

# **INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION IN THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION IN RELATION TO STRENGTHENING OF REGIONAL SECURITY**

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## **Abstract**

Developing of the international dimension of education assumes future development of every society. This paper analyzes the current development of the international component of higher education in the Republic of Croatia (University of Osijek) and methodological approach using a comparative analysis of the situation at MIT University in Skopje.

This paper analyzes the intercultural dimension in the process of education, in relation to the strengthening of regional security, by using the questionnaire. The survey includes questions related to the importance of conducting classes in a foreign language in relation to attracting of foreign students and teachers, as well as the issues such as the active involvement of all stakeholders (students, teachers, administrative staff) in the process of internationalization of higher education institutions.

The paper, as well as the research, is based on the following hypothesis "strengthening the internationalization of higher education, along with the active involvement of all stakeholders in the process contributes to the reduction of conflict, thus strengthening regional security. It can be seen through indicators of the degree of acceptance of cultural diversity and reached levels of strengthening of individual capabilities of students, teachers and administrative staff in the perception of the real sources of threat to security through the perception of the level of intercultural education impact on regional security."

The methodological approach and analysis of the survey results represent a comparative analysis of the degree of social distance in relation to the acceptance of foreign students through the lowest and the highest level of social relations (Bogardus scale), where we assessed the degree of social distance among students on the basis of cultural barriers. The second crossing data in the study is to determine the degree of perception of threat to

regional security on the basis of the scale and consent given by the respondents (10 levels of consent).

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**Keywords:** Internationalization, higher education, interculturality, region, security

## **Introduction**

Discussions on regional security and generally, speaking about security issues are interesting topics of many theoretical and research debates among scientists. A security debate on a contemporary security model represents a very broad scientific field. Within its framework all possible sources of threats to security are being discussed, i.e. factors on different levels and different conditions that affect all levels of security.

Such approach to regional security gives the opportunity to look back at less noticeable factors that influence safety. Usually, when we talk about security and sources that threaten it, we are talking about traditional sources or contemporary sources relating to terrorism, non-state actors, accidents and disasters, radicalism, political and economic instability, ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts and other sources.

Therefore, this work has a tendency to open a new debate. The debate, which points to a new source of threat to security and a new factor affecting the raising of the level of endangerment. This new debate is related to the issue of education as a source of threat to security. In this paper, we discuss the intercultural dimension of education as a factor affecting the regional security.

The theoretical approach is based on two factors determined as the impact of higher education through social influence in creation of interculturalism, being a model of security and of reducing conflicts through intercultural education in the context of modern security model and correlation with education. The interaction of several factors affecting the safety and security are present in the objective model regarding the introduction of intercultural studies and the process of intercultural education, as well as sociological process of interpersonal relationships and building of a tolerant person. Such approach to intercultural education realizes its influence on later perceptions in relation to the sources of threats to regional security, as well as to the creation of a common perception and interests of countering the risks and threats to the security of the region. International dimension of intercultural education is the next, higher level in the theoretical approach to security studies. Thus structured intercultural studies, connected to safety studies represent contribution, which is emphasized in this paper.

The scientific approach is to test the attitudes of students in two universities in Croatia and in Macedonia; a control variable used are students coming from other countries who are studying in two mentioned universities.

The basis for the determination of the future organization of intercultural education are the results, actually the attitudes of students in relation to their perception of security threats to the region, as well as their personal tolerance of peers who are studying and who come from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Respective attitudes should not be treated solely on intercultural studies, primarily because they refer to a very small portion of students in universities, but should show the direction in which we should move in organizing curricula and (non)teaching activities. Such approach will enable the international approach in relation to education and comprehensive approach to preserving security in the region.

Possible future steps are discussed in the final part of this paper, in which we discuss and understand the theoretical debate and research results. So we will be able to give a more complete scientific conclusions regarding the issues that we set in this paper.

### **Higher education and its social impact – creation of interculturalism as a security model**

General understanding of the international dimension of higher education is a topic that attracts the attention of entire academic community, both in Croatia and in the region. From a historical point of view, bearing in mind that in different periods of time the international component of education has changed; according to Jane Knight and Hans de Wit the context of internationality has changed too.

The context is now different from that prevailing after World War II and in the period 1970 -1980. The immediate post-war period was heavily influenced by the war and a strong idealistic connotation of peace and mutual understanding. The second period, as outlined above, focused more on the developing countries with North-North cooperation between north-north marginalized to a small sector within diplomatic relations. The third period is characterized by the emphasis on economic arguments the economy to promote international cooperation and exchange in higher education. However, rationales focusing on creating a common regional identity have also become important, expressed for instance in the emphasis by the European Commission on the European dimension of higher education".<sup>69</sup>

The last statement attempts to create a common space of higher education in Europe and has a special significance for the region to

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<sup>69</sup> Jane Knight, Hans de Wit: *Strategies for internationalisation of higher education: historical and conceptual perspectives*, Uni Kassel, pp 9

overcome the "post-war " and creating a worldview that will be more than regional one, i.e. European and global. In this sense, any imposition of religious domination and of national too, loses its meaning because the interculturality gives the chance to get insight into the else, the different and has been accepted as such.

However, parallel with the creation of intercultural there is fostering of national, it still survives, neither imposing, nor dominating. In place of the domination of one religion and one nation comes the intercultural. Through getting to know each other, the notion of being different and by accepting of the other and the different one, the potential subject of conflict is being sensitized.

In Southeastern Europe the international relations are often perceived through the prism of "post-war". In this context, the sphere of education, as well as the relations within its scope have to be viewed, its stakeholders - students and teachers who are its inseparable part and an important aspect in the development of intercultural conflict prevention. Taking into account the further development of the economic, political and cultural terms, overcoming the "post-war" and conflict become imperatives.

Today, in the context of the aforementioned European dimension, the international dimension of higher education system in the Republic of Croatia is developing. During the negotiations for accession to the European Union the Croatian higher education system has been to a great extent harmonized with the systems of the EU Member States. The provisions that encourage the internationalization of the educational process and fully support its international aspect have been incorporated in the Croatian regulations governing the issue of higher education. It is quite natural, since the EU accession implies further development of international cooperation on multiple levels and thus the internationalization too.

As the internationalization is immanent to a modern society which contemporary academic community tends to develop, every individual should endeavor to achieve the notion of internationality. With the introduction of the Bologna process, internationalization is becoming one of the priorities of the positioning of each institution of higher education in the region, including the Croatian universities.

According to Spajić - Vrkaš (1993 ) the basic task of interculturalism in the sphere of education is to make young people aware of their national identity, but also to make them tolerant by developing a sense of belonging to their community and to mankind as a whole. The author further states that inter-culturalism in education aims to develop new, more

tolerant forms of human behavior in everyday life, which includes changes in awareness and attitudes of people.<sup>70</sup>

The examples from the past testify that the position and role of the university is one of the indicators of the degree of democratic development of a separate country. Also, the university, being an institution of civil society, plays an active role in the process of building a modern democracy. The university and higher education institutions have not only a function of education, i.e. vocational training for students for their future profession, but also they form open-minded people and morally responsible persons, who are the main actors in the democratic process.<sup>71</sup>

The possibilities directed towards the internationalization of the University of Osijek are great and the EC programs opened to the Republic of Croatia (University of Osijek) in collaboration with the international partner institutions enable organized and more serious engagement in the international aspect of the development of university activities. Although the above mentioned started ten years ago and during this period the number of foreign partners has been considerably increased, it can not be said that the internationalization developed enough to attract foreign students and teachers. Thus, the internationalization of the curriculum has become one of the pillars of sustainable democracy for overcoming regional conflicts in the broadest sense of the word.

It is necessary to further expand and deepen activities with international partner institutions in Europe and the world and to encourage the mobility of students, teachers and non-teaching staff within the EC programs, as these activities are considered priority areas of development of international cooperation in the Osijek University and are an essential part of its development strategy.

The University of Osijek, which aims to develop as a modern European university, recognizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to bilateral and multilateral cooperation. In this sense, the main feature of international activities in the University of Osijek is further development of cooperation based on interdisciplinarity. The internationalization of the social, cultural and educational dimensions of students, teachers and administrative staff to be positioned in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) implies further strengthening of cooperation on an interdisciplinary principle that would be realized through cooperation with embassies, institutes that deal with international cooperation, language

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<sup>70</sup> Anđelka Peko, Vesnica Mlinarević, Ranka Jindra: *Interkulturalno obrazovanje učitelja – što i kako proučavati*, UDK 371.13 Educational challenges in multicultural communities, University of Osijek, Osijek, 2009, pp133

<sup>71</sup> *Strategija Sveučilista Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku 2011 - 2020.*, Sveučiliste u Osijeku, 2012. pp 18

institutes and institutions dealing with regional and cross-border cooperation.<sup>72</sup>

### **Role and importance of teacher training for the development of internationalization**

Since the internationalization in the sphere of education is a process in which an active involvement of all stakeholders is expected, the teachers are gaining substantial position in the revised curricula.

Traditionally, primarily foreign language teachers would tackle topics related to something *international* and *intercultural*, but today, aiming at reducing of security threats and at international positioning of regional universities, innovated curricula with the intercultural dimension should attract more foreign students. In the process of international positioning of universities teachers in all fields of sciences are expected to develop competences that would enable active and ongoing engagement within this issue.

At the University of Osijek (Faculty of Education) a study on the representation of intercultural content in certain courses has been conducted. The results of quantitative and qualitative analyzes indicate that out of 104 courses in the five-year teacher program only 21 courses implement intercultural education.<sup>73</sup>

The initiative to analyze the curriculum is excellent, but in order to fully develop internationalization and to strengthen the competences of teachers at the University of Osijek, it would be good to analyze other areas of sciences in the University of Osijek, first of all the programs in the field of social sciences, humanities and arts.<sup>74</sup>

As the University participates in the Erasmus mobility program only five years, it is expected that in the years to come, there will be a higher level of international recognizability of the curriculum, as well as even more courses dealing with intercultural issues and conducted in a foreign language.

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<sup>72</sup> *Vizija i misija međunarodne suradnje na Sveučilistu u Osijeku 2011-2015.*, Sveučiliste u Osijeku, 2011. pp 4

<sup>73</sup> Anđelka Peko, Vesnica Mlinarević, Ranka Jindra: *Interkulturalno obrazovanje učitelja – što i kako proučavati*, UDK 371.13, Educational challenges in multicultural communities, University of Osijek, Osijek, pp131

<sup>74</sup> The Department of Cultural Studies, The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Academy of Arts are considered leading units of the University of Osijek to develop the intercultural curricula.

## **Security and conflicts – theoretical approach to risks and threats as contemporary security model of regions and its connectivity to the educational model**

Endangering safety through a number of different risks and threats in the period of the last twenty years can be characterized as a dynamic process, which indicates the need for continuous adjustment of the security model. This security model shows a continuing intention to the territorial non-restricting and as such is beyond the scope of state, strongly affecting regional security. In this modern security environment, the nation-state is not a sole reference object of security; the security refers more to its citizens. The basic question that arises in this context is the following: "who needs security and who is at risk?"

If you want to give the correct answer to this question, another question is to be put, referring to sources of danger or "what threatens the security of the referential security object?" Seeking answers to these questions in order to establish a theoretical model of regional security, we can say that the citizens are those who need safety and so to say, through them the safety is reflected in the country. Therefore, the commitment is the source of threat to citizens and defining risks and threats to security.

Aligning theoretical model of security with the needs of this paper, it can be said that there are regional sources of threat, one of them being exactly the sphere of education, actually the wrong education policy of exclusion of national educational model that does not include interculturalism and regional educational cooperation. Inclusion of the intercultural dimension in the educational process of higher education encompasses several aspects that influence the perception of safety and also directly affect the perception of threat or occurrence of risks and threats to security. In this context, an important aspect is the influence of religious, economic and social status of both students and teachers, as well as the university status, ethnicity, historical heritage in relation to current and historical conflicts and conflict behavior, psychological attitudes regarding fears of conflict and social contact during the study period.

Exactly these effects can be observed through research by using Bogardus scale of social distance, whereby we can determine the level of acceptance of foreign students at universities and then look at the impact of the strengthening of regional security. Another aspect is positivism in intercultural dimension and creation of a network connection on institutional and personal level, as well as perception, creation and maintenance of common values.

Supporting shared values such as education for democratization of citizens is, intercultural education and human rights education, including

education on gender equality, contemporary intercultural studies include the area of religion, especially in public education.<sup>75</sup>

The main goal of education based on interculturality as a part of shared values is the creation of so-called sustainable democracies, or sustainable development. This objective of intercultural education achieves a high degree of influence on security issues, creating a democratic security through sustainable security, which on a minimum level provides the basic survival of the community. Certainly, the objective of intercultural education is not to maintain the minimum level of sustainable security; on the contrary, it represents a high level of security of the state in which the regional environment must be exported, it has to emanate security.

This is just one of the views related to the question: who actually needs security, where the citizens are primarily defined as an object of security. Another aspect is sustainable democracy, which is basically associated with the state in its essence and with the so-called democratic security. The democratic security means the rule of law and respect for human rights in all aspects of life, actually democratic approach to safety that does not endanger the public. Observing religion from this point of view and bearing in mind that religion is undoubtedly a part of intercultural education, but also a part of the latent or potential violent conflict processes in a society with a strong tendency to endanger regional security, we can say that intercultural education encompasses religious education transferring it into a part of public education. First of all, it should be noted that religion used to be defined and observed within a domain of private education, but due to its power, being accelerator of the immediate triggers of conflict processes, we have to count on its classification in the framework of intercultural studies. This alignment of religion and the introduction of the intercultural dimension of education opens up wide possibilities of its positive use in the prevention and possible conflict de-escalation process, whereby there is a direct impact on safety.

One of the important influences that is evident in intercultural education, which we connect with security, is opening up the possibility of raising of the international knowledge necessary for the functioning of national security and the maintenance of world peace. In this section we talk about the knowledge and skills acquired on the recognition of terrorism, disasters and catastrophes, internet security, illegal trafficking in arms, in human organs, which represent in relation to the modern concept of security risks and threats to peace and security on the highest level of endangerment.

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<sup>75</sup> Karin Sporre, Jan Mannberg, *“Values, Religions and Educations in Changing Societies”*, Springer, London, 2010, pp 6

Because of these security threats, we can talk about the internationalization of education, particularly in higher education that develops interculturalism as a model of study. In doing so, this is not the substituent in the context of building an imaginary process of education, which would be self-sufficient in order to link the scientific community and students. Basically, the internationalization of higher education and the introduction of active intercultural studies are linking knowledge on a global level and thus identify risks and threats common to the region, where the acquired knowledge is used in the prevention of threats to security.

In the context of knowledge sharing, we can talk about regional cohesion and intercultural studies on regional level, primarily due to the common perception of threats to security of state and citizens on regional level. A part of that knowledge is a religious division and ghettoization or national division and ghettoization of a part of the population in the region, thereby increasing the level of risk within these so-called marginalized groups.

This conclusion leads us to the next aspect of intercultural education and its impact on safety and that is the social dimension. The social dimension is strongly associated with psychological influence on the acceptance of communication with students from other countries and cultural regions by creating an emotional connection or simply understanding the cultural characteristics. However, the social aspects are strongly reflected in relation to the economic situation in certain regions. The attempt to use the available resources influences the behavior of the parties in conflict. Also, some resources are the problem not only on the country level, but also on a regional level; so the social aspect, actually the resources poverty, can be defined as a very strong accelerator of conflict processes.

Cultural diversity and deprivation of touch with the resources within the state is mostly accelerator to launch the ethno-political conflict. Since all regions have mixed cultural and ethnic characteristics, we can say that the goal of resource management is the key to managing conflicts and the impact on regional security.

In the context of intercultural education, an important link is peace education, which in relation to the construction and implementation of modern security model provides a pragmatic dimension of non-conflicting, non-violence and tolerance, using transformation of conflicts and understanding of conflicts in a positive security context of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional backgrounds in education.

This is particularly important in relation to the prevention of conflicts especially of so called intergroup ones. Multicultural and intercultural education represents emphatic learning about diversity and the establishment of the concept of mutual understanding and interdependence, which

generates more harmonious relations in society, affecting the key issues of structural inequality and differentiation of social power.<sup>76</sup>

Through the established security model, intercultural studies have a direct impact in the non-violent and non-conflict behavior, transforming the conflict process in the so-called "positive conflict", and reducing social inequality through improved education.

It is the social aspect of security that gets the most benefit through intercultural dimension of education, enhanced by psychological influence of the feeling of alienation or discrimination, the economic deprivation and ghettoization.

This benefit is very useful in relation to the prevention of risks and threats to the security, through transformation of inequality, deprivation and differentiation of young people from different political, religious, social and cultural backgrounds.

### **Scientific approach to pragmatic relations of intercultural education and regional security**

Presenting a theoretical approach of the relation between intercultural education and regional security, actually presenting their mutual influence; we intend to elaborate scientific approach to these two key concepts we have presented.

In carrying out the research scheme with one basic hypothesis related to testing of the following: "The strengthening of internationalization in higher education, along with the active involvement of all participants in the process, contribute to the reduction of conflict and consequently to strengthening of regional security. It is evident in indicators of the degree of acceptance of cultural diversity and the achieved level of strengthening of individual student capabilities, teachers and administrative staff in their perception of real sources of threat to security, through the perception of the impact level of intercultural education on regional security", as well as the methodological approach to research and analysis of the data obtained, we performed the analyses and scientific comments of the two questions.

The first question we introduce and compare with the theoretical approach is as follows: "To what extent does the intercultural dimension of education affect strengthening of regional security?", where the possible answers offered were on a scale from 0 to 10, whereby 0 means that intercultural dimension of education does not affect the strengthening of regional security to 10 referring to strong influence of intercultural dimension of education on strengthening of regional security.

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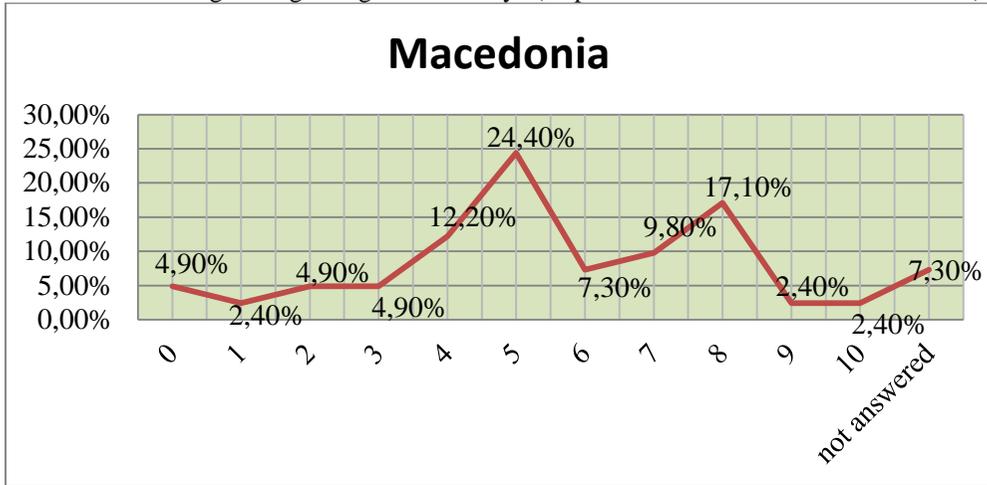
<sup>76</sup> Eluned Roberts-Schmetzer, Vincent Greaney, Kreszentia Duer, **“Promoting Social Cohesion through Education”**, World Bank Institute, Washington DC, 2006, pp 39

The survey results show that among the students of MIT University there is the highest level of dispersion of responses. Altogether 17.1 % of them believe that the impact is small, while the students of the University of Osijek and foreign students do not respond on a small influence on intercultural strengthening of regional security. On the other hand, there is certain similarity between the Macedonian and the Croatian students, when talking about the very strong influence of multiculturalism on strengthening of regional security; thus 21.90 % of MIT and 19.50 % of Osijek University students believe that interculturality influences strengthening of regional security. Foreign students, only 10.7 % of them, think that intercultural education affects regional security. It can be concluded that students who come from countries that are regionally rather stable do not attach importance to this issue, so that 85.80 % of foreign students responded that the impact of intercultural dimension in strengthening of regional security is "medium" (scale 5, 6, 7).

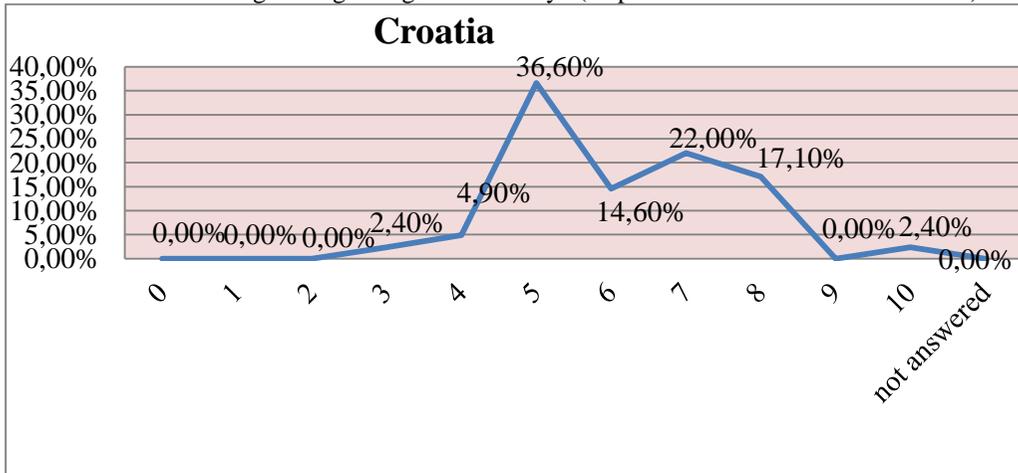
When analyzing the attitude of the Osijek students one element has to be taken into account. Unlike foreign and Macedonian students, all interviewed Croatian students answered this question. They have a clear attitude on this issue. An important note is that the interviewed are the students whose program of study is associated with the topic of interculturalism, thus they can be regarded as well informed and interested in the subject. On the contrary, 7.3 % of Macedonian and 7.1 % of foreign students did not answer this question. The assumption is the following: they are either insufficiently informed, or are not interested in the respective topic.

Since almost one quarter of the Osijek students and the same number of MIT students believe that the impact of intercultural dimension in education is an essential factor in strengthening of security, we are in a way obliged to consider further strengthening of internationalization, not only in teaching, but also in extra-curricular contents that become imperative in the time of the Bologna Process and EU accession.

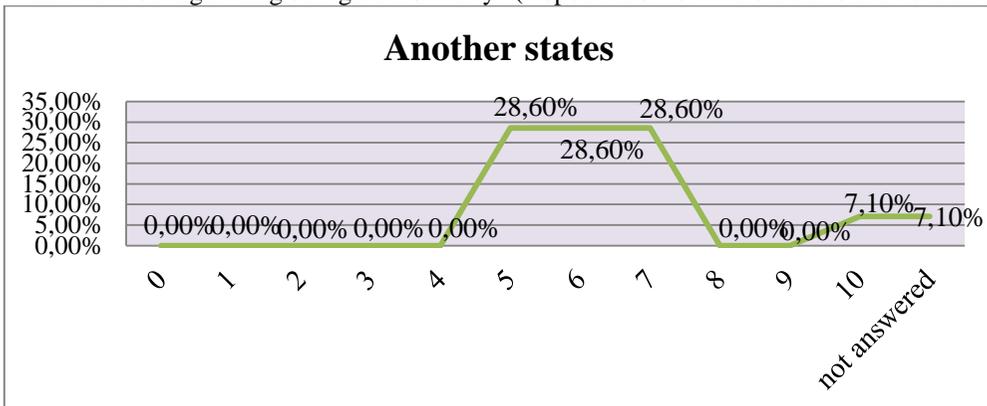
**Histogram 1-1** To what extent (from 0 to 10) does the intercultural dimension of education influence strengthening of regional security? (respondents – students from Macedonia)



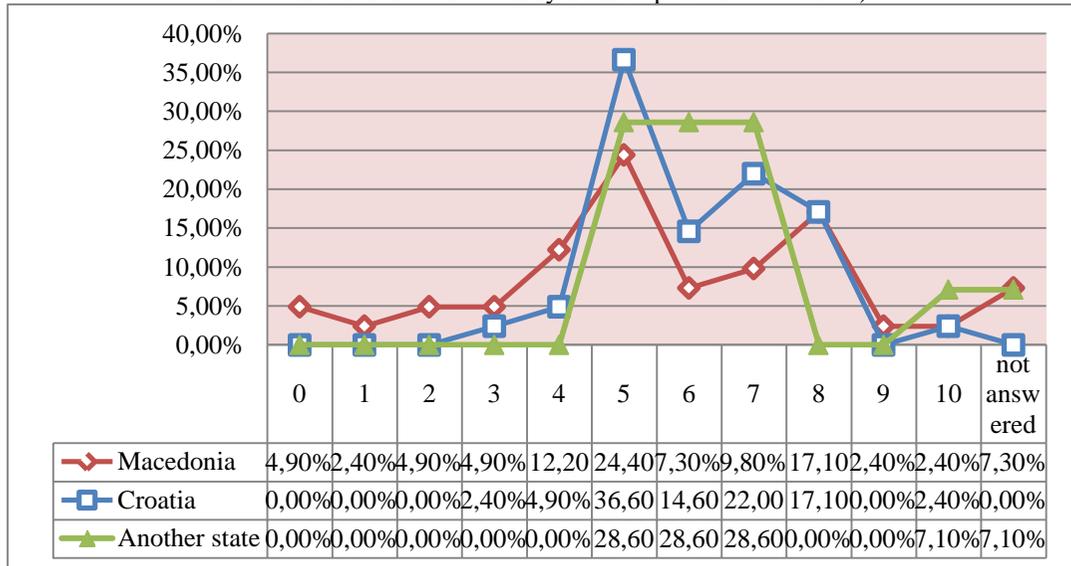
**Histogram 1-2** To what extent (from 0 to 10) does the intercultural dimension of education influence strengthening of regional security? (respondents – students from Croatia)



**Histogram 1-3** To what extent (from 0 to 10) does the intercultural dimension of education influence strengthening of regional security? (respondents – students from other countries)



**Histogram 1-4** To what extent (from 0 to 10) does the intercultural dimension of education influence strengthening of regional security? (comparative overview of dispersion of answers in relation to the country from respondents' countries)

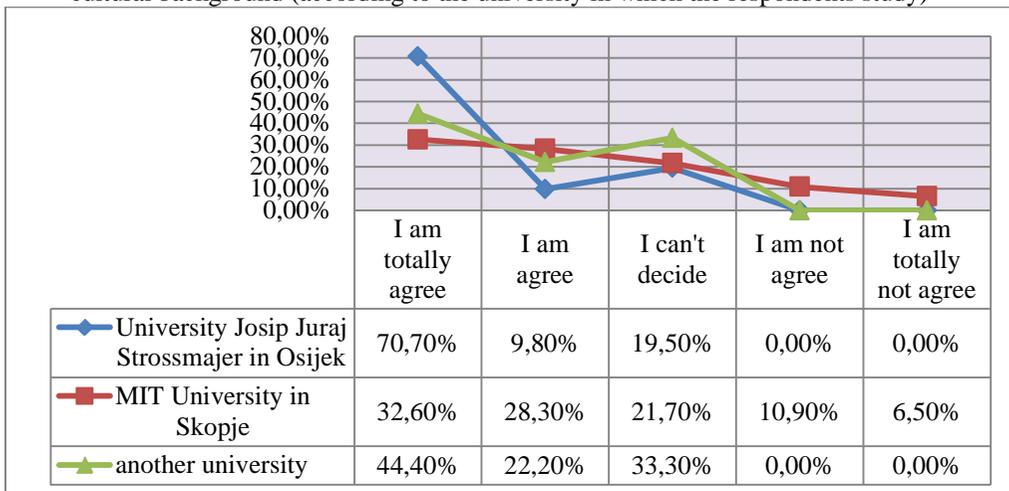


Upon analyzing the first question, the attitudes of students in everyday social communication can be discussed. It has been discussed on two levels; the lowest (the one that must be accomplished and refers to the common school attendance) and the highest level (establishing intimate relationships).

The first question in this section refers to the determination of social distance in the attitudes of students, as well as to their tolerance in respect of everyday communication in the classroom with students of other ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Although it is about determining the social distance in student attitudes, we use a Likert scale with five stages as follows: I completely agree, I agree, I do not care, I do not agree and I do not agree at all.

Dispersion of the responses is presented in a diagram where one can compare the obtained responses and in the form of one table, which is an integral part of the diagram. The crossing of the responses is done through the use of variables belonging to the university from which the respondents come.

**Diagram 1** Attending the classes together with students of other national, religious and cultural background (according to the university in which the respondents study)



When it comes to tolerance of students on a scale of social distance, in relation to the simplest form of social communication (joint attendance of classes) with the students of different ethnic, religious and cultural affiliation, we can notice a huge discrepancy of responses.

More than 80 % of students of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek accept differences and show willingness to share studying activities with colleagues of different national, religious and cultural backgrounds. Even a percentage of 19.5 % of indifferent students does not mean rejection of intercultural communication, especially characteristic is the fact that no student opposes common studying activities with students of different national, religious and cultural background.

The same results are obtained from students who come from other universities, whereas 1/3 of them is indifferent. Two-thirds, to be more precise 66.6 % of the students of other universities agree, or totally agree to study together with students of different ethnic, religious and cultural background.

Unlike students of the University of Osijek and students from other universities, students from MIT University in Skopje show a drastically lower tolerance in terms of intercultural education. Approximately 61 % of students of MIT University have no prejudices and show tolerance towards intercultural education. However, there is noticeable intolerance expressed by 17 % of students from MIT University in relation to intercultural education.

The reasons for such dispersion of answers can be explained in relation to absence of previous experiences during studying in relation to intercultural education and the opportunity to study with students of other

different ethnic, religious and cultural background. In addition, we evaluate the impact of negative experiences and social environment of students, their traditions and stereotypes constructed in relation to differences. To be able to give a more complete conclusion, it is necessary to examine the dispersion of responses to the following question we discuss, related to the other extreme - the maximum social distance.

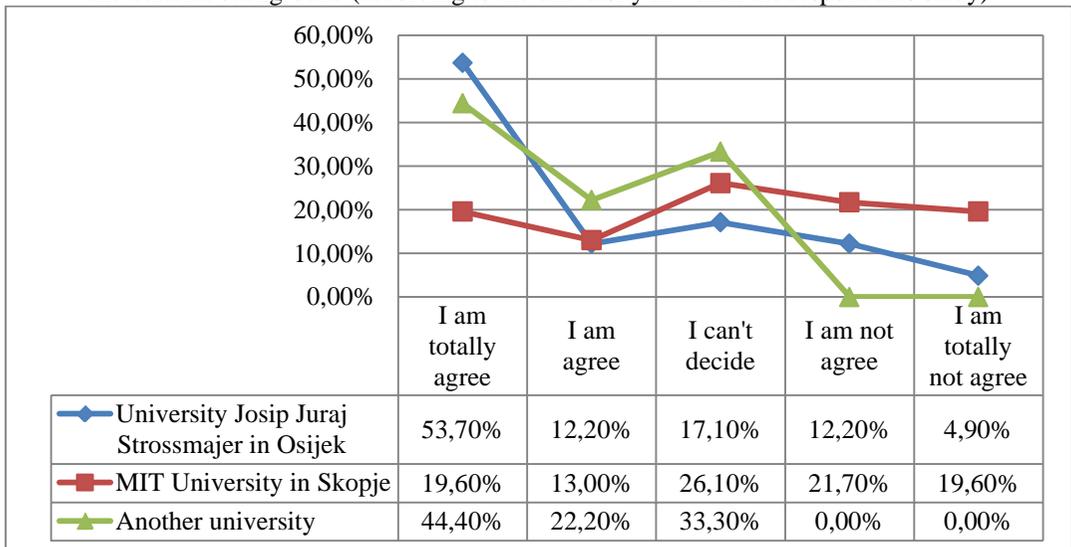
The question relates to the acceptance of intimate relationship with students of different national, religious and cultural background. Acceptance to have intimate relationship is an expression of total tolerance in all social aspects in the framework of intercultural education. This question is crossed with variable universities from which students come, as well as with the variable of gender.

The next question relates to the determination of social distance in the attitudes of students as well as their tolerance, acceptance of diversity in respect to intimate communication and relationships with students of other nationalities, religious and cultural background. Although it is about determining of social distance in attitudes of students, a Likert scale is used, with the same degrees of student attitudes, which gives the possibility to compare the responses to these two questions.

Dispersion of the responses is presented in a diagram where one can compare the responses obtained. A table is an integral part of the diagram.

The crossing of the responses is done through the use of variables belonging to the university from which students come (respondents) in diagram 2 and according to gender in the diagram 3.

**Diagram 2** To be in an intimate relationship with the students of different national, religious and cultural background (according to the university in which the respondents study)



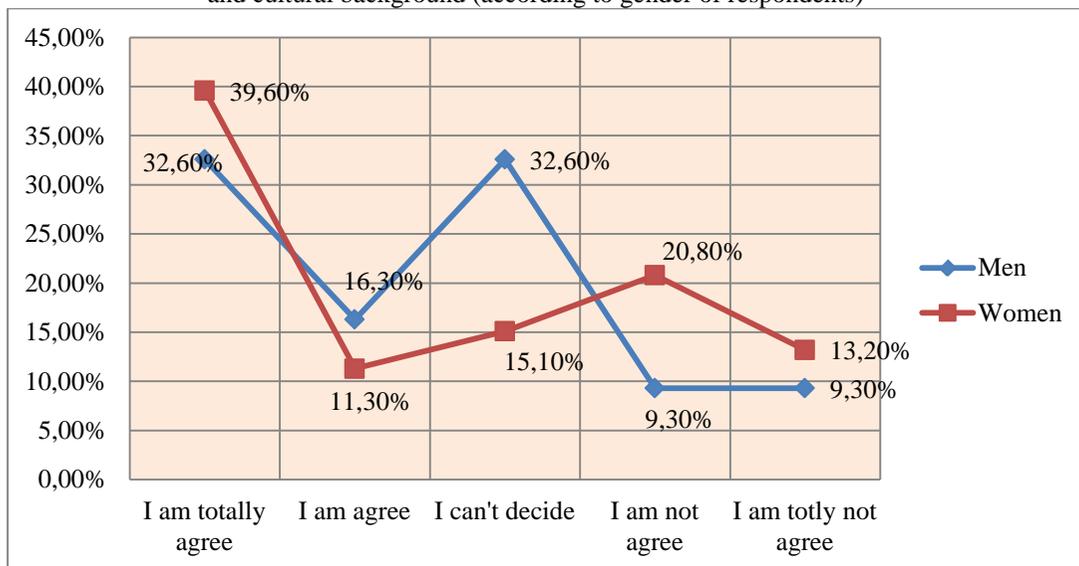
In relation to the expressed social distance, where there is expected level of prejudice (traditionalism, cultural diversity, religious beliefs), dispersion of responses is very different when it comes to the responses of students from the University of Osijek and MIT University, when compared to students who come from other universities.

Students from other universities have almost identical answers, if compared to the previous question. Such dispersion of responses leads us to the conclusion that students from other universities maybe answered the questions in a stereotypical way. However, this has to be checked via the variable regarding gender of respondents.

Regarding the responses of students of MIT University and the University of Osijek students, there is again discrepancy, as more than 1/3 of Osijek students agree or are tolerant about the possibility of intimate relationship with the students of different ethnic, religious or cultural affiliation. The percentage of the indifferent students decreases to 17 %, but there is also 17 % of those who do not agree with this statement to be in an intimate relationship with students from culturally diverse background. Students from MIT University give completely opposite responses, with more than 40 % of them who do not want to have sexual relations with the students of different ethnic, religious and cultural background.

The above mentioned dispersion of answers is presented in Diagram 3.

**Diagram 3** To be in an intimate relationship with the students of different national, religious and cultural background (according to gender of respondents)

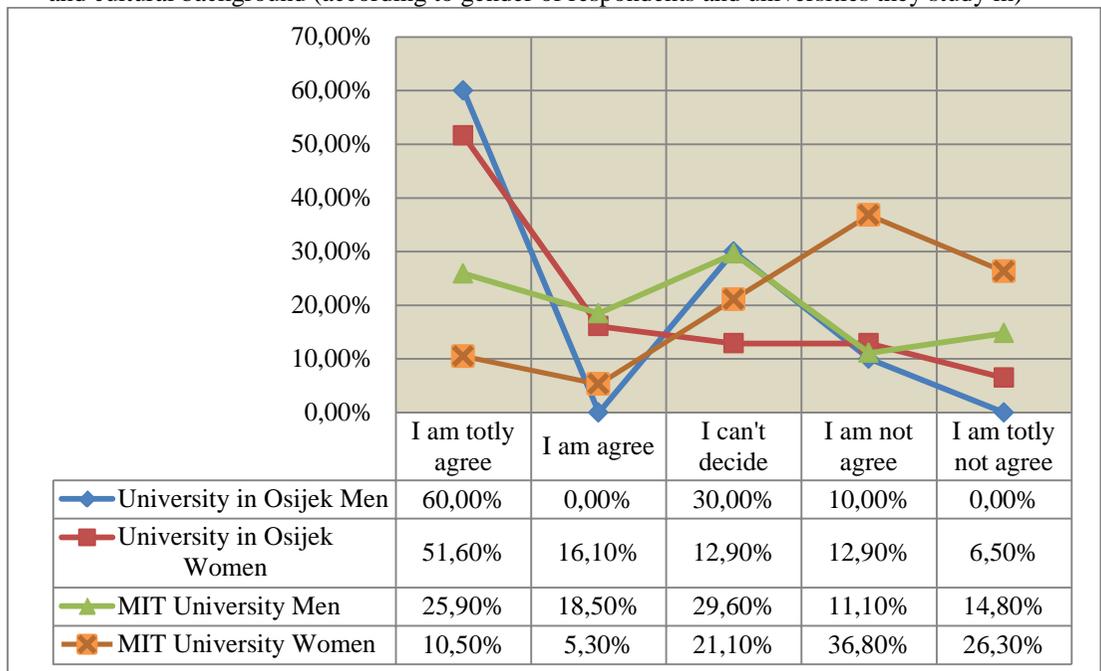


From the diagram we can see that there is approximately the same percentage of male and female students who agree, or fully agree to have intimate relationships with students of different national, religious and

cultural background. More female respondents are completely tolerant to the possibility of intimate contact with culturally different partners, while male students show indifference in this regard (32.6 %). The attitude of female students is interesting; so 39.6 % show total tolerance, whereas 34 % either disagree, or are completely intolerant in terms of having an intimate relationship with the students of other ethnic, religious and cultural affiliation. Yet, there is a higher percentage of women who are tolerant to intimate relationship with culturally different students in relation to the intolerant ones; the approximate percentage of men in relation to tolerance is similar.

With respect to a comparative analysis to gender and affiliation of students / respondents, we can see the following diagram in relation to the students of the University of Osijek and the students of MIT University.

**Diagram 4** To be in an intimate relationship with the students of different national, religious and cultural background (according to gender of respondents and universities they study in)



A comparative overview of the relationship between men and women respondents to the university from which they come is extremely divergent. It is interesting that this divergence applies to both men and women, a bit less than 30% of the differences in men and almost 40% of the variance in women. Typical is the intolerance in relation to intimate relationships as a final step in the scale of social distance in relation to cultural differences among female students from MIT University and high tolerance among female students of the University of Osijek. The situation is different when it

comes to tolerance, as well as to the indifference, where the differences are not so obvious. There is a logical distribution of responses and it does not indicate the possibility of illogical responses or occurrence of statistical errors. The same is evident in comparison of the response to the first question on the list and to this question.

According to the results we have analyzed, we come to a general conclusion that intercultural education tends to decrease social distance, but we can also put another question, which could be a research question for future researches.

## **Conclusion**

In the final stage of our research it is necessary to say that, apart from a very complex theoretical model of intercultural dimension of education, its international dimension, the impact of all factors and the overall impact on regional security; we are very surprised by sociological research. Research results indicate some divergent processes, which, in the given case can be connected to the reasons of behavior. However, there is the long-term influence of intercultural dimension of education on regional security. This conclusion leads us to the fact that the intercultural education in the future will have more impact as a preventive factor in the long-term risk management measures and threats to the security, or when creating security policies.

Let's start with thematic exposure of certain conclusions from the theoretical to the scientific part of the paper, where there are intersections of comments and conclusions, regardless their sequence in the paper.

The context of internationality in the sphere of education is very different, depending basically on the current challenges - political and economic, military, security, environmental and other, whereby the contemporary context of internationality and intercultural education is linked with the issues of identity and causing conflicts based on identity - based issues.

Intercultural education in the context of peacekeeping and conflict prevention represents a contemporary approach to the construction of social security. The main task refers to creation of a new generation of tolerant young people. This can be achieved through a process of education, using the academic community as a tool - instrument of creating of a future generation that could accept regional cooperation, in spite of cultural and other differences.

Such approach aims to preserve peace, to avoid conflicts and to improve regional cooperation, thus creating a sustainable security, both within countries and in the framework of the region. Tolerant approach manifests the acceptance of common values, democratization of citizens and

future generations and the creation of long-term conditions for good behavior and sustainable democratization.

In this way, conditions for the avoidance of deprivation and socially marginalized groups that would be a potential security risk to society are created. Thereby, the preconditions for creating of a sustainable security model can be created too.

Relying on scientific approach, it is necessary to conclude that there is a strong influence of the immediate situation in the country on students' attitudes regarding the impact of intercultural education to strengthen security in the region. This points to the need for the following: harmonization of curricula, extra-curricular activities of the university, being in accordance with the developments in society and the need to enhance the impact of intercultural education.

Tolerance in social relations among students is subject to the influence of traditional habits and contemporary discourse of life, whereby they can be characterized as divergent and sometimes incomprehensible.

Is a tolerant or intolerant approach in relation to the social cohesion of students a serious threat to safety, or is that just a stereotype constituting intolerance as a result of sociological code of conduct or religious influences, or is it about youthful freethinking in relation to the relationships on the highest social level with culturally different students? The answer to this final question can be given through some further researches, which gives a special meaning to development of scientific approach to the impact and interconnection of intercultural education and security.

Exactly this brings us to the conclusion that the impact of intercultural dimension in the educational process on strengthening of regional security is very high, not only from a theoretical point of view related to the development of cohesion of intercultural studies in the framework of modern security model and security studies through the construction of theoretical model, but also it can be considered a very influential within the framework of its practical application in the community.

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