do not follow cultural traditions and rules	4%	2%	3%	35%	ns	ns	31.92	ns	36.73	27.85
Group level: sexual minorities and disabled people	17%	20%	23%	18%	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

Notes: Estonia (EE), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Russia (RU); statistically significant differences with pairwise chi-squared test in the level of $p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.001$

The last question in the questionnaire was related with personal influence of foreigners and research results indicated that university students in four study groups had generally more positive than negative views toward foreigners connected with the influence on them, whereby negative feelings were related to personal experiences about insecurity and unpredictable behavior and different customs; and at the other side – foreigners as positive models as strong people who can survive and adapt in society. Additionally, some reasons why foreigners can positively influence personally students were different: (1) Lithuanians emphasized more sympathy and helping behavior, (2) Estonians and Latvians more enlargement of their knowledge with an increase of tolerance towards foreigners, and (3) Russian students' opinions were more connected with indirect positive influence by means of media, visual art, literature, music, movies, theatre, TV programmes and other art forms (Table 6).

Table 6.
Frequencies of key categories of influence of foreigners (f) calculation χ^2 for comparison between four samples.

Category	EE (f)	LV (f)	LT (f)	RU (f)	EE vs. LV (χ^2)	EE vs. LT (χ^2)	EE vs. RU (χ^2)	LV vs. LT (χ^2)	LV vs. RU (χ^2)	LT vs. RU (χ^2)
Positive influence: sympathy and helping behaviour	5%	8%	40%	4%	ns	16.1	ns	10.66	ns	14.82
Positive model of strong people	28%	27%	11%	5%	ns	ns	9.54	ns	8.70	9.73
Positive influence: knowledge's and experiences with increase of tolerance	31%	30%	10%	10%	ns	9.94	9.14	ns	7.51	ns
Negative influence: insecurity about peoples unpredictable behavior and customs	26%	25%	28%	25%	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Indirect positive influence by music, literature, movies etc	10%	10%	11%	56%	ns	ns	37.98	ns	36.62	43.22

Notes: Estonia (EE), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Russia (RU); statistically significant differences with pairwise chi-squared test in the level of $p < 0.001$

6. CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

The meaning of foreigners among Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian university students was generally conceptualized in society level as an exclusion of people with different nationality and language, and marginalization of people. Braun, Behr and Kaczmirek (2013) analyzed the cross-national equivalence of the meaning of the term “immigrants” and found that the perception of immigrants was determined by a general representation of immigrants as well as a representation by the most dominant ethnic minority group, which differed from country to country. Also, Asbrock et al. (2014) found that the meaning of foreigners was dominantly connected with largest groups of people with migration background in the country. Present results indicated that university students conceptualized foreigners broader than ethnic minority group in society – socially excluded and marginalized people reflecting historical-philosophical roots of the condition of the migrant (Utrela, 2016). Following sociocultural perspectives present study reveal that university students’ conceptions of foreigners differed cross-culturally – Russian respondents emphasized more differences in citizenship/nationality and languages, and three Baltic states respondents in cultural attitudes and values. Additionally, it was revealed that the meaning of foreigners for Estonian university students was conceptualized more from individualistic than collectivistic cultural perspective, supporting corresponding tendencies among young peoples’ citizenship behavior (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, Zalewska,

Kõiv, Zuzeviciute, & Vidnere, 2018). Thus, the meaning of foreigners among Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian university students mainly stem from cultural differences as the out-group from the society with referring to social identity theory (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996).

All four study group university students were generally open and tolerant toward foreigners in individual differences evoked from cultural enrichment, but their attitudes showed some variation: Estonian students expressed more the attitude that people are equal; and Latvian, Lithuanian and Russian respondents were more prone to express positive attitude towards foreigners when there is mutual respect and common values. Thus, acceptance of foreigners of university students tended to depend on the attitudes in the individual level, and the unacceptance of the foreigners reflects the polarization of opinions in the society level. Namely, negative attitudes toward foreigners among four groups of university students tended to be more pronounced against aggression, violence, discrimination and extremism in society, whereby the dominant reason for non-tolerance tended to be different – discrimination and extremism for three Baltic countries students, and not following of cultural traditions and rules for Russian students. Also, Sakai and Koike (2015) found that university students' attitudes towards foreigners were confounding, but dominantly positive and the same tendency was specified in the present study – an overall acceptance in the personal level, but un-acceptance in society level in terms of threatens of equality and security.

Although, university students tended to have tolerant attitudes towards foreigners, but ambivalent experiences concerning with influence of foreigners. At one side, the influence of foreigners in terms of personal positive experiences for three Baltic countries students was direct and to Russian university students tended to be indirect; and at one side – negative personal experiences for most of the respondents were related to insecurity evoked from peoples' unpredictable behavior and different customs. Also, Kim (2004) found that college students' attitudes toward minorities were more influenced by subjective factors than by demographic characteristics and family backgrounds.

This pilot study draws on questionnaire data exploring understandings of the foreigners with special focus on the difference between meaning of foreigners between one segment of young adults – university students, among four country samples; and the findings may not be generalizable to the broader samples of young adults in other countries. Regarding methodology, the constructs in the present study were assessed using self-report measures and future research using multiple methods is desirable to replicate the findings. Even though analyzing data among relatively small four countries' samples, it may be argued that the results are important for other countries as well, especially planning surveys for future research in the area of attitudes toward foreigners, there is a challenge for specification of the meaning of main concept for the specific target groups.

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K. Kõiv, S. Gurieva, O. Deyneka, V. Zuzeviciute, A. Liduma, & S. Rone

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