



## Living and Working in a Multicultural Society – A Comparative Study of Czech and Slovak Tourism Undergraduates' Views

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### Abstract

*In today's multicultural societies tolerance towards different cultures is becoming an important issue in any field of economy and life. Nevertheless, for those working in the tourism industry, it is a key competence since guests' and tourists' satisfaction depends heavily on their ability to provide high-quality services including their open and positive attitude towards otherness.*

*The present paper aimed to shed light on tourism undergraduates' perceptions of cultural diversity in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The international comparative examination brought some controversial and surprising results in terms of the general perception of cultural diversity, their relation to current problems in multicultural societies, as well as concerning working with colleagues and dealing with guests of different cultural background. Yet, the efficiency of the education system with regard to preparing for working in multicultural environments was conceived quite unanimously by both samples as rather unsatisfactory.*

**Keywords:** *multicultural societies, tourism undergraduates, attitudes, perceptions, Czech Republic, Slovakia;*

### 1. Introduction

Having the right attitude, i.e., being tolerant and respectful towards different ethnic groups is essential in any intercultural exchange [1]. Nevertheless, in the field of tourism and hospitality, it is a must, since it can contribute to the positive image of the destination or the accommodation establishment, as well as to a lasting emotional relationship to them and encourage the visitors or guests to recommend and revisit them. As [2] puts it, cultural differences in service expectations or communication may lead to frustrations among personnel and dissatisfaction among customers; hence, "a cultural approach to marketing and providing services is required".

It seems that despite the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, intercultural skills including a positive attitude and cultural sensitivity towards customers with different cultural backgrounds will play a crucial role in the future success of the tourism and hospitality businesses, as well, since according to numerous experts, people's hunger for travelling and encountering different cultures has only increased over the last months. Also, statistical and empirical data have confirmed the augmented interest of Asian tourists in European destinations [3],[4]. Hence, nurturing students' intercultural skills should be a common goal of tourism education. But do the educational systems provide the necessary and adequate support for living and working in a multicultural society? The present paper compares the results of two investigations in the given field carried out in Slovakia [5] and the Czech Republic [6].

### 2. Methodology

The research aimed to examine differences in the attitude of Slovakian and Czech tourism undergraduates towards cultural diversity and multicultural society. Besides, the investigation focused on their perceptions of dealing with guests and working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Another goal was to learn about their opinion on the efficiency of education in terms of preparing students for living and working in a multicultural environment.

The research sample involved 241 university students majoring in tourism at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia and 145 tourism undergraduates of the Silesian University in Opava, Czech Republic. The participants' age ranged from 19 to 26, while regarding their sex, the majority of the respondents were female.

To reach the above-mentioned objectives a questionnaire survey was conducted in February 2019. The questionnaire contained twelve questions/items and the respondents could express their opinions on a seven-point Likert scale. They could identify the extent to which they agree with the opinion, i.e.



opting for values from 7 to 5 or from 3 to 1 (See the *Results and discussion* part). The data were processed applying the Semantic Differential Scale Method.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The findings of the research are discussed alongside the aspects of living and working in a multicultural society.

#### 3.1 Tourism students' perceptions in terms of living in a multicultural society

1. Culture and religious diversity are connected with:

enrichment of various aspects of life.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	the danger threatening in various aspects of life.
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As it can be seen in Figure No 1, the majority of the Slovak respondents opting for values 7, 6 and 5 (altogether 62,23 %), considers culture and religious diversity to be rather the enrichment of life than a life-threatening danger, (chosen by a total of 14, 52 % of the participants circling values from 1 to 3). On the other hand, only slightly more than one-third of the Czech students agreed that culture and religious diversity is connected with the enrichment of life and 26, 21 % of them thought it was rather a life-threatening danger. However, it is noteworthy to mention that 24, 07% of the Slovak and 41, 38 % of the Czech undergraduates remained neutral by selecting value 4.

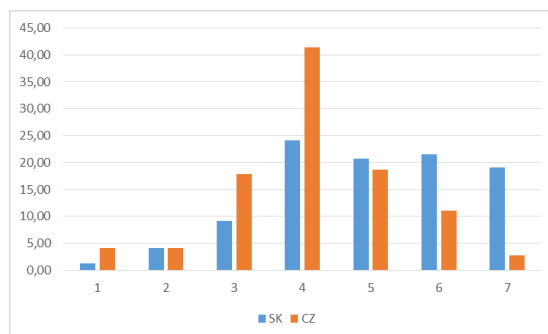


Figure 1: The perception of culture and religious diversity

2. Current problems in multicultural societies are related to the religious radicalism of ethnic minorities and their social status.

Definitely yes.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Absolutely not.
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More than half of the Slovak respondents, i. e, 51, 04 % opting for values 7, 6 and 5, think that religious radicalism of ethnic minorities and their social status is the source of current problems in multicultural societies (see Figure No 2). Moreover, 32, 78 % had a neutral standpoint and only 16, 18 % thought that recent problems in multicultural societies are not related to religious radicalism of ethnic minorities and their social status. Regarding the Czech participants, 78, 62 % of them agreed that current problems in multicultural societies have nothing to do with religious radicalism of ethnic minorities and their social status and only 4, 15 % thought the opposite. Besides, only 15, 86 % did not take a stand on the given issue, choosing value 4.

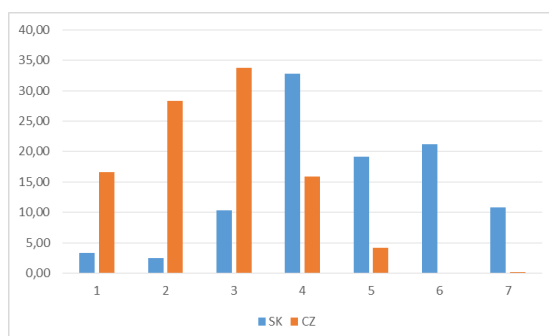


Figure 2: The perception of current problems in multicultural societies



3. Does the education system prepare students for the changing social and cultural conditions in Europe?

In a satisfactory way.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	In an unsatisfactory way.
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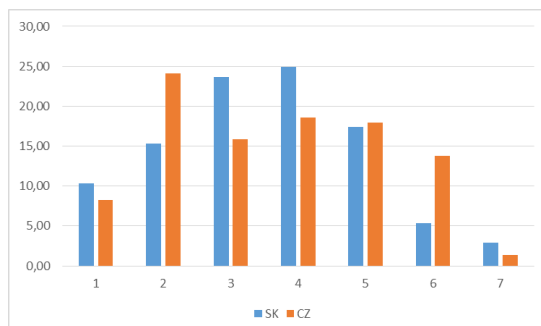


Figure 3: The perception of the efficiency of the education system in terms of preparing for living in multicultural environments

Neither the Slovakian nor the Czech tourism undergraduates consider the education system concerning the preparation for changing social and cultural conditions in Europe satisfactory, since almost half of the former (48, 9 %) and 58, 62 % of the latter chose values from 1 to 3. Besides, 22, 41 % of the Slovakian and 17, 24 % of the Czech students were neutral, and only 27, 80 % (Slovakian) and 13, 21 % (Czech) indicated values from 5 to 7, meaning that the education system prepares students for changing social and cultural conditions in Europe in a satisfactory way. It is also noteworthy to mention that the highest values (7) were selected only by 1, 7 % altogether that is by ten people out of 386.

### 3.2 Tourism students' perceptions in terms of working in a multicultural society

4. Ethnic diversity at a workplace

may be fruitful since it can bring new solutions to problems.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	can cause frustration and lead to conflicts.
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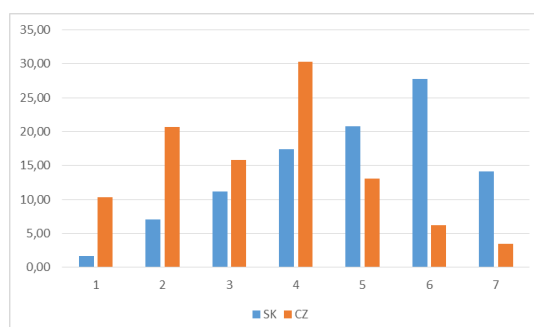


Figure 4: The perception of ethnic diversity at a workplace

In terms of the perception of ethnic diversity at a workplace, the majority, i.e. 62, 66 % of the Slovak respondents agreed that it may be fruitful since it can bring new solutions to problems (see Figure 4). However, according to almost one fifth (19, 91 %), ethnic diversity at a workplace can cause frustration and lead to conflicts, while 17, 43 % of them did not take a stand on this question. As far as the Czech undergraduates are concerned, 22, 76 % of them considered ethnic diversity at a workplace as fruitful and 46, 89 % conceived it as rather frustrating. Also, one-third (30, 34 %) chose to be neutral in this question.



5. Dealing with guests of other ethnic and religious groups (e.g. Roma, Muslims, etc.):

makes a job more interesting.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	makes a job less appealing.
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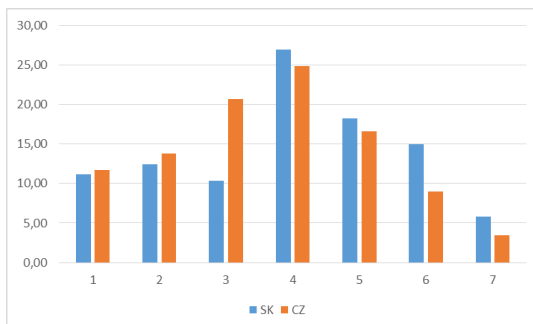


Figure 5: Dealing with guests of other ethnic and religious groups

Even though services in tourism are based on the interaction of people usually from at least two cultures, 34, 02 %, that is more than the third of Slovak tourism undergraduates expressed their opinion that dealing with guests of other ethnic and religious groups made a position less appealing (see Figure No 5). Also, only according to 39, 01 % of them is such a job more interesting, while 26, 97 %, i.e. more than a quarter remained neutral. Regarding the Czech respondents, even less than in the case of the Slovak students, only 28, 97 % of them found dealing with guests with the different cultural background more attractive and 46, 20 % of them considered it to be less appealing. Also, 24, 83 % did not take a stand on this issue.

6. Does the education system prepare you/students for changing conditions on the labour market in terms of cooperating with people coming from different cultural background?

In a satisfactory way.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	In an unsatisfactory way.
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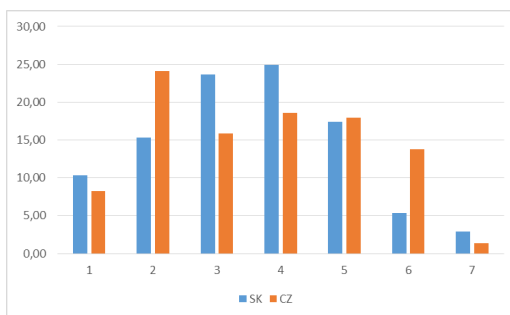


Figure 6: The perception of the efficiency of the education system in terms of preparing for working in multicultural environments

The efficiency of the education system in terms of preparing for working in multicultural environments was conceived quite similarly for the Slovak and the Czech respondents, since almost half of the former (49, 37 %) and 48, 28 % of the latter indicated that it was rather unsatisfactory. Besides, 24, 90 % of the Slovak and 18, 62 % of the Czech students stayed neutral, while only 25, 72 % of the former and 33, 10 % of the latter thought that the educational institutions gave them the necessary skills to tackle the mentioned challenges of the labour market (see Figure No 6).

### 3. Conclusions

Based on the above-discussed results, it can be assumed that Slovakian and Czech students' attitude towards cultural diversity shows a kind of controversy since, on the one hand, the former regard it rather as an enrichment of life, yet they think that religious radicalism of ethnic minorities and their social status is the source of current problems in multicultural societies; while the latter considers



cultural diversity rather as a threatening danger, however, they do not think that recent problems in multicultural societies are related to religious radicalism of ethnic minorities and their social status. Furthermore, both in terms of cultural diversity at a workplace and dealing with culturally diverse guests the Slovakian students demonstrated a more positive attitude in comparison to the Czech undergraduates. Yet, both groups agree that the efficiency of the education system neither in the case of preparing for living in a multicultural society nor concerning working at multicultural workplaces is satisfactory. Hence, it seems that the key to the shift in students' perceptions towards cultural diversity in both countries is in the hands of the stakeholders in education including teachers and the management of educational institutions, as well as governmental bodies, to provide an adequate educational background for softening (tourism) students' attitude and sensitivity towards cultural diversity throughout and from the very beginning of their studies.

#### 4. Acknowledgement

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