

Summary

The history of Europe is characterised by the blending of cultures, mutual enrichment, as well as tragic conflicts. The image of the "other", whether positive or negative, has frequently shaped mutual coexistence in multi-ethnic Europe. It has exerted a significant influence upon the region of Central Europe, where the borders of countries could never designate areas inhabited by homogenous national communities.

The mutual images of European nations, especially neighbouring ones, have been subjected to systematic observation by Blažena Gracová and Denisa Labischová and their team from the University of Ostrava since the mid-1990s.

The aim of this monograph is to capture changes in the respondents' knowledge of and attitudes towards selected aspects of European consciousness, and to identify some of the features of the subject of history as it is taught at schools, especially in relation to the principle of multiperspectivity and the level of accentuation of intercultural topics.

The theoretical part strives to shed light on the educational context of the research. We focused on the conception of intercultural education and European education in the current Czech curriculum. We also briefly present the existing sociological and disciplinarily didactic research on the issue, primarily those carried out in the Czech Republic. Part two presents the methodology of the research, and analyses the results of the two parallel surveys that formed a part of the research project *Multicultural aspects of education in humanities and their reflections in the historical consciousness of young students*.¹ The concluding part of the text sets out some recommendations for an optimisation of the teaching of history at primary and secondary schools.

The main aim of the project conducted in 2011 was to identify the changes in national identity and attitudes towards members of ethnic minorities living in the Czech Republic, and towards individual European nations since the Czech Republic's joined the EU. We also sought to uncover the multicultural aspects of young students' historical consciousness in different regions of the Czech Republic (comparison the

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results of the research in different regions), and to capture the influence of the way history and other humanities are taught at schools on the formation of multicultural attitudes and values.

Having analysed the project intention, we selected a blended research approach and the implementation of two parallel surveys (*European consciousness in young Czech students after the association with the EU* survey, and *Survey into historical consciousness and aspects of multiculturalism in relation to school education*), as a single questionnaire could never encompass the entire issue and its scope would exceed the acceptable number of questions. In this way we were able to expand the scope of the research to cover the broader context of intercultural aspects of the formation of the civil and historical consciousness.

The sample group involved in the two surveys was relatively large and included 2,947 respondents, which renders the projects fairly exceptional in the Czech history didactics. Up to now research projects have dealt with the influence exerted by the interpretation of history in the primary educational medium upon students' attitudes. As we believe that there are scores of other factors, especially the way the subject is presented by teachers, we addressed not only various groups of young students, but also teachers.

The sample group consisted of respondents from nine regions of the Czech Republic. The first survey addressed ninth grade pupils from primary schools (126), third year pupils of secondary vocational schools teaching history (111), and third year pupils of secondary general schools (218).

The second survey included a total of 2,524 respondents, 710 of whom were primary school pupils (aged 14–15), 624 were grammar school students (aged 17–18), 486 students of secondary vocational schools (aged 17–18), 347 university students studying history education and 257 history teachers at primary and secondary schools.

In order to obtain the most comprehensive possible picture of the issue, we opted for a blended research combining qualitative (focus groups and in-depth interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) procedures. The results were statistically processed using the special *Remark Office OMR* and *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* programmes.

The empirical survey *European consciousness in young Czech students following the association with the EU* carried out with a nine-year delay confirmed that Czech youth had relatively stable attitudes towards the USA as the crucial factor influencing global events. At the same time, it shows that young people reflect on and are aware of the importance of Europe or the EU's dominant countries and their impact upon life in the Czech Republic. The survey also proves that young Czech students have stable attitudes towards other European nations. Young Czechs view their neighbours from Slovakia most favourably, whereas Germans are still perceived as the least favourite nation. The particular properties ascribed as typical or untypical of members of the European nations included in the survey also show a notable stability. The respondents mostly ascribed positive characteristics to the individual nations. In this context, the attitudes held by young Czech students towards inhabitants of other European countries appear friendly. Therefore, present-day youth may be described as multicultural and tolerant towards the differences of other nations. They also perceive the outlook for coexistence and mutual relations with neighbouring countries as positive. On the other hand, we must point out the insufficient levels of tolerance towards some minorities living in the Czech Republic, especially towards Romany people. The deterioration of the image of these citizens in the eyes of the students, as our surveys have shown, is alarming given the effort to find ways of coexistence with this minority and its integration into the Czech society.

The heterostereotypes of European nations are, except for Slovaks, characterised by a lower number of features, or are even limited to two or one significant qualities (Poles are viewed as devious, Russians as alcoholics). Here we can find a certain rigidity in the image of certain nations in young people caused by historical rather than their own experience. The Czech self-image contains a number of positive features also ascribed to the "ideal European". Czech students are aware of the high value of education, tolerance and friendliness for efficient coexistence of all Europeans within a single community. Our youth are also capable of self-criticism and willing to consider the flaws in the Czech national character.

Young people are aware of the importance of historical events for the gradual drawing together of European nations. They also credit foreign and national figures (such as V. Havel and T. G. Masaryk) for the peaceful coexistence of European nations. They have relatively realistic notions of what EU membership has brought the Czech Republic. The young generation is aware that nothing is either black or

white, and are able to reflect the advantages as well as drawbacks of EU membership. They especially fear dangers related to migration and immigrants, and also disapprove of the complicated administration required by EU bodies. On the other hand, they intend to make use of all the benefits provided by the EU (better security and economic advantages). Therefore, a majority of them wish to remain in the union. However, the further deepening of this integration also causes concerns, as shown by the respondents' vehement rejection of the Euro becoming the future currency of the Czech Republic. Most of the youth consider themselves to be Europeans, but they also respect national traditions and acknowledge their national identity.

Nonetheless, the respondents did not manifest in-depth knowledge about the process of the formation of the European structures or current issues in the EU. They admitted that school played a very important role, ranking third after the Internet and mass media. Civic education and basic humanities were the subjects that provided the most information on history, integration and the EU. However, the level of their actual knowledge lags behind the contents of the textbooks of history, civic, education and basic humanities. We believe that this area suffers from the gravest difficulties.

Even now, nine years after the country joined the EU, emphasising the European dimension in the teaching of history and humanities appears more desirable than ever before. We will never truly become Europeans unless we know Europe, and knowledge is the single most important precondition for understanding. The content of school education should not focus merely on historical facts related to the EU and its evolution. It is essential that students identify with the values lying at the heart of the community. Students should also be made aware of the European identity and be encouraged to observe current events in the EU, as well as this country's relations with the union. The task played by civil education is simply irreplaceable in this respect. Stressing the desirable values and attitudes in the European dimension of education is important if students are to develop tolerance and acquire a capacity for communicating with people of different nationalities. Therefore, it is crucial that topics related to European consciousness should not play a marginal role in the Czech educational system, and that they should be allotted sufficient time within the curriculum and receive adequate attention from teachers.

As outlined in the selected partial results of the *Research into the historical consciousness and aspects of multiculturalism in relation to school education*, Czech school pupils' and students' historical consciousness has changed in many ways since the implementation of the *Youth and History* international research. The young generation is mainly interested in world history (as opposed to 1995/1996, when the national history prevailed), which is in a certain opposition to their teachers' interest.

The European dimension of history education that was the current topic of educational theories at the dawn of the 21st century is chiefly favoured by university students. Given the current trends in history didactics, the survey showed the relatively low interest in regional history; this trend was especially apparent in grammar school students' answers. Respondents showed by far the least interest in the history of broader, cross-border territories (e.g. Silesia, the so-called Euroregions, Central Europe). This finding should inspire history teachers to bring in the regional perspective more frequently as this topic allows for the multiperspective approach and focus on the history of intercultural contacts.

Regarding specific topics, the history of everyday life is relatively popular, which renders this area suitable for an in-depth analysis of intercultural issues, gender topics, the history of ethnic minorities, etc. As the 20th century is by far one of the most interesting periods in human history, it holds a tremendous motivation potential for an accentuation of intercultural topics.

It is irrefutable that respect for the important representatives of ethnic minorities living in this country largely contributes to a more positive perception of the given ethnic group. However, more than 80% of the respondents, including history teachers at primary and secondary schools, were unable to name any historic individual from the Slovak, German, Polish, Jewish or Romany minorities.

The respondents consider folklore festivals to be the best form of presenting the history and culture of ethnic minorities living in this country; they also share a positive view of special sections in textbooks and other publications. Most respondents view bilingual names used in ethnically mixed areas as useless.

Regarding the experience of personal contact, the respondents rank Slovaks the best. Poles are also seen positively. The prevailing perception of the Vietnamese and Ukrainian people is neutral; the most negative answers were recorded with the Romany.

As regards the issue of forced assimilation of various ethnic groups (the ban on Romany migration in 1958), the majority of respondents believe that legislation cannot induce a change in the minorities' lifestyles. This attitude is in accord with the current, so-called transcultural conception of intercultural education.

Summarising our findings concerning the current conception of teaching history at schools, we can say that intercultural topics tend to attract more attention at schools in regions with numerous ethnic minorities. The sensitivity of Czech-German relations is reflected more in places where contact with our strongest and most influential neighbour is more frequent. Issues concerning the Polish minority are only felt to be important in the Těšín region, whereas they escape attention elsewhere, even in borderline regions. Jewish history is undoubtedly the most popular intercultural topic and is even mapped in the latest history textbook, which devotes large sections to the history of this culturally intriguing ethnic group. We were surprised to learn that history lessons in the Ostrava Region only contained brief and sparse mention of the past of various ethnic groups, even though the region used to be inhabited by Germans, Jews, Poles and then Slovaks and Romany people. Had we targeted the analysed items of our questionnaire at primary school pupils, we might have gathered a different set of data. After all, there is a primary school with a regional focus in Ostrava. The problem may stem from grammar school teachers' efforts to prepare their students for the school leaving examination (*maturita*) or admission examinations to universities and colleges; hence their preference for general and Czech history, as these can be expected to be covered in tests and oral interviews. These examinations largely overlook the issues of regional history and intercultural links. Teachers also find the number of history lessons per week insufficient and consciously play certain topics down.

The research results concerning the use of multiperspectivity in the teaching of history show that a certain shift in the accent on the preferred principle has already taken place. Most teachers attempt to bring about this change, mainly in regard to events of crucial importance; controversial events in the regional history are included at least in the immediately involved locations. Nonetheless, we still remain skeptical, as willingness to complete the questionnaire was shown mainly by elite teachers, i.e. teachers who participate in training courses and summer schools, through which we were able to address them and through the History Teachers'

Association. It is likely that the current practice of employing the multiperspective approach is more reliably reflected by the percentages declared by the students, or is at best somewhere between the two.

The concluding part of the paper articulates certain priorities that social sciences and humanities didactics should focus on:

It is essential to develop a quality disciplinary didactic research as the foundation for further development of the theory of European education. The research should mainly identify the current ways of implementing the cross cutting topic of Education towards thinking in the European and global context in civil education, history and geography. It should also focus on shaping teachers' and students' attitudes, raising their awareness of and interest in European topics, and selected features of regional, national and European identity. It should improve the students' knowledge of the political, economic, legal and cultural-historical context of the European integration process. It is also desirable that we examine and evaluate educational materials and aids (mainly civil education, humanities, history and geography textbooks) from the perspective of the European dimension.

Didactics experts and pedagogues are faced with the immensely important task of creating a balanced conception of European education including not only the cognitive elements, but also attitudes and skills, on the grounds of which the current curriculum (framework educational programmes) may be reviewed. It is also important to arrive at a broader definition of the European dimension including both institutional and political development and the sphere of culture (in the broadest sense, not merely the "highbrow" culture), to deepen the intercultural aspects of education and the multiperspective approach towards interpretations of the shared past, as well as current issues important to the European population.

Education towards democratic European citizenship should become an integral part of transculturally-conceived intercultural education. One of the ways which may effectively lead to this objective may lie in an integration of the current cross-cutting topics of Multicultural education and Education to Thinking in a European and Global Context in a single revised cross cutting topic while respecting the overlaps with the Education of the Democratic Citizen and Personality and Social Education.

The requirements outlined above are unthinkable without more intensive collaboration between didactics experts (including participation in international research teams) in this area (creation of and research into textbooks and methodologies, exchange of experience with teaching the European dimension, comparative analyses of individual national models of the European dimension in individual countries).

Primary and secondary school teachers should devote much more attention to the European dimension, as it appears to be present only in civic education or fundamentals of humanities. We believe that the largest room for improvement is implementation in the teaching of history. The research indicates the need to enhance the knowledge component of education, since the respondents did not display in-depth knowledge about the process of the formation of the European structures or current issues in the EU. Undoubtedly, we will never truly become Europeans unless we know Europe. Knowledge is the single most important precondition for understanding. The content of school education should not focus merely on historical facts related to the EU and its evolution; it is also essential that students identify with the values lying at the heart of the community. Students should also be made aware of the European identity and be encouraged to observe current events in the EU, as well as this country's relations with the union. Stressing the desirable values and attitudes in the European dimension of education is important if students are to develop their tolerance and acquire a capacity for communicating with people of different nationalities.

The research also shows that regional history does not enjoy much popularity among students and teachers, although this geographic dimension offers an opportunity to present the history of intercultural relations. It is desirable to enhance not only local history (especially in regions with significant ethnic minorities in the past or present), but also the history of the border regions and Euroregions. We do not know whether this lack of interest is caused by the small amount of time allocated to these aspects in history lessons, which could mean that students have no idea how stimulating and captivating regional history may be.

Regional and intercultural topics provide an opportunity to employ the multiperspective principle in history teaching at schools. At present, teachers tend to employ this principle with the milestones of Czech history, and leave issues

only concerning a part of the territory (e.g. the Těšín region conflict) largely unnoticed.

The research also shows that the history of ethnic minorities living in the country, as well as other social and cultural groups (women, children, religious groups), are dealt with only marginally (for example, there is a lack of knowledge of the most important representatives of these groups). The relation between the quantity of information in the basic educational medium and students' knowledge is more than obvious (teachers themselves declared that they paid great attention to the Jewish history and culture, which was reflected by their students' knowledge).

In spite of this, the continuous expansion of textbook content is not the ideal way forward, as the same goals can be achieved through suitable methodical approaches, mainly methods of learning through "discovering" with emphasis on personal experience, methods enabling intercultural comprehension and developing the students' independent and critical thinking, project-based education, oral history, family history, gender topics and media education.

The results of this empirical research may be a source of inspiration for teachers, and help them find areas to focus on when teaching European issues. It may also serve as a source of inspiration for further research in this domain.