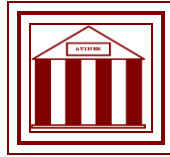


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ATINER's Conference Paper Series
SOC2013-0515

**The Formation of Hybrid
Identities in an Ethnically and
Religiously Diverse Society**

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN 2241-2891

2/09/2013

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ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Stare, J. (2013) "The Formation of Hybrid Identities in an Ethnically and Religiously Diverse Society" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: SOC2013-0515.

The Formation of Hybrid Identities in an Ethnically and Religiously Diverse Society

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Abstract

This paper describes an interaction between the ethnical and religious diversity in a society that historically has been developed as a maximal borderland territory (Momoh, 1989) with a high performance of the cultural interaction. The interaction between the ethnical and religious diversity promote the emergence of hybrid identities containing signs of ethnicity and religion, characterising the appropriate form of the cultural diversity in the society. This paper contains changed concept of the hybrid identity, developed not only from the mix of ethnicities, but also from the mix of ethnical and religious signs that are found in the society. Considering the ethnically and religiously diverse situation in the society, the key question raised in this paper is how the interaction between the ethnical and religious diversity unveils in the construction of a hybrid identity of a person.

In the theoretical part of the paper, the construction process of hybrid identities is analysed in a diverse environment, considering the concepts of the cultural identity in the literature, the application of the concepts of diversity and its understanding in sociology, the ethnical and religious aspects of the development of diversity, the conditions of the development of identities, as well as the development of an identity from the social constructionism perspective. In the empirical part of the research, characteristics of hybrid identities are shown, analysing the discourses in the in-depth interviews with members of religious organizations.

Keywords: ethnical and religious diversity, cultural diversity, hybrid identity, social constructionism

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1. Introduction

In the social sciences, the territorial borders are commonly understood in the frameworks of administrative divisions, politics, economics, migration, and diversity. The seemingly simple territorial division of the states means not only geographical positions, different history, and political systems, but also the differences in the ethnic composition, cultural diversity and other forms of diversity. One of the most known diversity researchers, Steven Vertovec, has said that we are living in the era that is pervaded with discourses about diversity (Vertovec, 2012). That is why, on the one hand, we should be able to recognise the distinct forms of diversity, and on the other hand, we should be aware of the common and unifying elements to be united in diversity as it is said in the European Union motto.

Globalisation processes have influenced the actualisation of the issues of migration, diversity and the social identity in the social sciences in the last few decades. The focus of globalization has made the concepts of diversity and the changing social identity matter-of-course. Nevertheless, globalisation is historically a deep, long-term process (Pieterse, 2009). It is seen as a historical and dialectical process.

Currently, in the academic literature, the globalisation and its impact on the social processes is seen in the today's context, not paying sufficient attention to the historical migration and the historically emerging diversity. For the wider assessment of globalisation and cross-cultural migration, it is necessary to identify not only the societies, which are currently experiencing rapid migration and diversity, but also the societies in which the cultural diversity, as the result of historical migration, is the value inherited through generations, and uniquely affects the construction of the social identity of the people living in the diverse environment.

The paper describes the specific context of the historical diversity in Latvia's (EU) second largest city Daugavpils, analysing it in the framework of social constructionism. Considering the ethnically and religiously diverse situation in Daugavpils, a research was made, trying to understand the interaction between the forms of the ethnical and religious diversity in Daugavpils. In the pilot study, described in the paper, the qualitative approach of sociology, the in-depth interviews with the representatives of religious organizations (with different nationalities), and the method of discourse analysis of the transcribed interviews were used. The key question raised in this paper was how the interaction between the ethnical and religious diversity unveils in the construction of a hybrid identity of a person.

2. Area of Research

One of examples of historically determined cultural diversity is Latvia. Latvia has experienced numerous political statuses and regime changes, the occupation by the Soviet regime, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the recovery

of independence, and the integration into the European Union. Despite the political changes in Latvia, the territorial border lines practically have not changed since the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia in 1918. Latvia borders Lithuania, Belarus, Russia and Estonia. The neighbouring countries historically have influenced the development of the cultural diversity in the border regions of Latvia, especially in Latgale that borders Lithuania, Belarus and Russia.

The ethnical structure in various regions of Latvia is different, but mostly complex. The most complex ethnical structure is observed in the Latgale region where the largest regional city Daugavpils has developed as a multi-ethnic area. It has a wide variety of ethnic groups: Russians, Latvians, Polish, Ukrainians, Jews, Belarusians and others. According to the information of The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the total number of population in the city in the year 2011 is 93 312 (Latvians – 18 447, Russians – 50 013, Polish – 13 278, Ukrainians – 1 795, Belarusians – 6 674, Lithuanians – 891, Others – 2 214). In addition to the inherited multi-ethnicity, there are many different religious groups: about 90% of the officially registered religious organisations in Latvia, including Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, Baptists, Oldbelievers and new religious movements.

The current research of the Latvian cultural diversity is mostly focused on the topics of the national identity, the integration of ethnic minority groups, and the globalisation and its impact on the society. Little attention has been paid to the existing forms of the cultural diversity and the interaction between them. There is no research on the interaction between the diversity forms and practices, which refer to person's ethnic and religious membership, the interaction between the ethnic and religious diversity and its influence on the identity, and the changes in the discourses of the society.

3. The Concept of the Diversity

The concept of the diversity is one of the most frequently used and discussed concepts in social sciences. It has been used in different meanings and contexts of all disciplines in social sciences (Kivisto, 2002).

The concept of diversity emerged in early 60's in the United States, and initially was used for the purpose of the anti-discrimination campaign whose aim was a fair treatment, legal protection, and equal opportunities for different minorities (in terms of race, sex, and disability). Along with the emergence of diversity in the United States, it began diffusing as a trend around the world (Vertovec, 2012). In Europe, first international conventions on anti-discrimination emerged in 1997 (starting with the Treaty of Amsterdam), suspending the discrimination of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, and sexual orientation. These categories extended the meaning of diversity; however they did not include the concept of cultural diversity.

The importance of the cultural diversity was emphasized in 2000 in the Declaration on Cultural Diversity by the Council of Europe that defined the

concept of cultural diversity and the concepts around it: the cultural groups, the cultural practices, and the cultural content expressed by the groups. However, the definition of the cultural content is vague as it depends on the specific cultural values and properties of the particular society, typically determined by the ethnical and linguistic composition. Latvia is one of the countries where the specific properties of the cultural diversity are determined by both ethnical and religious values.

3. The Meaning of the Identity and the Social Constructionism

A perfect research perspective for studying the diverse identities is the social constructionism. In the perspective of the social constructionism, social phenomena are understood as a result of interaction of certain social and historical processes, which are viewed discursively. The knowledge of the reality is socially relative, associated with a certain social context, to be analysed in detail. So the concept of identity is designed by the existing discourses in the culture, created in the process of communication with other individuals. According to Vivienne Burr (2006), a person's identity is formed and composed of different „threads” of the person – the age, the social status, the ethnicity, the race, the sexual orientation, the gender, the religious affiliation, etc. threads (Burr, 2006).

Any part of a person's identity consists of discourses that are reflected in the current culture. Each thread of our identity has a limited amount of discourses existing in the culture, out of which we can choose the most suitable for ourselves, when constructing our identity. Thus, the identity of the person is in continuous process of construction, and the origins of the parts of the identity are rooted in the social and cultural reality, not in the personal character of the individual.

The identity of a person is a component of constantly changing social reality; therefore discourses forming the identity are closely related to the practices of the society. Every social phenomenon, also a person's identity is seen as a historical process and the result of the social interaction. Our knowledge and our identity is the result of a certain social context.

4. The Concept of the Hybrid Identity

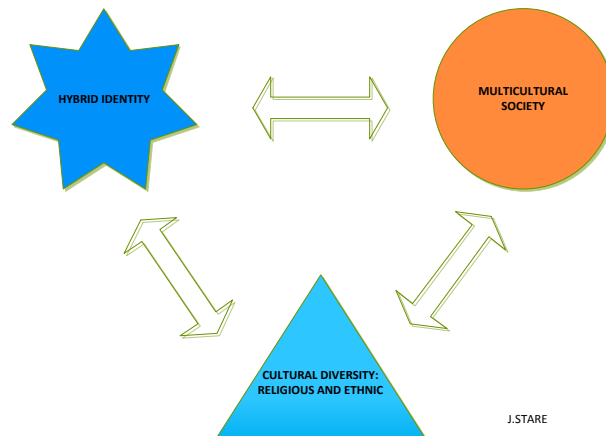
According to Smith, the historical and dialectical process of the cultural globalisation tends to produce one of the three outcomes: differentiation, assimilation, or hybridization. The process of hybridization is a process where “forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms and in new practices” (Pieterese, 2004). Robertson proposes that the hybrid identity is a reflexive process between the local and global (Robertson, 1992), where elements of a culture or multiple cultures are incorporated to create a new hybrid culture. This understanding of the hybridisation of identity

is basically connected to the globalisation and massive inflow of migrant groups. Gandhi has pointed, that hybridity can be found in cultures that have been destabilised by colonisation (Gandhi, 1998). But it can be seen in the perspective of the historical diversity (as the result of a historical migration), not just in the perspectives of globalisation and colonisation.

The concept of hybridity has roots in the hard sciences, as well as in the social sciences. Hybrid is something that is made by combining two or more different elements. In the context of the social identity of a person, the hybridisation is understood as a blend of cultural categories into one identity (Lo, 2002), the cultural intermixture (Gilroy, 1993). It is a cross-category process and a supervision of hierarchy (Pieterse, 2000).

In the academic literature, there are several types of the understanding of hybrid identities: identities that exist across the borders, duality, gender, new identities, the diaspora, the internal colony (Smith, 2008). Most commonly the hybrid identities are expected to consist of two different parts. In this paper and in the context of the current research area, the hybrid identities are defined consisting of at least two different cultural categories and their types (variations of ethnicity and religious affiliation). An example that is considered in this paper is a hybrid identity that consists of religiousness and ethnicity, where the types of religious and ethnical membership differ. The society and its multicultural context influence both the identity construction and the diversity formation, likewise the cultural diversity influence the development of a multicultural society. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



6. The Methods and the Research

During the process of the development of doctoral thesis, author found that identity of Daugavpils citizens consist of religious and ethnical membership. For the aim to understand the hibridity of the identity construction, in the research was used qualitative method of sociology, the in-depth interviews

with 10 members of religious organisations. Interviews was transcribed and analysed with the discourse analyse method. During the interviews, following assumptions were raised:

- Religion in Daugavpils plays a vital role in maintaining ethnic diversity;
- Cultural diversity has a big impact on why there is developed religious pluralism and tolerance among religious organizations;
- Hybrid identities are forming as a result of social interaction and within the ethnic and religious discourses existing in the environment;
- New, hybrid identities forms in a close interaction of ethnic and religious characteristics;
- Cultural diversity in Daugavpils consists of two main components – religious and ethnic membership.

6.1. The Results of the Discourse Analyse of Interviews

During the in-depth interviews was observed the appearance of discourse of the role of religion in preservance of ethnic culture - religious organizations are able to satisfy the desire of local ethnic groups for religious practices in their native language (in Daugavpils, all religious organizations are offering religious practices in at least two languages (Latvian, Russian and other languages)). Persons are indirectly indicating that the use of language in religious practice helps to maintain the cultural values in everyday life.

An important issue in the context of cultural diversity is tolerance between cultural groups (religious groups). An example from interview, to the question: "What do you think, whether there is religious and ethnic tolerance in Daugavpils?" The person says, "In my opinion, because there are many of cultural groups, there is more tolerance, and it is easier to accept new things coming". There are emerging discourses of tolerance.

During the in-depths interviews and analysing them, was observed hybridity of social identity of locals. Self-understanding of locals is constructed from components of signs of ethnic and religious membership. Hybrid identities consist of aspects of affiliation to ethnical and religious groups and it shows the everyday practice of local society.

Examples from in-depth interviews with polish person and Russian person who are living in Daugavpils: on the question about ethnic belonging, person replies: "I am a Catholic" or "I am Orthodox", thus uniting in their own identity forms of cultural diversity, which are available in the society.

Examples from in-depth interviews with Latvian-born polish person, living in Daugavpils: on the question: what is your country of origin, pole responds "Latvia is a homeland, but Poland is my motherland, where my culture and religious traditions come from."

During the interviews, it was observed that hybridisation process of identity is basically formed from the inherited traditions and cultural signs of

family, for example, religious membership, traditions, which are based on the ethnicity, use of language/linguistics.

It is observed that the multi-ethnic family is a perfect model for formation of hybrid identity. In addition, it was observed that one of the components of ethnic belonging is religious belonging.

Additionally, influence of multi-ethnic/multi-religious family on the identity is expressed in more tolerant view of different ethnic and religious groups. The same applies to the person's daily practices, in terms of use of language, practicing any religious rituals.

An example from in-depth interview with Latvian person, which has a multi-ethnic identity; on the question - please define your ethnicity, the person answered: "It's complicated. I was born in Poland, lived in Daugavpils. I have parents - mom is half pole, half - latvian, and father is half pole and half all the other nationalities.. Because the grandfather is half Jew and half german, it makes it all difficult. Speaking about my religious affiliation - grandmother was a catholic, so everyone in our family is catholic too." Such opinion confirms the importance of ethnic and religious interaction on the construction of person's identity.

Characteristic feature of the religious organizations in Daugavpils - split of parishes by the ethnic groups (in Latvian, Latgalian, Russian, Polish, potentially – Belorussians).

Despite the fact that there is possibility to practice religion in different languages, for the person with hybrid identity use of specifical language is not important.

On the question about the language of religious practice, Latvian with polish roots, but born and raised in Daugavpils, responds: "At the moment I live in Riga and choose to worship in English. As in all other languages services take place in inconvenient time: either too early or too late. That's the only reason why, no other language.."

7. Conclusions

The Main conclusions are:

1. Religion plays a significant role in maintaining the ethnic diversity in the Latvia's border region Latgale.
2. The cultural diversity has an impact on the religious pluralism and tolerance among religious organizations.
3. Hybrid identities are constructed in the process of social interaction and in the environment of existing cultural discourses.
4. Hybrid identities are constructed in the process of interaction of ethnical and religious practices.
5. The definition of cultural diversity is context specific.

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