

Multicultural society from view of university students

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Abstract

The article focuses on exploring the way in which Slovakia is viewed as a multicultural society by sampling university students with a survey. For that reason, the aim was to examine the extent that participation in the educational process at university affects opinions held by the university students on the existence of a multicultural society in Slovakia. The theoretical part of the article defines basic key terms associated with the given issue. The aim of the article's empirical examination is to analyse the formation of opinions of the surveyed students connected with the topic of a multicultural society in the educational process at universities. 200 university students participated in our empirical research. Data were collected in the course of April 2016 through a questionnaire prepared in advance. Processing and subsequent univariant, bivariant and multivariant analyses of the collected data were carried out using the statistical software SPSS 2.

Key words: culture, multicultural society, nation, university education, university students

Introduction

In today's world, one can see constantly extending diversity and variety in almost all areas of life, including social life. The 'daily' life of individuals is determined by the effect and course of several elementary interactions reflecting events in society. Understanding them is considered to be the essence of living a person's social and private life to the fullest. For that reason, it is necessary to pay more attention to exploring the attitudes and opinions of various groups of people who create, by their interactions, an inevitable precondition for maintaining and sustaining an effective and acceptable social order. However, the past few years have brought along a gradual transformation of the way that some settled and accustomed conditions for the existence and effectiveness of values and norms in society traditionally work.

If we aim at defining both typical and specific phenomena and processes in the current arrangement of crucial social circumstances, we must focus our attention on exploring the issue of multicultural society. Multicultural society is a

result of the unstoppable collision of cultural differences. It is the diversity of the existing spectrum of cultures that is in many cases the source of constantly emerging questions of individuals concerning the vision of the future.

University students definitely represent an important group of the population. This generation of people is essential not only for its multiplicity, but also for their attitudes and opinions which they present during their everyday interactions necessary for the constant development, formation and sustainment of an effective social order. University students in Slovakia begin to participate in the decision making processes that influence not only their present life, but their future as well. For that reason, we find it necessary to explore their opinions on the existence of a multicultural society in Slovakia. The subject of our research also outlines the possible preconditions for forming these opinions by our respondents, based on their presence at lectures and seminars carried out within the educational process at university. The university environment is considered to be the place where an individual not only gains and deepens his/her knowledge, but also forms attitudes and opinions according to which he/she lives his/her life by in society. Therefore, we need to focus our attention on the way in which university students, as a specific group of population, perceive the multicultural society in Slovakia.

Culture and multicultural society

When defining elementary interactions between individuals, it is necessary to draw from the overall character of basic characteristics and specifics of society. Therefore, we need to focus on the description of a chosen human creation that is *culture*. "Culture is a specific human way of organising, performing and developing human activities objectified in both material and non-material results of its everyday performance" (Sabol-Zubková, 2003, p. 9). Speaking about the general definition of culture, what is important is the fundamental fact that it is being created by human individuals. The everyday interactions between individuals result in producing both material and non-material outcomes which need to be characterised as the basic building pillars of culture in society.

In every culture, one can observe various phenomena. Cultural phenomena can be understood as positive values participating in the cultivation and humanisation of man and directed towards the progressive development of human society (Soukup, 2000, p. 15). At this point, we do not find it necessary to pay more attention to extensive definitions of culture and its specifics. However, we need to emphasise the fact that based on subsuming an individual into a specific culture, a significant development of his/her personality takes place through accepting and potential subsequent reproducing the given cultural values through which one integrates oneself into human society. Culture represents an important and inevitable part of human survival and for that

reason the phenomena connected with it participate in the progressive development of society as well.

In addition, one should not forget that society is currently experiencing an expansion of diversity and variety. It is possible to observe many minority groups in comparison to the majority. Minority groups are often either repressed or dismissed. Many member states of the European Union have been experiencing the issue of the non-acceptance of minority groups for a long time and therefore anti-discrimination strategies should be adopted as a part of the accepted common policy of the European Union (Cabanová, 2006, p. 47 – 48). That means that the issue of existing prejudices and signs of rejecting the members of minority groups of the population by the majority affects various member states of the European Union. As a result, many different concepts and strategies striving to achieve an equal perception of all groups of population in society are being created. Despite that, it is necessary to think about the strategies that are being adapted and their real effectiveness, since it would be more adequate to direct their focus and content more at the middle generations of the population.

In our opinion, for social development is also typical that “cultural differences are the cause of many misunderstandings and conflicts. These misunderstandings are often displayed in the form of prejudices and stereotypes, but they can also result in more serious forms, such as intolerance, xenophobia and racism” (Kurčíková, 2016, p. 165). Emphasising and deepening cultural differences brings along conflicts between the members of individual cultures who are neither willing nor able to accept the existing differences. Differences between individuals can also arise from their different nationalities, since within the existence of multicultural society, Kymlicka points out that every nation has its own homeland, language as well as history (Kymlicka, 2000, p. 52). A person's nationality is also considered to be a way of perceiving members of different nations as individuals characterised by their diversity. Members of different nations can also relate to the specifics of different cultures, which only deepens potential prejudices or stereotypes of the members of majority nations in comparison with the minorities existing in society.

A gradual collision of elements of many different cultures witnessed nowadays gives rise to a situation where a pluralistic system of cultural values emerges. That is what we call an existence of multiculturalism in the current world society. The term multiculturalism is according to Sabol and Zubková usually used in the following meanings (Sabol-Zubková, 2003, p. 21 – 22):

1. state – multiculturalism can be defined as the coexistence of socio-cultural groups with a system of traditions, institutions and meanings,
2. process – multiculturalism is understood as the mutual influencing of different cultural systems,
3. scientific theory – exploring the aspects of socio-cultural diversity,

4. social aim – an effort to create a pluralistic society connecting various different socio-cultural groups.

There are many definitions of multiculturalism in the current theories. In connection with the given subject of exploration set in our article, we focus our attention on the prevailing perception of multiculturalism as a social aim. Through promoting multiculturalism in the current society we can observe an effort to gradually create a pluralistic and diversified society based on the existence of several diverse and mainly culturally different groups. The direction towards creating a multicultural society is determined mainly by the overall character of current migration processes, when the elements of individual cultures gradually mix and blend.

In focusing on attitudes and opinions of individuals on perceiving the existing culturally different groups, Kadlečiková points out that these opinions are being formed in the family environment, although they can be changed based on secondary socialisation through multicultural education in the school environment (Kadlečiková, 2009, p. 23 – 24). During childhood, the family is considered to be a significant socialising factor. A child usually spends a lot of time with his/her relatives, which affects the process of forming the child's attitudes and opinions. With progressing socialisation, however, a young person, comes into contact with a different environment than the person's own family. It is mostly the school environment where an individual expands his/her beliefs, but can also take a completely different direction in comparison with the values, norms, attitudes and opinions acquired so far. Therefore, we agree with the importance of incorporating a multicultural education into the existing educational system. It is also necessary to emphasise that an essential part of multicultural education should be the consistent exploration of the issue of multiculturalism not only in the world, but the specifics of this phenomenon in Slovakia as well. Furthermore, a multicultural education is equally important at all levels of education.

The goals of multicultural education can be described in the following way (Kurčíková, 2016, p. 170):

1. delivering knowledge and information about cultural pluralism,
2. understanding different cultures, overcoming prejudices and stereotypes,
3. tolerance, empathy, fellowship, cooperation, positive relationship to different cultures.

The main goal of the content of multicultural education is mainly to deliver basic knowledge about the existence of specifics of many different cultures all around the world. Only deep knowledge and constant learning about the differences can lead to overcoming concerns and fear of unknown customs, values or traditions. On the other hand, it is necessary to outline that a consistent knowledge of the differences of various cultures can also lead to not only

condemning diversity and gaining a hostile attitude, but even to creating new or enhancing existing prejudices or stereotypes. Another particularity of the multicultural education is the certainty that cultural factors should not restrain anyone from getting education (Fullinwider, 1996, p. 3). If we speak about multicultural education, it is equally important for members of the majority culture as well as the minority culture to participate in the educational process.

Carrying out multicultural education also requires qualified educators, whose attitudes, opinions, abilities and skills are based on understanding the values of pluralistic society (Vavrus, 2002, p. 18). Learning about the preconditions for the existence of many different cultures within one society is necessary for teaching future generations the exact same thing.

Empirical research

During the empirical research of the given issue, we focused on clarifying and answering the empirical question related to exploring the perception of Slovakia as a multicultural country by the university students that we surveyed. What follows is a brief review of the opinions of our respondents related to the issue mentioned. Since a detailed and complex analysis of the perception of multicultural society is an extensive subject of both theoretical and empirical exploration, we need to focus on the chosen areas that characterise the subject of our research. Our focus is thus narrowed to the analysis of opinions of the surveyed university students related to the perception of the issue of multiculturalism in the current Slovak society. Based on a brief review connected to the given issue, we can more closely explore the preconditions for forming opinions by our respondents. Therefore, we find it adequate to determine the connection between perceiving Slovakia as a multicultural country and viewing multiculturalism as an issue in the current Slovak society by the university students of the survey. In addition, we took in to consideration the specificities of the educational process at university, which mostly consists of attending lectures and seminars. Since educational process is considered to be an important way of gaining knowledge, as well as a precondition for the formation of attitudes and opinions by the persons that are being educated in many different areas, we need to search for a connection of the opinions of the university students surveyed with the perception of multiculturalism in Slovakia.

During our empirical research of the university students' view on the issue of multicultural society, we interviewed 200 university students studying at universities all over Slovakia. We used the quantitative approach, which allowed us to map opinions of the given research group. The collection of data through a questionnaire prepared in advance took place in April 2016. The data that were collected were subsequently processed and evaluated using the statistical software SPSS 20.

What follows this brief introduction is our analysis of the issue of the perception of multiculturalism in current Slovak society by the surveyed university students.

Table 1: Multiculturalism as an issue in the current Slovak society according to the surveyed university students

Multiculturalism as an issue in the current Slovak society	Number of students	%
Did not respond	14	7.3
No	20	10.4
Rather no	44	22.8
Rather yes	42	21.8
Yes	46	23.8
I do not know	27	14.0
Total	193	100.0

Based on the data shown in the table above, we can state that 10.5% of the university students clearly do not consider multiculturalism to be an issue in current Slovak society. However, we would like to emphasise the profiling of 3 approximately same-sized groups of our respondents. On one hand, almost 23% of the surveyed university students responded that they rather do not consider multiculturalism to be an issue in current Slovak society. On the other hand, an group of approximately the same-size as our respondents (almost 22%) rather perceive multiculturalism as an issue for the current Slovak society. However, we need to point out that the highest number of our respondents definitely view multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society (almost 24% of the university students that were surveyed). Additionally, we noted responses of the surveyed university students who did not have an answer when asked about the given issue (14% of our respondents). We can state, that based on the results of our empirical research, we cannot definitely assess whether the university students that we surveyed perceive multiculturalism as an issue for the current Slovak society. Despite the dominant frequency of responses clearly considering multiculturalism to be an issue in current Slovak society, it is necessary not to exclude from the focus all the other, almost equally representative, responses. The reason for this is the actual existence of multicultural society, which is characterised by its complicated essence that can only be understood through a detailed and complex exploration. For that reason and based on the results of the research, we consider the profiling of opinions on the issue of multicultural society in Slovakia to be an extensive and long-continuing process that requires constant learning about the essence of this issue. Learning about the essence of multiculturalism, as well as the consequences and contributions of its constant

expansion, would be possible also through the integration of multicultural education into the content of education at all levels of the educational system within Slovakia.

Based on the observed prevailing perception of multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society by the surveyed university students, it is necessary to further explore the preconditions for the formation and subsequent development of the opinions of our respondents. For that reason, we have focused our attention on searching for a connection between the prevailing perception of multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society and discussing the issue of multicultural society at lectures and seminars in the process of university education.

Table 2: Discussion of the issue of multicultural society at lectures and seminars connected with the perception of multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society

Discussion of multicultural society at lectures and seminars		Multiculturalism as an issue in the current Slovak society					Total	
		Without a response	No	Rather no	Rather yes	Yes		I do not know
Without a response	number	0	1	5	4	3	2	15
	%	0.0	0.5	2.6	2.1	1.6	1.0	7.8
No	number	1	1	10	4	9	3	28
	%	0.5	0.5	5.2	2.1	4.7	1.6	14.5
Rather no	number	3	5	6	13	6	4	37
	%	1.6	2.6	3.1	6.7	3.1	2.1	19.2
Rather yes	number	6	4	8	10	11	6	45
	%	3.1	2.1	4.1	5.2	5.7	3.1	23.3
Yes	number	1	6	12	10	11	7	47
	%	0.5	3.1	6.2	5.2	5.7	3.6	24.4
I do not know	number	3	3	3	1	6	5	21
	%	1.6	1.6	1.6	0.5	3.1	2.6	10.9
Total	number	14	20	44	42	46	27	193
	%	7.3	10.4	22.8	21.8	23.8	14.0	100.0

The results of the second-degree processing of our research data displayed above (Table 2) point to the absence of a connection between the discussion of the issue of multicultural society at lectures and seminars during university education and the perception of multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society among the surveyed university students. Even though the mentioned issue is according to our respondents a part of lectures and seminars carried out

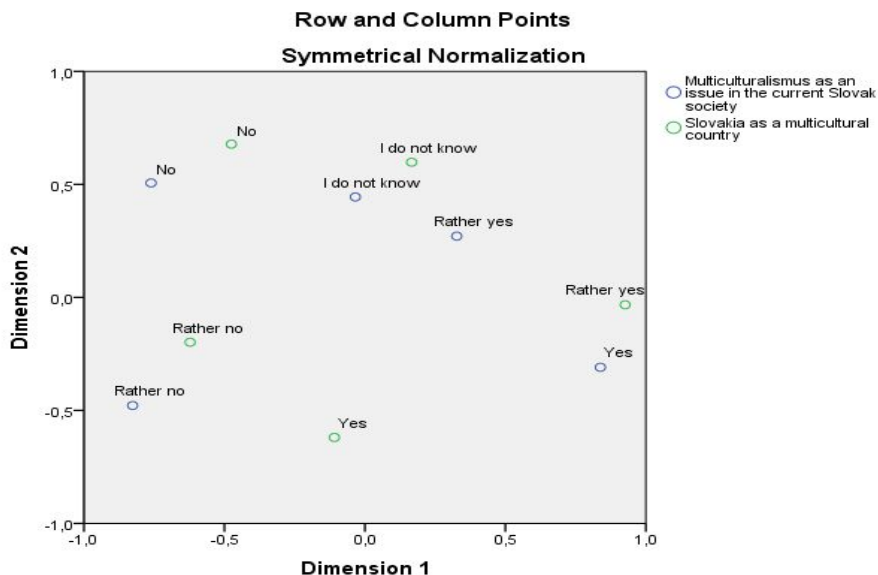
at university, this way of learning about the given issue cannot be considered to be the basis for viewing multiculturalism as an issue for current Slovak society by the university students of the survey. Approximately 5% of our respondents, who did not have the opportunity to discuss the issue of existing multicultural society at lectures and seminars, rather do not consider multiculturalism to be an issue in current Slovak society. At the same time, almost the same number of respondents, who also did not have the opportunity to discuss the issue of multicultural society at lectures and seminars, responded that they definitely perceive multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society. Besides that, we cannot forget to outline the group of respondents who did have the opportunity to discuss the given issue at lectures and seminars. Within this group of the surveyed university students, almost 6% of our respondents rather do not view multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society. On the other hand, we cannot avoid the fact that almost the same number of the surveyed university students who had the opportunity to discuss the issue of multicultural society at their lectures and seminars definitely perceive multiculturalism in Slovakia as an issue, and at the same time again, almost the same number of our respondents rather consider multiculturalism to be an issue in Slovakia.

Table 3: Perceiving Slovakia as a multicultural country and perceiving multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society

Slovakia as a multicultural country		Multiculturalism as an issue in the current Slovak society						Total
		<i>Without a response</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Rather no</i>	<i>Rather yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>I do not know</i>	
Without a response	<i>No.</i>	3	0	5	2	4	3	17
	<i>%</i>	1.6	0.0%	2.6%	1.0%	2.1%	1.6%	8.8%
No	<i>No.</i>	1	6	6	6	3	4	26
	<i>%</i>	0.5	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	1.6%	2.1%	13.5%
Rather no	<i>No.</i>	7	9	22	12	7	7	64
	<i>%</i>	3.6	4.7%	11.4%	6.2%	3.6%	3.6%	33.2%
Rather yes	<i>No.</i>	2	2	3	17	23	6	53
	<i>%</i>	1.0	1.0%	1.6%	8.8%	11.9%	3.1%	27.5%
Yes	<i>No.</i>	0	2	6	2	6	3	19
	<i>%</i>	0.0	1.0%	3.1%	1.0%	3.1%	1.6%	9.8%
I do not know	<i>No.</i>	1	1	2	3	3	4	14
	<i>%</i>	0.5	0.5%	1.0%	1.6%	1.6%	2.1%	7.3%
Total	<i>No.</i>	14	20	44	42	46	27	193
	<i>%</i>	7.3	10,4 %	22.8%	21.8%	23.8%	14.0%	100.0%

The educational process at university that is carried out through lectures and seminars influences the attitudes and opinions of participating individuals in a significant way. However, it is necessary to emphasise the effect of many other factors and elements on forming the personality of a young person as well. It is mainly the undeniable influence of information presented in the media. In our opinion, it is the content of media that plays an important role in affecting the judgement of our surveyed university students.

Based on the data collected in our research and displayed in Table 3, we can state that multiculturalism is most often considered to be an issue in current Slovak society by the surveyed university students who rather consider Slovakia to be a multicultural country. Approximately 9% of our respondents rather considering Slovakia to be a multicultural country also rather perceive multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society. Almost 12% of the surveyed university students who rather consider Slovakia to be a multicultural country, responded that multiculturalism definitely represents an issue for the current Slovak society.

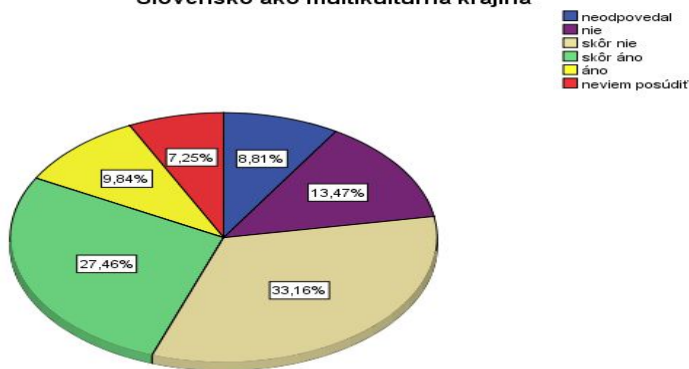


Graph 1: Correspondence map of perceiving Slovakia as a multicultural country and perceiving multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society by the university students surveyed.

Further, it is also necessary to outline a group of respondents (approximately 11% of the sample) who rather do not consider Slovakia to be a multicultural country and at the same time they rather do not consider multiculturalism to be an issue in the current Slovak society. There is a correlation between the observed variables, which means that the surveyed university students who mostly perceive Slovakia as a multicultural country also mostly perceive multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society. These observed results can be explained through the above image, constantly discussed consequences, as well as potential threats arising from constantly expanding multiculturalism in the current world.

The vision of existing multicultural society in Slovakia is according to our respondents highly relevant at the moment. Moreover, it is important to add that mainly based on the concept of multicultural society presented in the media or on social media, the respondents associate multiculturalism with various threats and that is the reason why many respondents perceive multiculturalism as an issue for the current Slovak society. These observed results can be supported by the results of our multivariate analysis of data displayed in the correspondence map below.

Slovakia as a multicultural country
Slovensko ako multikultúrna krajina



Graph 2: Perceiving Slovakia as a multicultural country by the university students of the survey.

Just to complete the vision of Slovakia as a multicultural country, Graph 2 records the responses of our respondents related to the given issue. We can note

that based only on opinions of the surveyed university students, we cannot definitely assess whether Slovakia represents a multicultural country or not.

Discussion

By exploring the issue mentioned above, we were able to outline the surveyed university students' view on Slovakia as a multicultural country. For that reason, we would like to accentuate that the results of our research based on which we cannot definitely assess, whether the surveyed university students perceive multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society. There are 3 approximately same-sized profiled groups of respondents, 2 of which rather consider multiculturalism to be an issue in current Slovak society. Further more, almost the same number of university students that were surveyed do not perceive multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society. For that reason, we focused on a more detailed exploration and search for possible preconditions that would lead to the forming of the opinions observed among our respondents. Since our research focused on mapping the opinions of the surveyed university students, we tried to determine to what extent the educational process carried out at university influences the formation of opinions related to the issue of multiculturalism in Slovakia by our respondents. The process of university education is carried out in many different forms and ways, where active interaction plays a significant role in its course, mainly between the university professor and the persons that are being educated, as well as the interaction among the students themselves. One of the various ways of interaction in the university environment is the option to have a discussion within lectures and seminars. Lectures and seminars in the educational process at university are composed in accordance with the effective curriculum of a specific study programme, but they also provide space for expressing opinions that respond to current events in society. According to the prevailing opinions of our surveyed university students, a part of the discussion within lectures and seminars is also the issue of multicultural society. However, the prevailing perception of multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society among our respondents is not influenced by discussing the given issue within lectures and seminars carried out in the process of university education. Despite the fact that we are not able to determine in detail the extent, intensity, scope or course of discussing the issue of multicultural society among the respondents of our research, we can note that understanding the essence and existence of multiculturalism by young people, mainly by university students, would require providing more extensive and more professional space for explaining the given issue in the process of university education. Besides that, we cannot ignore the constant process of development of a young person's personality. Despite the fact that the university environment significantly participates in the formation of each individual's personality,

opinions of a university student are affected by many other socialising factors. It is necessary to emphasise the importance of information that is everyday being delivered by the media, in recent years mostly by the internet and social media. Thanks to modern means of communication, young people come into contact with a huge amount of accessible information that broadens their horizons very easily. In this way, individuals are able to learn about the potential of more or less current issues, not only all over the world, but also about the phenomena and processes occurring within the area where they live their everyday life.

Perceiving various issues in Slovakia by young people, who university students undoubtedly belong to, is usually oriented towards the phenomena and processes that directly affect the life of this above-mentioned group of the population. The existence of multicultural society in Slovakia is to a great extent a highly current and discussed topic. The past few years have brought along a great amount of changes in society. Last but not least, it is necessary to emphasise the gradual and unstoppable collision of many more or less different cultures, elements of which either gradually blend together or they come into conflict. It is the concern or fear of the unknown or innovative, as well as atypical that gets us to think deeply about the current situation in the world. Since current society is accompanied by a great amount of constantly appearing conflicts, in many cases individuals contemplate their essence or causes. As stated above, the collision of many different cultures and their subsequent mixing or blending together can bring along conflicts in a different intensity or extent. For that reason most of the university students surveyed expressed the opinion that multiculturalism in Slovakia needs to be perceived as an issue supported by the prevailing perception of Slovakia as a multicultural country. There are members of various minorities that currently live in Slovakia, which also signifies the diversity of different cultures that occur in the given area and that are usually being preserved or constantly cultivated by their members.

Conclusion

In our article, we focused on presenting the opinions of the surveyed university students regarding the issue of existing multicultural society in Slovakia. Since this topic is an extensive subject of research, we focused our attention on selected aspects that would highlight the views of the university students that were surveyed on multicultural society. During our empirical research, we questioned 200 university students studying all over Slovakia. The collection of data was carried out through a questionnaire prepared in advance. The subsequent analysis of the collected empirical material was carried out using the methods of univariant, bivariant and multivariant analysis of data in the statistical software SPSS 20.

Based on the results of our research, we can outline the views of the surveyed

university students on the existing multicultural society in Slovakia. However, by mapping the opinions of our respondents, we must point out the diversity and ambiguity regarding the perception of the existing multicultural society in Slovakia by the surveyed university students. We would like to emphasise the observed prevailing perception of multiculturalism as an issue in current Slovak society. Among our respondents, the seeing of multiculturalism as an issue in Slovakia is, however, not supported by learning about the given issue at their lectures and seminars carried out within the educational process at university. The process of education in the university environment indeed participates in the formation of attitudes and opinions of the persons that are being educated, but among the university students of the survey, it is necessary, in connection with their perception of multiculturalism in Slovakia, to pay more attention to the way they perceive multicultural society. This observed result regarding the prevailing perception of multiculturalism as an issue in the current Slovak society most often arises from viewing Slovakia as a multicultural country by our respondents. Multicultural society is mainly associated these days with the mixing of many different cultures, their diffusion, as well as the constant appearance of various conflicts, which brings along, mostly among young people, a great amount of unanswered questions related to future social development not only around the world, but also in Slovakia. For this reason, the process of university education should focus more on explaining the essence of how a multicultural society works all over the world and at the same time it should mainly focus on multiculturalism in Slovakia.

If we focus on further exploration of the issue of multicultural society, we need to point out again that this given issue provides a great amount of opportunities for both theoretical and empirical research. However, based on the results that we obtained in our research, we consider the usage of data from the quantitative research to be a contribution for having a profound conversation with a group of selected university students. A more detailed and more extensive exploration of opinions of selected university students related to the position of Slovak nationals in the current Slovak society in comparison with the position of members of different national minorities that live in Slovakia can serve as one of the main goals of a subsequent qualitative empirical research.

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