

## LITHUANIAN ACADEMIC YOUTH'S EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** This paper theoretically and empirically analyzes education problems of academic youth. The study object is their national cultural identity. The topic is relevant because globalization causes the retention problem of national identity as a natural human need and the source of the nation's vitality. It is believed that personal identity reflects human integrity, gives meaning to his/her goals. The authors of the paper used scientific literature which discusses modern educational paradigms as well as the results of the empirical research. This paper draws attention to the respondents' attitudes towards national identity, citizenship and their approach to the present date state.

**Keywords:** nationalism, citizenship, identity, culture, values

### Introduction

Lithuania's Progress Strategy *Lithuania 2030* establishes two important principles, reflecting the relevance of the topic the authors chose. The first one - 'National identity, continuity of tradition that is based on knowing history and openness to cultural diversity'; the second one – 'Humanity, democracy and equal opportunities, citizenship. Realization of freedom and ethics, tolerance and dialogality' [12, p.2]. This provision is found in another document – Lithuania's Education Strategy for years 2013 - 2022: "In the age of globalization, it is

important to reexamine our own national identity, to understand what brings us (including emigrants and immigrants) together and links us to Lithuania" [14, p. 4].

Today global modernity has transcended the boundaries imposed by national political institutions. It is extremely difficult to say exactly where they end because global modernities share integral relations. Because of globalization, everyday life priorities are obviously changing. It offers pragmatism: to take what is profitable, efficient, quickly and easily accessible and to open up to the international community. Today it is possible

because global processes are becoming more and more interrelated and interdependent. The world is going through distinctive extremes in terms of modernity and nationalism. When people understand their options anew and use them in the face of globalization, even such basic values as national origin essentially lead to sociocultural change. Modern global culture is mainly reflected in the integration of different cultures as in the broader context all national cultures become subcultures, i.e. cultures which are understood in the context of their own cultural environment. A lot of different but changing cultural and intellectual forms, which are related or very distant from each other, are interactive or even conflicting. They, however, technologically are being involved into the globalization process. This process of global culture is created by the generation which lives here and now (mostly young people) [2].

Under these conditions, the retention problem of national identity as a natural human need and the source of the nation's vitality arises. Philosopher Astra seconds that by saying that a person's identity defines human integrity, gives meaning to his/her goals, helps to understand his/her position in the world; thus, it is of great importance. For a member of a national community a collective *we* just like an individual *I* is inseparable from the subjective perception of one's own nationality. A huge sensuous and energetic potential is common for national self-awareness. Being a part of a national community ensures the continuity of a person, gives the meaning to his/her existence as a mature person seeks to leave the boundaries of individual *I* and connect with a broader context of *we* [2, p. 131].

Intercultural cooperation, cultural concepts, structure, cultural classification, ethnocentrism problems that arise due to globalization and migration have been studied by Jančaitytė, Valavičienė, Augutienė, Prakapas [9]; Kuzmickas has studied the value problem within cultural contexts [11], self-awareness of national identity [10]; Giddens - issues of modernity and personal identity [7]; Castells - the construction of identity and its meaning in the society [4]; Duoblienė - national and supranational features of education policy and globalization [6].

Although issues of a person's national identity are very important, due to the methodological difficulties they have not been fully analyzed. The following authors who have analyzed

national identity are worth mentioning: Giles, Taylor, Lambert, Albert [8] that have tried to assess the dimensions of national identity; Antinienė who has analyzed the development of personal national identity [1]; Astra who has studied problems of nationalism and Lithuanian identity in global modernity [2].

Issues of youth's national cultural identity have not been systematically researched in Lithuania; thus, **the object** of this study is the academic youth's *national cultural identity*.

**The problem** of the study is: How does the academic youth's national cultural identity manifest itself?

**The study aim.** To reveal how the academic youth's cultural identity is expressed.

**The study objectives:**

- To reveal the essence of the relation between national identity and citizenship in the face of globalization;
- To point out the impact of globalization on the change of cultural identity;
- To analyze the relation between Lithuanian academic youth and the nation's culture.

**The theoretical approaches:**

- The issue of relation between national identity and citizenship in modern times is given a modern interpretation: national identity is gaining the dimension of citizenship [10].
- National identity is a foundation for the community's cultural development which is a historically vibrant and creative process.

### **The relation of national identity, citizenship and the state in terms of globalization**

Although the state plays a very important role in the nation's life, but today due to globalization attitudes towards citizenship and national identity are changing. There are more and more people who say that the state as a concept is doomed. There are many other signs that show that this process is objective and unstoppable. At the same time the relation between the nation and the state is changing as well as the nature of the factors that support national identity. Thus, the opposing views: some people are worried and opposed to such an idea whereas others support it.

Smith highlights the key elements of national identity: a) self-awareness that 'we are the communities' which is related to knowing the historical territory and the past; b) the common

mass culture; c) the common civil rights and obligations; d) the common economy and the residential area [10, p. 43]. Lithuanian philosopher Kuzmickas highlights the challenges that raise to the stability of these elements. Today the constant integration of individual nations into the European Union leads to the emergence of factors that are changing traditional subjects: national legislation is being drafted in accordance with the EU legislation, national citizenship is becoming European, labor movement opportunities are expanding, economy is transcending national insularity, national currency is being changed with Euro. But no one can clearly say what political models that represent nations' will could replace nation states or how future societies would handle all of this [10]. Therefore, a gulf has been opened up between citizens and the state. This is an objective reality.

The effects of the Soviet legacy prevents from retaining and strengthening national identity: old-fashioned stereotypes are entrenched in the media and public opinion, there is open indifference to civil and moral values and nationalism. Such attitudes are characteristic even to many Lithuanians of a new generation who are not directly the successors of the nomenclature legacy; however, they were maturing when the values were diminishing and, thus, did not see any other ways, just those showed by the former Soviet nomenclature, how to get the material welfare.

The media is attributed to the reasons why the gulf has opened up between national identity and the state: it suggests the elements of universality and cosmopolitan attitudes. While the free flow of information expands people's horizons, develop cultural and religious tolerance, at the same time it opens up opportunities for the poor quality commercial culture which inhibits a person's understanding about his/her essence. All these things form the cosmopolitan mindset.

### **The impact of globalization on the change of youth's cultural identity**

The formation of youth's cultural identity is affected by one of the reasons why the nation state is losing ground, i.e. changing and in some cases completely extinct its former defensive function. In addition, due to the traditional understanding of the war aims, i.e. to protect

national borders and territory, the so-called trench wars are becoming less possible, at least in the larger part of the world. The power of the state no longer ensures peace and national security; the membership in international security organizations does. Due to the decline of the defensive function of the state, 'patriotic education' when military service is compulsory has become ineffective (it has been replaced by voluntary military basic training).

Free movement of individuals is not conducive to the development of youth's national identity and citizenship: it makes the relation between nationalism and citizenship vague. When Lithuania entered the European Union, its citizen's identification not only with Lithuania but also with the rest of Europe, especially if he/she was linked with this part in terms of work or personal relationships, became inevitable. Kuzmickas notes that some theorists are already talking about the post-national citizenship which should not be linked to the nation state. According to him, Delanty, the author of the book *Rethinking Europe*, presents such ideas by saying that today it is important to sever the relation between citizenship and national identity [10, p. 218].

The European Union policy has the same goal. Although the large immigration flows to Western countries are weakening xenophobic sentiment, the European Union objective is citizenship which would have nothing to do with nationalism.

Today globalization is increasing the influence of Western culture, especially mass one, endangering national identity, hindering efforts to preserve ethnically-formed traditions of spiritual education. Therefore, something which has been considered as the most important, i.e. the connection with another human being on an ethnic and moral level, is being forgotten. In the context of sudden changes there is a risk for the younger generation to lose moral guidance. These challenges pose a challenge to dramatically improve moral education, raise it to a level which would ensure the sustainable development of social environment [15].

### **Methodology**

#### Characteristics of the study participants.

Considering national cultural identity as the foundation of citizenship, an empirical study was specifically designed and carried out with

cadets and officers from the General Jonas Zemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. The method of case study is effective because it meets the needs of each person, ensures theoretical and practical lifelong learning, shows the respondent's sociocultural working conditions, identifies the factors that shaped cultural identity, demonstrates innovative and creative authenticity of the respondents [5].

The study involved 52 representatives, i.e. cadets and officers. 31 respondents (7 officers and 24 cadets) made into the study group. The subjects of the study, aged from 18 to 28, can be described as mature, responsible, they are people who chose the profession of a serviceman deliberately. There were 6 girls and 23 guys. In terms of ethnicity - 26 Lithuanians and 5 people of other nationalities. All of them at school had *The Introduction to Civil Society* course, all of them passed Lithuanian state exam and studied *The Educational Components of Language Culture, Political Science and Citizenship* at the universities.

**The purpose of the study** is to analyze the respondents' experience of national identity in a multicultural environment in terms of their expression and improvement.

**The study was carried out** in between April and May in 2013. In the light of the general principles of research ethics, each study participant was free to decide on his/her participation in the study. The participants were introduced to the aim of the study and were allowed to decide whether to participate or not. In order to get comprehensive answers, they were asked to provide written answers anonymously, without a name or a surname.

**The study instrument** is an argumentative essay on the topic 'What it means to be a citizen.' An essay is an article the style of which is characterized by the elements of scientific, journalistic and artistic style; therefore, it was chosen specifically for the respondents to reflect their knowledge, to reveal their attitudes and the need to act in a written form.

Reflection, as a method of a case study, helped the servicemen:

- to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of national identity;
- to identify their own core moral values, hopes and expectations;
- to know the possible assumptions of their ideas, feelings and actions;

- to identify the areas of potential bias;
- to recognize their doubts, fears and possible inconsistencies;
- to identify the development area of national cultural identity.

The findings of the empirical study were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative method determined the following quality parameters of citizenship and cultural identity:

- the relationship with the nation's history, the Lithuanian land (territory), native language, and language culture;
- Lithuania's future vision in terms of globalization;
- the values of a person as a citizen;
- the factors of giving and retaining the sense of citizenship;
- the essence of the concept and the formation of a cadet as an intellectual.

The quantitative analysis of the findings was performed to identify the respondents' high, medium or low level of expression of cultural identity. The criteria: emotional evaluation, cognitive interest (strengths and weaknesses), ethnic and civic practical skills, the assumptions of ideas, feelings and actions of national identity (knowledge and the application of methods), values, hopes and expectations. The findings were summarized by analyzing the text of the essay, carrying out the text analysis.

The findings were analyzed using the approach of qualitative content analysis, i.e. the text is read several times to identify the main categories; the categories on the basis of the keywords are later divided into sub-categories and they are justified by the supporting statements from the text [3, 13].

#### The analysis of the findings.

The disclosure of how academic youth expresses cultural identity is an important task because it identifies educational problems in terms of identity and its authentic expression.

The findings of the study revealed the respondents' relation to knowledge of citizenship and cultural identity, values and the need to be active:

1. Respondents' essays about *the relation with the nation* showed several sub-categories, ranging from reality and ending with a vision of the future work: **a) knowing oneself as a part of the nation**: My name is Lithuanian, it is old

and it means a storm. My ancestors lived in Lithuania, mostly in Kėdainiai district, around Krakiai (V.G.); **b) knowing family history:** My family roots are of Lithuanian origin; I have analyzed my family tree where I have found a lot about my great-great-grandparents (R.K.); **c) the relation with the nation's culture:** Our culture is one of the oldest. Of course, there are many things that have not survived; thus, the issue of identity may rise. 20 years ago and before that our country was defended by the whole nation for it would be independent and so that the next generations would love it and that is why I have chosen a career of an officer. In this way, I intend to contribute, at least minimally, to our country's history (A.G.). Being a patriot of Lithuania, I am very interested in the Lithuanian history. Even though I started delving into it at school, I spent a lot of time on my own reading books about our great past. Also, thanks to my parents, I visited quite a lot of famous places of my homeland getting to know better the current territory of Lithuania. However, it is difficult to admit, but my knowledge of Lithuanian culture is superficial (A. Š.). My mother's desire to ignite love for the homeland and for my native land led me to take interest in it myself. Movies, literature, music, special events really were and are the things that motivated and ignited the love for my country and its history (D. K.); **d) attitude towards the nation's (state) language:** Mother tongue has always been the thing which I appreciate and am proud of (J.L.). I foster it and I try to speak only correct Lithuanian language (A.G.) **e) the nation's history:** the history of Lithuania is the great country's past which everyone should be proud of and have respect for all those people who defended it (P.Ž.). For me, as a citizen of the country, history is a big book from which you can learn and find a historical figure who could be my idol. Those people, who had really special skills, demonstrated an advantage over many other generals (R.Š.); **f) who I am:** I do not know what ethnic region I should associate myself with because my speech does not have a dialect of Suvalkija although I have always lived in Kaunas (O.S.). At this moment I could not call myself an intellectual even though I have some intelligent features which I am trying to develop: however, in order to call myself an intelligent, I have a lot to learn. This I hope to learn while studying at the Military Academy of Lithuania where not only

characteristics of an intelligent but also of a patriot are developed (A.Š.). To be a Lithuanian is a great honor for me (S.V.).

Culture as a system of values gives a meaning to the expression of spiritual forces in the society. This is the foundation of all kinds of human activities, showing how and on the basis of which principles a person acts. Not sharing values in childhood and adolescence later shapes a person who fails to empathize and does not respect other people. Therefore, Lithuanian citizen's valuable national element today has encountered various challenges of the globalized world.

2. Respondents' reflections on *the future of Lithuania* in terms of globalization: **a) positive evaluation:** Today we see a positive impact of Western culture on our culture. We have distanced ourselves from a previous stagnation and joined Europe (B.L.); **b) negative evaluation:** Our nation's culture is overshadowed by European one and, therefore, it is slowly disappearing. Due to globalization our culture will continue disappearing (A.G.). In my opinion, globalization is nothing but trouble for Lithuania and other small nations. Cultural mixing for a country, where a population is about 3 million, can be disastrous (A.Š.). A possibility to emigrate and to learn, to work, to live is tempting for many people in my country (J.B.). Globalization promotes Lithuania's loss of national identity and the loss of the country's uniqueness (I.B.); **c) prediction:** There will be people who will foster multiculturalism and when all people realize that we are losing our culture due to the impact of Western culture, they will turn again to people who have fostered the old ethnic culture and will start promoting it, thus, slowly reviving it (A.G.). We must teach our younger generation in order to save Lithuania (J.B.). It is important not to copy what other countries have, we have to maintain our own traditions, customs, fashions, etc. If our country wants to survive, it must protect what we have the most unique (I.B.).

The relation between globalization and cultural change is complex and ambiguous. It is necessary to further analyze and identify those factors in the education process that would be extremely important in order to maintain national and personal dignity, and for our youth to be creative and not too obedient.

The situation can change only in the community and in particular when young people realize that

through national mentality and distinctive cultural values Lithuania can show itself for the global world as an attractive and unique country.

3. *What are the values of respondents as citizens?* **a) moral values:** I came to serve in the Lithuanian military due to the belief: '... it wasn't in vain the ancestors defended you so' [an extract from Maironis' poem] (I.K.). I feel proud of my local hard-working people (P.B.). I am proud of our country's history and I could enthusiastically tell anyone about the glorious past of our country (V.L.); **b) relation to religion:** I am a Catholic, I have received first Communion and Confirmation and all the people closest to me profess this religion, including me (I.V.). Our nation's culture and customs are closely linked to the Catholic religion, including me (A.G.). I cherish Christian values such as respect, honesty, fairness, responsibility and many others. They, in my opinion, help to cultivate even idealistic attitude towards life and the country. As a result, I often support those people who tend to stand out from the crowd and are not afraid to be unpopular and sometimes even misunderstood by the others (G.B.); **c) the value scale:** My civic virtue is patriotism, loyalty, keeping promises, justice, respect for the history of the country and the elderly. I think they can always teach us and we have to listen to them (A.G.). One of my main values is patriotism. It does not let me be indifferent to what is wrong in my homeland (A.Š.). Another important one is not being indifferent and being active (J.B.). Patriotism is a sacrifice to the nation and the state (K.N.).

Global processes create a new hierarchy of global culture. The results of the study show that the forms which express national consciousness of the youth are becoming more and more relevant. Being original, a believer, intellectual and creative are the aspirations of great importance and are found in the respondents' works. For students of all different programs these aspirations should be relevant.

4. *Factors influencing and helping to retain the feeling of national identity and citizenship:*

**a) family:** Love, respect and responsibility for the homeland were nurtured by my parents together with the grandparents, parents' brothers and sisters - the entire family (A.G.). In the evenings my mother would vividly tell stories about the past, battles of Crusades, warriors, mounds or book smugglers (N.V.).

My grandfather is most likely to be thanked for the sense of citizenship who would constantly tell me about the history of Lithuania. Often it was exalted or even romanticized (A.Š.); **b) environment:** All of my immediate surroundings: people, books, everything around developed my national feelings (T.D.). Neighbor boys and I played liberation wars and fought for the freedom of Lithuania; we even imitated the singing revolution (Š.K.). Sport achievements and people unity help to maintain the sense of citizenship (A.Š.). I look at the swimmer Meilutytė and my heart sings – she is a real patriot (D.N.). Internet, the nation's minds, i.e. Šliogeris, Juozaitis, Grigas and others, help to form the feelings of national self-esteem and national identity (I.K.); **c) school:** My school reinforced citizenship, but I would not say that it was done actively (A.G.). Solid foundation for citizenship was formed in my family and a little bit at school (J.B.); **d) self-development:** A person develops the whole time and it never ends; therefore, I made no mistake choosing to study at the Military Academy (A.G.). Every day at the Academy we raise the flag, sing the national anthem, wear a uniform and learn to be honest and honorable citizens (J.B.).

Academic youth's national identity is developed by individual conditions, social and cultural factors, but they still function poorly. The strongest relations of national identity remain in a family. Children, teenagers are encouraged by non-formal education to take interest in the nation's culture, however, it is not enough. As a result, the respondents do not talk much about the role of the school or other educational institution. Students experienced particularly striking transformations due to global technology, studying elements related to ethnic mentality, i.e. language, history, ethnic culture and citizenship. A more pronounced sense of identity is captured among those respondents who are more active in terms of sociocultural activities.

**The quantitative analysis** is performed to identify the respondents' high, medium or low level of expression of cultural identity. The criteria include: emotional evaluation, cognitive interest (strengths and weaknesses), ethnic and civic practical skills, the assumptions of ideas, feelings and actions of national identity (knowledge and the application of methods), values, hopes and expectations. The findings

were summarized by analyzing the text of the essay, carrying out the text analysis.

The results (Table 1) show that there are two and a half times more respondents who have reached the medium level (54.3%) than those who have reached high or low levels (22.5% and 23.2%, respectively). These results indicate that Lithuanian students', who have deliberately chosen a profession related to national security,

level of national identity is medium. Holistic education, reflection helped to systematize knowledge, give meaning to them in a purposefully chosen career. Education which is integrated, acquired in different courses and self-formed by using a modern curriculum, innovative training tools, forms and methods was effective for the respondents to reflect on their personal identity.

Table 1

The Respondent's Levels of Expression of Cultural Identity

No	Criteria	High level (%)	Medium level (%)	Low level (%)
1.	Emotional evaluation	11,8	46,2	41
2.	Cognitive interest (strengths and weaknesses)	24	56,3	20,7
3.	Ethnic and civic practical skills	20,5	56,3	23,2
4.	Assumptions of ideas, feelings and actions of national identity (knowledge and application of methods)	30,7	48,6	20,7
5.	Values, hopes and expectations	25,8	64	10,2
	Average	22,5	54,3	23,2

Positive reflexive thinking is shown by a harmony of differentiated and individual learning methods. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods demonstrates cadets and officers' independence, originality of thinking. Respondents' skills are being formed, their emotional state is being improved and their indifference is also decreasing while inspiring history, literature, direct communication with family members and relatives, positive learning institutions (school and the Academy), sociocultural environment are becoming of high priority.

Summarizing scientific literature on the results of empirical research, it can be said that a person's identity is achieved while looking for and trying out different roles, cherishing one's values, critically evaluating specific sociocultural environment.

### Conclusions

- Due to globalization, the attitude towards citizenship and national identity is changing. There already is a gulf between citizenship, national identity and the state. This is due to the

changing nature of the factors that support the nation and the state:

- there are more and more areas where key decisions are made not by the state, but by a variety of international political and financial entities; old Soviet stereotypes are still alive, there is indifference to civil and moral values and to national identity as such; the media keeps suggesting elements of universality and promoting cosmopolitan attitudes; therefore, it opens up opportunities for the poor quality commercial culture which inhibits a person's understanding about his/her essence.
- Today the formation and expression of youth's cultural identity is affected by the weakening of the nation state, i.e. its former defensive function is changing, and somewhere completely extinct; serving in the military of other countries can develop patriots of other cultures. Free movement is also not conducive to foster youth's sense of national identity and citizenship: it makes the relation between national identity and citizenship vague. The policy of the European Union is the same: The European Union's objective is citizenship which has no connection with nationalism.

• The results of the empirical study confirm that respondents' national cultural identity is essentially correlated with the quality of existing cultural knowledge and their awareness level. And this is the main source of values,

emotional experiences. Using the combination of integral knowledge, skills at an educational institution the youth opens up to promising authentic development of national identity.

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