

Dimensions of Social Integration of Ethnic Groups in the Contemporary Society of Lithuania

S U M M A R Y

Introduction

The established legal framework and formal premises of equal opportunities to all ethnic groups, even if crucial to the development of civil society, do not mean that all citizens are treated on an equal basis in all spheres. Ethnic processes remain a social challenge in Lithuania as some problems have not yet been overcome during the last decade: negative attitudes, concerns about ethnic purity, symbolic and actual cleavages in the labour market and the public sector, treatment in the mass media, etc.

As far as the mass media is concerned, the principles of being un/noticeable or in/visible are dominant in respect of ethnic minority groups: public discourse on the issues is either missing or one-way and does not include opinions of ethnic minorities, or ethnic groups are treated exclusively through negative characteristics ascribed to them, which leads to stigmatisation (especially in the case of the Roma/Gypsies and the Chechens). As the importance of the issue is usually determined by political matters, politicised ethnicity tends to encourage xenophobia by blocking the evolution of citizenship, which is essential for the growth of democratic institutions.

Cleavages in the socio-economic areas of society among different ethnic groups in Lithuania are not sharp; social research, however, indicates that social differences among ethnic groups do exist (e.g., educational attainments, higher unemployment rates among non-Lithuanians) and that mono-ethnic segments are observed in the labour market. The major problems faced by minorities in the public sector relate to the low levels of their participation in electoral and executive bodies. Political parties are instruments for the political participation of ethnic groups within the ethnic borders: parties of ethnic minorities become an instrument for the participation for minority groups, whereas the other parties are dominated by the majority ethnic group of Lithuania.

These tendencies confirm the significance of the issue, especially when considering future migration-related challenges. Also, the aspects discussed above lead to assumptions about the existing tendencies of overlapping of the ethnic recognition and the construction of resource distribution, which allows social differentiation in respect of ethnicity.

In the society of Lithuania, where one ethnic group comprises a significant majority, there are no distinct cultural or anthropological differences among ethnic groups and the competition between ethnic groups is weak, however certain ethnic social cleavages are observed, the question of how ethnicity structures social environment and how ethnic groups are ranged in the social space is raised. The analysis of ethnic relations should be based on multidimensional indicators and should combine various variables in order to disclose real aspects of ethnic differentiation.

In Lithuania, studies of ethnicity are based on traditions that are widely prevalent in Eastern Europe: focusing on studies of the ethnocultural identity and its content through the analysis of factors specific to minority groups. Studies of culture are dominant in ethnic minority surveys with less attention being paid to the issues of employment or social status. These studies maintain a distinction between cultural values of the majority and minorities, which explains social differences, i.e. they are based on the assumption that social or cultural attributes and attitudes of an ethnic minority determine its position in the social structure.

The research presented reflects another perspective that aims at carrying out a sociological analysis of the relations of ethnic groups on the basis of the breakdown of socio-structural positions, i.e. it is based on an assumption that a certain position held and analysed through the nature of social relations has an impact on the construction of ethnic identity, ethnic relations and organisation. The analysis of relatively equalised social positions of ethnic groups' members facilitates an assessment of the social significance of ethnicity.

The advantage of the concept of social integration lies in the analysis of networks of social relations, disposition of social resources and a broader social context, which extends the understanding of ethnic groups' participation in society. Also, the research includes attempts to analyse the ethnic structure of different social sectors (public, private and non-governmental).

The research presented is based on several premises that are examined and grounded in the study. Firstly, the formal equal opportunities (e.g. legal provisions that are universal to all citizens) do not ensure the development of society's equal ethnic structure. The content of social integration is determined by different distribution of ethnic groups' social and symbolic resources. Secondly, a monoethnic environment has a different impact on the expression of ethnicity: it suspends it in the public sector and intensifies in the private and non-governmental sectors. This determines the ethnic structure of society. Finally, social cleavages of ethnic groups are related to different processes and results of social integration as well as constructs of the ethnic identity.

The research presented aims at disclosing the content of social integration of ethnic groups of Lithuania. The study consists of an introduction, three parts and the conclusions. Also, annexes with empirical data are provided.

The first part of the study provides with a theoretical framework for the research. In this part, the concept of the social integration of ethnic groups is considered on the basis of instruments of the sociological theory and methodology and a model of the empirical research is elaborated.

The second part deals with the ethnic structure of the public sector. It focuses on the premises of the formation of the main features of Lithuania's public sector that are based on the analysis of available secondary information sources, statistical data both on the national and international levels. In this part combined with other secondary sources, as well as data from previous studies, data of an international project, *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector* (UNRISD, 2002–2004), form a substantial part of empirical data.

The third part presents an original empirical study of the content of social integration of ethnic groups, which examines the characteristics of the ethnic structure of different sectors (public, private, non-governmental) in respect of employment. It provides the major source of quantitative data. This part includes a discussion on the research methodology, analysis and interpretation of the results with regard to the categories of the ethnic identity and established dimensions of social integration. The quantitative data collected are supplemented with the information of qualitative interviews with different experts.

In the concluding part of the study, results of the research are summarised and the final conclusions are presented.

Theoretical framework of the research of social integration

The research presented follows the social constructivist perspective that focuses on the situational and processional nature of ethnicity, the features of which are used as criteria for distinction in a specific context of social reality and social experience. Also, it maintains an active role of members of ethnic groups in defining their identities, collective knowledge and principles of solidarity (Conzen, Gerber 1992). The underlying component of the formation and definition of ethnic groups, as well as the research object includes interactions and relations of ethnic groups (majority–minority, among minorities), which can acquire forms of competition, cooperation or conflict. In the research, a structural concept of an ethnic group is applied, which defines the ethnic group in a relational conception and focuses on structural social relations rather than cultural differences (Young 2000).

On the level of sociological theory, the term *integration* is used to define developments that determine connections of related diverse agents into the social whole, system, community, or another unit. As a fundamental concept of the functionalist theory, in later theoretical developments, the concept was elaborated in the distinction between social integration and system integration (Habermas, Giddens, Lockwood).