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Social distance and communicative relationships between nationalities in Latvia: a psychological analysis

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Abstract

This study is of the most significant determinants of the European personality in a pattern of inter-ethnic relationships. We measure social inter-ethnic tolerance using the Bogardus social distance scale. Modern Europe appreciates and requires respect and tolerance towards other nations and their cultures. In this study, we were interested in the Latvian residents' attitudes and distance in their own state – Latvia – towards: the Baltic states; the EU countries, USA and Canada; and Eastern countries; as well as attitude towards race. We obtained two factors that clarify 49.6% of dispersion of the assessed data. The first of these was 'orientation towards the West', the second 'orientation towards familiar national neighbourhood'.

Introduction

The aim of the study is to determine the significance of personality's ethnic and civic identity in the formation of inter-cultural communicative competence and their interrelations with the person's age, gender and educational level. The object of the study is the personality's ECC as psychological phenomenon that arises in the process of inter-ethnic communication and cognition. The subject of the study is social tolerance as qualities of the personality's ECC indices.

In the modern world, one can widely observe the processes characterised by one's becoming aware of their ethnic identity, as well as development of inter-ethnic tolerance. Not only is belonging to a certain ethnic group a nationality issue in the person's conscience, it also includes thoughts, feelings and orientations that form the person's system of values and attitudes towards both their own and other nations.

Inter-ethnic tolerance is influenced by two inter-determined factors:

- Influence of specific elements of ethno cultural traditions (language, symbols, system of the nation's values and norms, specific forms and acts of communication etc.);
- Factors of awareness of inner reference level; significance of one's own ethnic group in the life of the individual.

ECC can serve as a quality index for personality's direction, attitudes and characteristics in the communication of inter-national relations, as well as for ethnofore evaluating attitude towards other ethnic groups.

At the first stage of the project, the following tasks were performed:

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1. Philosophical, ethno-psychological, cultural anthropological and socio-linguistic literature on the development of national cultural identity and the essence of inter-cultural communicative competence was reviewed,
2. Formation criteria for ethno-communicative competence were developed; their significance in improvement of inter-national relations was stated,
3. ECC correlations with social identity studied in the context of social cognition were determined,
4. Social-psychological conditions for ECC formation were analysed, stating social attitudes in the biggest ethnic groups.

Tasks of the study:

- To perform assessment of personal ECC in inter-ethnic relations;
- To analyse language ethno-competence, attitude towards the language, assessment of language skill in inter-ethnic relations;
- To analyse inter-ethnic social distance and its dependence on social competence and other indices.

Personal ECC is a personality's social-psychological quality that reflects the person's readiness, attitude and wish to be involve with inter-national communication, i.e. this is such an ethno-semiotic attitude that provides optimal interrelation of personality's mutual relations with representatives of other cultures.

The results of the study reflect the contents of personal ECC and its quality criteria, show specific forms of ethnofore communication, significance of inner reference and one's own ethnic group in the individual's life and social processes in the state. Personal DEC shows a personality's abilities to integrate into international relations in the process of aculturisation with the aim to create an ethnically integrated, socially structured and developed country. This process can positively direct further and develop formation of European civic identity.

The theoretical base of the study is formed by: theories of formation of the European identity, comparative analysis of cultures and the necessity of fostering multi-cultural communicative competence in the changing multicultural society of modern Europe and the world (Allport, Bairam and others); theories on the strong relation between mobilising power of national and ethnic identity and individual and collective memory (Kilis, et al); theories and research on social and language communicative competence in inter-national relations (Austin, et al); theories on activity, attitudes and social-cultural aspects of ethnopsychology, developed by Latvian philosophers and psychologists (Apine, Dirba, Vidnere et al).

Social economic changes in post-Soviet society made researchers in Russia and new independent states deal with ethnic and social identity issues. These psychological issues have been studied by many psychologists in Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Lithuania and Estonia.

The following empirical methods were applied in the study:

- In order to determine personality's ethnic and social identity correlations and interrelations with the person's age, gender and educational level, a survey of social-psychological indices with 42 blocks of questions was developed (by M.Vidnere, D.Igonins);
- Modified Bogardus social distance scale, in order to study attitudes towards both one's own and also other nationalities.

All these indices and qualities of interrelation were analysed with the help of statistical data treatment programme 'Statistika-6' that allows one to receive indices of multidimensional indices of high quality.

Study Base

We received a total of 720 survey questionnaires (mostly Russian speaking people – 85 %; Latvians served as a control group) from different regions of Latvia (Riga region – 230 questionnaires, Kurzeme region – 190 questionnaires, Latgale region – 300 questionnaires). Regional division was necessary, because the density of Russian speaking population between regions is different. From those, 647 questionnaires were valid.

Table 1. Division of respondents by gender, age and educational level

Gender	Age	Education	Number of questionnaires
male	< 30	lower	60
		higher	60
	31-55	lower	60
		higher	60
	56 and over	lower	60
		higher	60
female	< 30	lower	60
		higher	60
	31-55	lower	60
		higher	60
	56 and more	lower	60
		higher	60

The structure of main minorities living in Latvia was necessary for the analysis of Bogardus social distance scale.

Table 2. Ethnic composition of the population of Latvia (%)

Ethnicity	1939	1979	1989	1995	1999	2000	2003
Latvians	77.0	53.7	52.0	54.8	55.7	55.8	55.7
Russians	8.8	32.8	34.0	32.8	32.3	32.0	32.2
Byelorussians	1.4	4.5	4.5	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.9
Ukrainians	0.1	2.7	3.5	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.9
The Polish	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
Lithuanians	1.2	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
Jewish	4.9	1.1	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.3
Gipsies	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Estonians	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Germans	3.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
other	0.2	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	1.0
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

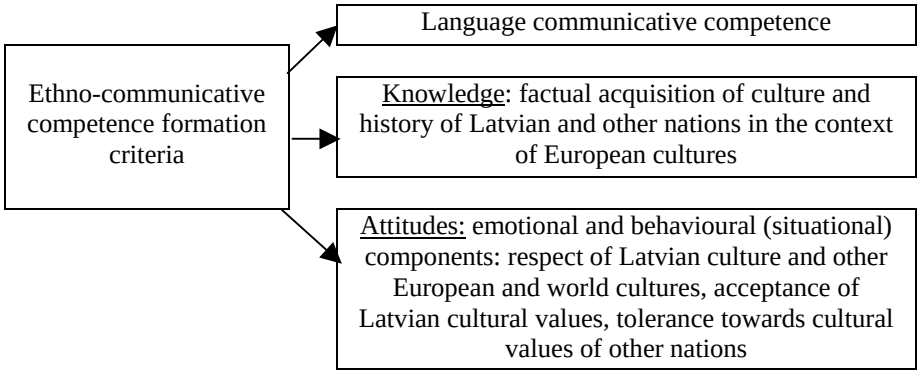
The Ethno-demographical structure of Latvia changed a lot in the Soviet time and Nazi occupation time. There were several reasons for these changes: loss of people in the Second World War, mass deportations and genocide against the Latvian nation, repatriation of Baltic Germans, the holocaust – mass murdering Latvian Jews and Gypsies in the time of German occupation, the stream of refugees to the West at the end of war and intensive migration processes in the territory of the ex-USSR. In the Soviet times, the proportion of Latvians reduced rapidly (in 1939, Latvians made 77 % of the total number of population, but in 1989 – only 52 %), but the proportion of Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and other peoples living in the ex-USSR, increased.

In the present study, we were interested in the residents' attitude and distance in their own state – Latvia – towards: the group of Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia, Poland); the block of European countries (EU countries) and the USA, Canada; the group of Eastern countries (residents of other countries who could wish permanent residence in Latvia), as well as residents' attitude towards the races.

ECC system includes language communicative competence in knowledge of Latvian culture and history in the European context, as well as attitude (emotional and behavioural components) to respect of Latvian and other nations' culture.

State civic identity is also expressed if the person does not accept values and symbols of Latvian culture as deeply significant for him/herself or emotionally touching; he or she has a neutral attitude towards the cultural-historical aspect of Latvian identity, however, he or she knows Latvian language and respects Latvian culture, being aware of and feeling like he/she is a part of the society of Latvia.

ECC criteria in inter-national relations in changing multi-cultural society



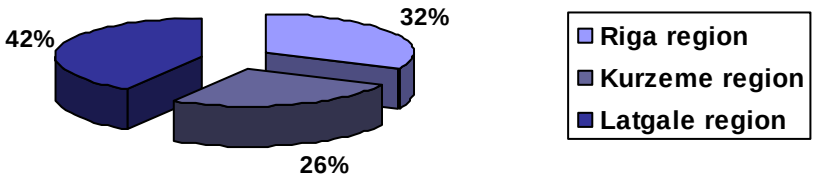
ECC formation to a great extent is determined by the individual's acquired total of social cultural knowledge, which states or emphasises the role of the environment (U.Bronfenbrenner).

Social tolerance (distance) scale – SDS

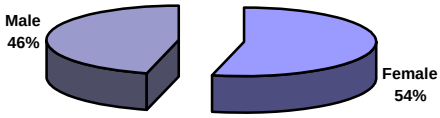
Modern Europe highly appreciates respect and tolerance towards other nations' culture. Under the development of international political, economic and social unions, in order to cope with contradictions between new social ideals, traditional Latvian upbringing and unfavourable consequences of social changes, a model (survey questionnaire), where diversity of identities was respected, was created.

Data treatment

In the process of study, 647 valid questionnaires were obtained. For data treatment, factor analysis was used to reflect hidden structures in data or classifications of variables. For treatment we used all the questionnaires that were correctly filled in, even if separate answers were left out. Questionnaires classified as non-valid were those where there was no assessment dispersion or where more than 15% of answers were lacking. We also didn't include such questionnaires where respondents, having ignored the instruction, gave more than one answer to every question. From those, 647 questionnaires were valid.



Gender



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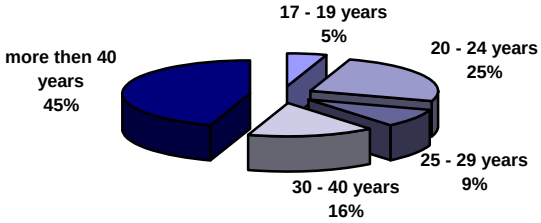
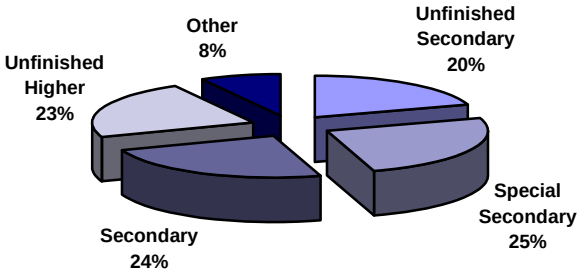
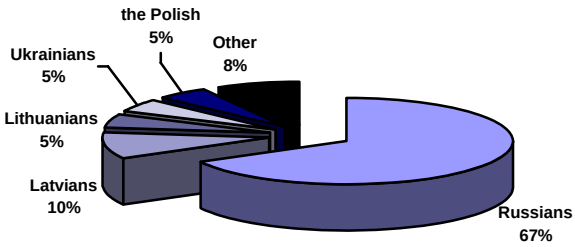


Education



Nationality



ECC Empirical Correlates

ECC is made operational and is measured in terms of language communicative competence in second language (L2), social tolerance, social adaptive skills, culture orientation and personal Locus of Control.

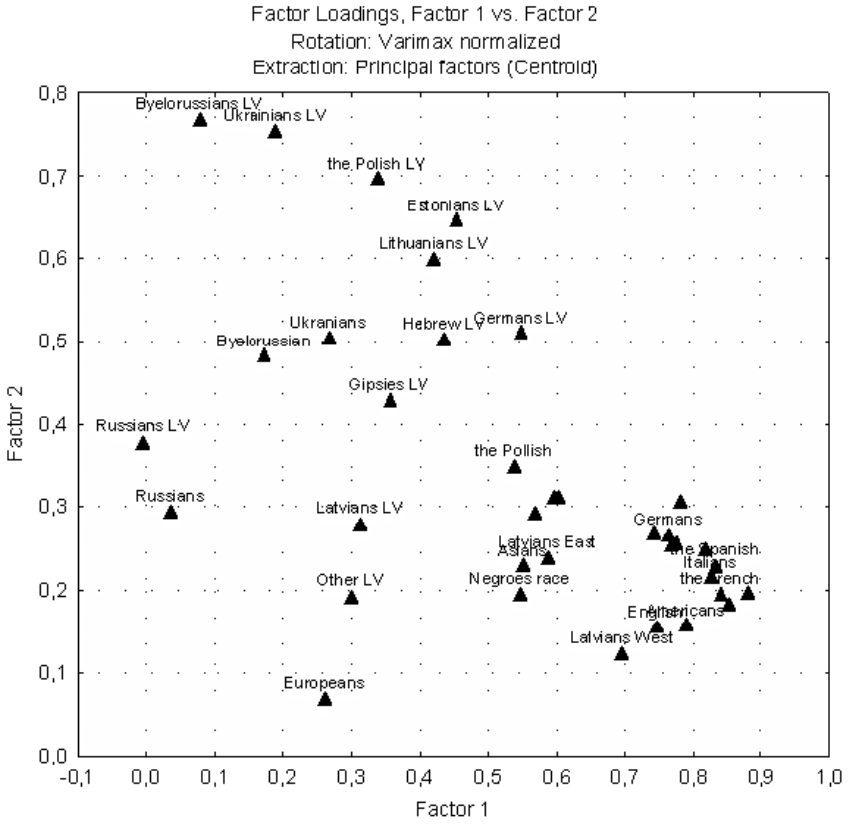
Correspondents' subjective significance in the assessment of social tolerance (distance) criteria sometimes was beyond the limits of SDS parameters, giving interesting reflection of the issue.

Data factor analysis was performed with the help of DA System STATISTICA 6.0 Stat Soft Corp, using data (orthogonal) VARIMAKS cut.

Results

In the results of the SDS scale treatment, we obtained two factors that clarify 49,6% of dispersion of the assessed data, besides the first factor explains 43,2% of the observed dispersion.

Table3. First Factor 'the factor of positive attitude towards the peoples of the Old European states'



The first factor in the total factor interpretation shows that in general we can observe respondents' 'orientation towards the West', reflecting a high level of tolerance (e.g. in relation to the Dutch/Belgians – 0,88, Canadians – 0,852, French – 0,84). A lower level of this factor group is related to the English – 0,70, as well as to the group of 'Western Latvians'- 0,697. Low tolerance is related to Russians, independent of their place of residence. This factor can also be characterised as the opposition of the term 'Russia' to the rest of the world 'West' (Western Europe and North America).

In general, a conclusion can be made that SDS assessment in the analysis of the first factor reflects the respondents' orientation towards the West.

Social Tolerance (Distance) Scale
Factor Loadings (Varimax normalised)
Extraction: Principal factors (Centroid)

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
LatviansLV	0.31330	0.277675
RussiansLV	-0.00370	0.377600
ByelorussiansLV	0.07929	0.766608
UkrainiansLV	0.18989	0.753817
PolishLV	0.33878	0.696779
LithuaniansLV	0.42181	0.598716
JewsLV	0.43725	0.502076
GypsiesLV	0.35694	0.428524
EstoniansLV	0.45478	0.645652
GermansLV	0.54877	0.510585
OthersLV	0.30065	0.191256
English	0.74691	0.154700
Germans	0.76478	0.265591
French	0.84042	0.194063
Italians	0.82672	0.215357
Spanish	0.83319	0.228419
Holland.,Belg.	0.88060	0.195415
Swed.,Fin.	0.76968	0.254076
Dan.,Nor.	0.81857	0.248988
Americans	0.79043	0.157261
Canadians	0.85164	0.181392
LatviansWest	0.69738	0.121638
Russians	0.03587	0.293261
Byelorussians	0.17366	0.482377
Ukrainians	0.26776	0.503158
Caucasians	0.56818	0.291018
Kazakhs,Kirg.	0.59694	0.309942
Uzbeks,Tadzh.	0.60240	0.309534
Polish	0.53897	0.349019
Czech,Slovaks	0.78149	0.304900
Hung.,Roman.	0.77647	0.255530
Bolg.,Serbs	0.74308	0.268659
LatviansEast	0.58880	0.237723
Europeans	0.26253	0.067906
Black	0.54807	0.194006
Asians	0.55202	0.229118
Expl.Var	12.67344	5.189214
Prp.Totl	0.35204	.144145

The second factor explains approximately 6% data dispersion, and it is less significant than the first factor. This factor reflects attitudes towards the nations that live near Latvia, also including those that in the process of historical development are most closely associated with Russians, e.g. Ukrainians and Byelorussians. This factor that can be called 'orientation towards familiar national neighbourhood' shows that the highest significance and social acceptance (favourability) is granted to ethnic groups living in Latvia (Ukrainians, Byelorussians, the Polish, Lithuanians, Estonians, Jews). Therefore this factor reflects specific advantages for those ethnic groups that create minorities of the inhabitants of Latvian environment and reflect a familiar social environment for the respondents.

Analysis of both factors allows us to conclude that the first factor reflects attitudes towards representatives of other national groups on the basis of 'we know', not on 'we

are familiar with'. It reflects the social tendency that has been formed on the experience the respondents have in relation to representatives of those ethnic groups, and in most cases this experience is based on very unsystematic and superficial relations, as well as the result of general social-economic and historical factors. This way it should be understood as the cognitive component of the social trend in relation to representatives of other social groups.

The second factor reflects another attitude – this is acceptance of other national groups of the residents of Latvia, which is determined by personal systematic experience and familiarity. This factor reflects not only cognitive, but also emotional and behavioural aspects in the trend towards other ethnic groups in Latvia.

In the total number of variables for factor analysis, we also included the factor 'Racial differentiation and national priorities', which reflects tolerance towards the three basic races – Caucasian, Afro-American and Asian. The results of the analysis show that the respondents have a neutral attitude towards this factor.

Conclusion

Analysis of both factors allows us to suggest that the first factor reflects attitudes towards representatives of ethnic groups. It can be interpreted as a factor of the pro-western orientation of the respondents (90% Russians) and reflects a high level of acceptance and association with representatives of the Western countries and Western culture. This is the product of positive components of the social attitude.

The second factor is different. It reflects acceptance of other ethnic groups of the residents of Latvia and is determined by factors of personal, systematic and many-sided familiarity with their representatives. We can expect this factor to reflect less cognitive, but more emotional and behavioural aspects of the attitude – experience-based.

Differentiation of racial and national preferences

In the total number of variables for factor analysis, we also included the factor 'Racial differentiation and national priorities', which reflects tolerance towards the three basic races – Caucasian, Afro-American and Asian. As one can see in the figure, the variable 'European' has little factor load on both factor axes. It shows indifference of the variable to these measurements. This result could be expected as most of the ethnic groups included into the analysis were representatives of this race and the observed dispersion of the obtained assessments can mostly be determined by the factors based on differences between representatives of different national groups of the Caucasian race. Two other factors take central place in the space of factors, and corresponding factor loads are practically the same. It can show respondents' neutral attitude towards these racial groups. We can expect that tolerance towards representatives of these races corresponds to one they show towards representatives of the closest (in the factor space) ethnic groups.

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