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## **Attitudes and identity: a comparative study of the perspectives of European children**

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### **Introduction**

A sense of national identity is one of the central elements of social identity. Our ability to differentiate between ourselves and others, our cultural roots and a feeling of distinctness satisfy the natural need for security, affiliation and membership. We develop ties with our nation very early, and they are of great significance in establishing ourselves within our community. In the present international social, economic and political situation, with the world heading towards globalisation and inter-state unions being formed, a key question is the correlation between national and supranational/European identity, and the development of ties within that community also. Our project aims to study this development and has identified three key areas dealing with social development and identity for analysis:

- children's understanding and perceptions of national identity
- children's perceptions of tolerance and difference
- children's understanding and perceptions of European identity.

### **Research methods**

1. The project will be carried out in eight European countries: Belgium, Greece, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Finland, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia.
2. The inter-European composition of the project enables us to research and compare important aspects of identity, and the nature of the countries involved allows for a rich comparison of data. For example within the group of eight we have:

- monocultural countries vs multi-cultural countries  
Poland, Greece, vs Portugal, Belgium, UK
- EU non-members vs EU members  
Poland, Hungary, Slovenia vs Portugal, Belgium, Greece, UK, Finland

- European Central Countries vs European Peripheral Countries  
Poland, Belgium, Hungary, vs Portugal, Greece, Finland  
Slovenia

### Research sample

We plan to examine approximately 30 children in each country:

- 7-8 years – 10 children in each country x 8 = 80
- 9-10 years – 10 children in each country x 8 = 80
- 11-12 years – 10 children in each country x 8 = 80

The research methodology will be both quantitative and qualitative. Children will be interviewed individually, with researchers following an interview schedule which includes both open and closed questions and a number of focused tasks.

### Structure of the project

The project consists of 3 parts:

#### Part I: Children's understanding and perceptions of national identity

##### A. Theoretical background

Identity is a fundamental concept for the functioning of every human being. It is connected with our feeling of uniqueness, integrity and individuality. An important element of identity development is our environment, which allows us to develop both our 'self' and the sense of belonging to a given group (Schlenker, 1985). Our parents, friends/schoolmates and teachers continually convey to us messages and opinions about what we are like. We observe their behaviour and rituals and identify ourselves with them, thus internalising social objectives and values. In time some of these become our personal objectives and values. It follows that the ties we establish with a group are a specific kind of social identity. National identity is a special case of social identity, as (a) it is built upon a stable criterion of non-transferable nature, mutually exclusive with other criteria (Jarymowicz, 1994); (b) it concerns joint participation within the confines of a larger social community; (c) it is 'shared' by many persons; and (d) it refers to a common code, accepted *a priori* (Greenberg et al. 1992). So we may define national identity as a perception of the distinctness and uniqueness of own nation, and of ourselves as rightful members of our nation.

##### B. What do we want to know? Research questions

- What does it mean to children to be a member of a nation ?
- What is the nature of this tie for them?
- How do they describe such ties? (emotional, social ...)
- In what way do they participate as citizens? (active, passive, positive, negative)

C. *How will we get there? (questions asked and subsequent analysis)*

- categories of description
  1. *Where do you live? (What country do you live in?)*
  2. *Who are you? (What nationality are you?)*
  3. *What does it mean for you to be ...? (Polish, Greek, Portuguese, Belgian, British, Hungarian, Slovenian, Finnish)*
- specific features of their own nationality
  4. *How we can recognise a Polish person? (What do Polish people do? How do Polish people look? How do they behave?)*
- level of citizenship (Freitas, 2000)
  5. *Put a cross next to the things you have already done or the things you plan to do when you grow up:*
    - *I take part in discussions on the situation in my class, at school*
    - *I take part in such actions as Cleaning Up The World*
    - *I will always take part in voting when I grow up*
    - *I will always vote in the parliamentary elections when I grow up*
    - *I would like to work as a volunteer for some humanitarian organisation, e.g. Medecins sans frontieres.*

**Part II: Perceptions of tolerance and difference**A. *Theoretical introduction (description of phenomenon)*

In his classic study, Piaget stresses the egocentric nature of younger children's perception of the world, describing their thinking as pre-operational in character (Piaget, 1926). This is particularly so up until the age of seven, as conceptions of social relations are limited and self centred. Livesley and Bromley (1973) indicate that as they grow older, children's understanding of the characteristics of others becomes more diversified and detailed, so that initial responses are gradually replaced by descriptive categories. By the age of 12 children are more willing to describe people's inner states instead of their physical features. The ability to conduct formal operations, developed with age, makes it possible for some 12 year-old children to integrate information, describe things at an abstract level and formulate generalised opinions. As this research will include children aged 7-12 years, we can expect to see responses ranging from children who attribute complex characteristics to people to those who still concentrate on physical aspects such as appearance or behaviour. It may be expected that younger pupils will still exhibit contradictory judgements and stereotyped generalisations.

B. *What do we want to know? Research questions*

We aim to examine children's attitudes and tolerance towards other cultures. We understand tolerance as:

- knowledge of others
- acceptance of others, and
- experience of others (personal contact) (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz et al, 1999).

Attitudes of tolerance can be evaluated or assessed at two levels:

- as descriptive opinions – what children say about others
- as evaluative opinions – how they assess others in real-life situations (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, Zielińska, 2001).

C. *How will we get there? (questions asked and subsequent analysis)*

By seeking descriptive opinions:

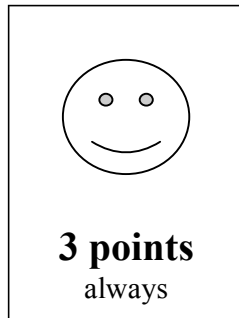
1. *What does mean to you if I say someone is from a different culture?* - Knowledge
2. *What are people from other cultures (countries) like? (how do they behave, what do they do)?* – Knowledge
3. *Have you met someone from a different culture who lives in ...? (i.e. in your country) How do you know they were from another culture? How were they similar to you? How were they different?* - Experience
4. *Have you played with them?* – Experience
5. *Would you like children from different cultures to go to the same school as you?* - Acceptance
6. *Would you like children from different cultures to sit next to you in class?* - Acceptance
7. *Have you been abroad anywhere?* – Experience
8. The children examined are given for three photographs of children:
  - the first is of a child similar to the child examined (e.g. a white person)
  - the second is of an obviously different child (e.g. an African child)
  - the third is of a child from a different culture who lives close to the child examined (e.g. a member of a national minority – gypsy child, Asian British child).

We ask:

*Tell me a little about what each of these children might be like. (What country do you think they live in? What do you think they eat? Do you think they go to school? Do you think they have a happy life? Why? Why not?)* – Knowledge

9. The children examined are given three photos of children (as above) and four kinds of labels (2cm x 2cm), three labels of each kind:
- a smiling sun, and an inscription below which reads '3 points – always'
  - a sun with straight mouth; the inscription reads '2 points – often'
  - a sun partly covered by a cloud, with the inscription '1 points – sometimes'
  - a raining cloud with the inscription '0 points – hardly ever'

For example:



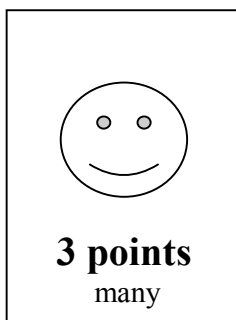
*Usually, when children come back from school they do their homework. Do you think these children do theirs every day? - Knowledge*

*Put under each child:*

- *a smiling sun if you think his homework is always done*
- *a straight faced sun if you think his homework is usually done*
- *a sun partly covered by a cloud if you think his homework is sometimes done*
- *a raining cloud if you think his homework is hardly ever done*

10. The children examined are given three photos of children (as above) and four kinds of labels (2cm x 2cm), three labels of each kind:
- straight sun with the inscription '3 points – many'
  - a sun partly covered by a cloud; '2 points – some'
  - a cloud; '1 point – a few'
  - a raining cloud; '0 points – none'

For example:



*Sometimes we meet people and they can teach us interesting things. If you wanted to learn something new, which boy could teach you more? - Knowledge*

*Put under each child:*

- *a smiling sun if you think this boy can teach you many interesting things*
- *a straight faced sun if you think this boy can teach you some interesting things*
- *a cloud if you think this boy can teach you just a few interesting things*
- *a raining cloud if you think this boy cannot teach you anything*

11. The children examined are given three photos of children (as above).

*Children often have a birthday party. These three boys ask you to come to their birthday party but you cannot go. What might they think about you? - Knowledge*

- *What might the first boy think about you?*
- *What might the second boy think about you?*
- *What might the third boy think about you?*

12. The children are asked to continue to look at the three photos of the children.

*Imagine that your parents must leave for a weekend. You cannot stay at home alone. The parents of each boy invite you to stay for weekend with them. Which do you think your parents would be most happy for you to go to? - Acceptance*

- *Why?*
- *To which of them would you go most willingly?*
- *Why?*

13. The children examined are given a picture of a child with a truck on landfill site (Freitas, 2000)

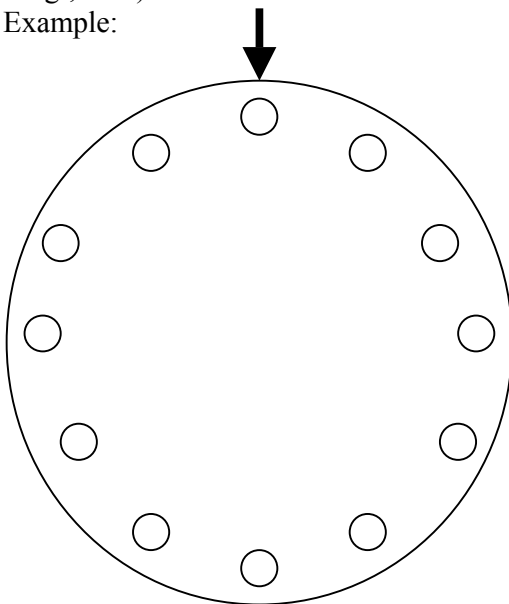
*Tell me what can you see in this picture (what is going on in it)? - Knowledge, acceptance*

- *What caused this situation? (what is the reason for this situation)*
- *How will it all end?*

Evaluative opinions

14. The children examined are given three photos of children (as in Task 9 above). They are also given a picture showing the face of a clock, with places corresponding to the 12 hours (Weigl, 1999).

Example:



*Imagine you are at a camp. There are 12 tents. One of them (e.g. at the position of 12 o'clock) is occupied by first boy (second / third boy). Which one would you take? Mark it in the picture". - Acceptance*

15. The children examined are given three photos of children (as above) and two envelopes, one containing 30 small white sheets of paper and the other 30 small green sheets. (Weigl, 1999).

*Look, there are two envelopes on the table. One of them contains white sheets of paper, the other green sheets of paper. The white sheets represent people's qualities and the green ones, people's defects. First think of yourself - take white or green sheets for each good quality or bad quality which you have. Now think of first boy (second, third). Take as many white/green sheets for the good and bad qualities he has in your opinion". - Acceptance*

### **Part III: European identity of children (how children understand "Europeanness")**

#### *A. Theoretical background*

Many researchers examining social relations and psychological phenomena are interested in the notion of what might be termed "Europeanness" The concept is new and may be associated with the creation of the European Community. This phenomenon may be examined from different perspectives: psychological, social, political and economic. We intend to concentrate on Europeanness in relation to social identity and the sense of group identification. Our research is not based on a single definition of this concept; it aims rather to determine what characteristics may be connected with it. Through the use of mainly open-ended questions we hope to begin to understand what Europeanness means for children.

#### *B. What do we want to know? Research questions*

In this part we want to investigate:

- how children understand Europeanness
- to what extent they identify with Europe
- how children understand the links (connections) between Local-Regional-National-European identity.

We will test two levels of children's opinions:

- Europeanness in "declarative opinions"
- Europeanness in "procedural opinions" (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, 2001a, Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, 2001b)

#### *C: How will we get there? (questions asked and subsequent analysis)*

1. The children examined are given a list of nationalities which includes all European nationalities and the three most popular non-European – American, Japanese, Vietnamese (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz and all, 1999)

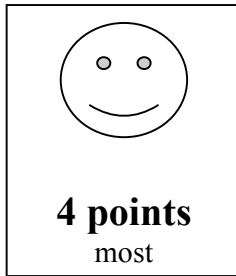


**Example:**

\_\_\_ Greek                      \_\_\_ Polish                      \_\_\_ Portuguese  
                  \_\_\_ British                      \_\_\_ Slovenian                      \_\_\_ Czech  
 \_\_\_ Belgian                      \_\_\_ French                      \_\_\_ Hungarian  
                  \_\_\_ Russian                      \_\_\_ Finish                      \_\_\_ American

They are given five kinds of labels (2cm x 2cm) too, 30 labels of each kind:

- ° a smiling sun with the inscription '4 points – most'
- ° a sad sun; '3 points – very'
- ° a sun partly covered by a cloud; '2 points – little'
- ° a cloud; '1 point – almost none'
- ° a raining cloud; '0 points – none'

**Example:**

*You have representatives of different nations bellow. For each of them put:*

- ° *a smiling sun if you think this person is most European*
- ° *a sad sun if you think this person is very European*
- ° *a sun partly covered by a cloud if you think this person is a little bit European*
- ° *a cloud if you think this person is almost non-European*
- ° *a raining cloud if you think this person is completely non-European.*

*Why have you given a smiling sun to this person/these people?*

*Why have you given a cloud to this person/these people?*

*Why have you given a raining cloud to this person/these people? - procedural opinion*

2. *Imagine that on holiday you meet Bill, a boy from America (Fretias, 2000). You tell him you are:*

- \_\_\_ *from Olsztyn (locality – town or village)*
- \_\_\_ *from Warmia (regionality)*
- \_\_\_ *Polish (nationality)*
- \_\_\_ *European (Europeaness) - procedural opinion*

3. *You want to show to Bill a very interesting monument. You have four photos. The first one you show Bill is:*
- \_\_\_ a castle in Olsztyn (local monument)
  - \_\_\_ a castle in Malbork (regional monument)
  - \_\_\_ a castle in Warsaw (national monument)
  - \_\_\_ Wersal (European monument) - procedural opinion
4. *Your family decides to make a monthly allocation of PLN 50 for poor children. Decide if the money should go to:*
- an orphanage in your hometown (local ties)
  - an orphanage in Warsaw (Polish ties)
  - children in Bosnia (European ties)
  - an orphanage in Malbork (Regional ties) - procedural opinion
5. *What does it mean to you to be "European"?* - declarative opinion
6. *Are you European?* - declarative opinion  
*Why?*

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