

15

Social Identities and Attitudes towards Assimilationism and Multiculturalism in Four Multiethnic Communities

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Abstract

Relations between the ethnic majority and minorities in Croatia have been developing under the influence of different circumstances. Hence we expect different social contexts to shape social identities of the majority and the minorities in different ways. The relationship between social identities and attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilationism, which determine the majority-minority relations, is particularly important.

Therefore, we compared the importance of different social identities of the majority and the minority group in four multi-ethnic communities, where minorities exercise their right to education in their respective mother tongues (Croats, Serbs in Vukovar, Hungarians in Baranja, Italians in Istria and Czechs in Daruvar). In addition, we were interested in differences in attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilation with respect to the status of the group and the region. We also wanted to investigate the relation between ideological attitudes and the importance of social identities. The data was collected from 745 primary and secondary school students, members of minorities and the majority, aged 12 to 19.

The results show that the importance of specific social categories varies across regions and largely depends on the majority-minority group status. We found different patterns of relations between salience of specific social identities and the two ideological orientations, multiculturalism and assimilationism, depending on the region and group status. With an exception of Daruvar, among majority group members, ethnonationalism, rather than ethnic identity, was related to multiculturalism and assimilationism. Among minorities, these relations are considerably weaker and region dependent.

Keywords: multiculturalism, assimilationism, multi-ethnic communities, social identities

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Introduction

The term *identity* has been one of the main concepts in psychology ever since Erikson's work in the second half of the twentieth century (Erikson, 1966, 1968, 1994). There has been a substantial body of research reporting that the development of personal and social identity is the central task in adolescence (Albarello, Crocetti & Rubini, 2018; Brown, 1990; Meeus, 2011; Tarrant, 2002). Furthermore, in the 1990s a renewed academic interest in identities (especially in interpretations of national identity) took place. Although questions of identity have become both more salient and more important than ever, its interpretation remains vague (Verkuyten, 2005b). Social identities are not only shaped by the social context, but they themselves shape one's attitudes towards other groups. In modern societies attitudes towards the assimilationism and towards multiculturalism are especially relevant. Multiculturalism is an ideological foundation of the European Union, which is evident in its motto: "*In Varietate Concordia*"-"*United in Diversity*". However, while some people argue that multiculturalism corresponds to equality and democracy, others claim that multiculturalism challenges national integrity and unity. For some, it serves to prevent (ethno) nationalism, and to promote cultural diversity; for others, multiculturalism is the source of ethnic conflicts, which increases the need for assimilation (Kastoryano, 2009). We propose that whether attitudes towards multiculturalism (vs. assimilationism) will be dominantly positive in one country highly depends on the existing social and political circumstances in that country i.e. intergroup relations between the majority and minority groups in question. Furthermore, within each country there should be significant differences in the above mentioned attitudes depending on its "*microclimate*", that is the ethnic diversity and intergroup relations in any specific region. Thus, in this paper, we examine the importance of different social identities among the ethnic majority and minority groups in Croatia, along with their relations with specific attitudes towards assimilationism and multiculturalism.

In articulating *social identity theory* (SIT), Tajfel and Turner (1979; Tajfel, 1982) posited the distinction between *personal* and *social identity* which underpinned the difference between interpersonal (people define themselves as idiosyncratic individuals with no awareness of social categories) and intergroup (people relate entirely as members of their groups) ends of the spectrum of human interaction. Social identities involve more or less clearly defined social categories that distinguish people (such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc.), and based on those categories an individual is located in a social structure. Furthermore, people tend to evaluate their groups more positively and show in-group bias as a means of enhancing their social self-esteem (Brown, 2000; Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 2002; Hornsey, 2008; Verkuyten, 2005b). According to *self-categorisation theory* (SCT; Turner & Reynolds, 2012), identity operates at different levels of self-definition rather than on a bipolar spectrum, but the central point is always the same: the impact of social groups on the way people perceive themselves and others can be understood only by taking into consideration the importance of the social context as one of the most important agents of development of intergroup attitudes (Ellemers et al., 2002; Maloku, Derks, Van Laar & Ellemers, 2016; Nesdale & Flesser, 2001; Verkuyten, 2017).

Identity as a dynamic social product cannot be understood except in relation to its social context and historical perspective. Just like being the only woman in the room can make you more aware of your gender, growing up in a multi-ethnic community can make your (as well as the other) social group more salient. It can be either a positive or a negative experience, depending on the intergroup relations and the status of your group in the community.

In line with what has been previously said, in this paper we examine the importance of different social identities among the ethnic majority and minorities in four different multi-ethnic communities in Croatia (Croats as the majority group, Serbs in Vukovar, Hungarians in Baranja region, Czechs in Daruvar region, and Italians in Istria). We chose these four specific regions in Croatia where Croats are the majority group living next to a minority group that is big enough to be recognised by the state and to exercise minority

rights, such as the right to education in their respective mother tongues (e.g. model A of minority education) (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2008; Mesić & Baranović, 2005; NN 155/02, 47/10, 80/10, 91/11;). However, relations between the majority group and four different minorities in Croatia have been developing under different cultural and historical circumstances. Ever since the Croatian War of Independence, Vukovar has been developing as a post-conflict community divided along ethnic lines, where intergroup communication is flimsy and reconciliation is very slow (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2009, 2012). As opposed to Vukovar, the other three contexts are more likely to meet conditions for optimal contact and develop positive intergroup attitudes. This is especially true for the Daruvar region where tensions between the two groups never existed, as well as for the Istria region with the long history of multiculturalism. Since social identities are formed and defined in the social world (Verkuyten, 2005b), we argue that historically, economically and culturally different social contexts will form social identities of the majority and the minorities in Croatia in different ways.

People inevitably belong to more than one group at a time i.e. they have multiple identities. For instance, the common in-group identity model recommends including former in-group and former out-group members in one superordinate category (i.e. the perception of one, more inclusive common group rather than two opposing groups) (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell & Dovidio, 1989). A psychologically less damaging strategy for minority groups who might fear being assimilated into a larger category is the dual identity model, which proposes the creation of a superordinate identity while simultaneously encouraging the retention of subgroup identities (Cameron, Rutland, Brown & Douch, 2006; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gonzalez & Brown, 2003; Levy, Van Zomeren, Saguy & Halperin, 2017; Verkuyten, 2016). Another example is cross-categorisation or social identity complexity, an approach that deals with the overlap between different social identities and examines the connection between the extent of such overlap and the salience of social categories (Brewer, 2010; Levy et al., 2017; Maloku et al., 2016; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). According to social identity complexity theory, intergroup relations may improve to the extent that people subjectively combine their multiple identities in complex in-group representations, which should be quite inclusive (Brewer, 2010).

Therefore, we started from their ethnic identity which is one of the most popular concepts today, both among scholars and among the wider public. However, people can be attached to their ethnic group in many ways that may have different consequences on intergroup relations. For instance, constructive patriotism, involving attachment and love for one's country, has to be distinguished from blind patriotism that involves uncritical support for one's country, and from nationalism, an ideology based on the premise that one's nation is superior to other nations (Bakić, 2006; Schatz, Staub & Lavine, 1999). In terms of social context in Croatia, it is more appropriate to refer to ethnonationalism, where nations are defined by a shared heritage and culture (common language, faith, and ethnic ancestry). It is different from a cultural definition of the nation, which allows people to become members of a nation by assimilation (e.g. USA); and from a linguistic definition, which puts all speakers of a specific language in one nation (Muller, 2008). Recent studies suggest that ethnonationalism, rather than ethnic identity per se, is detrimental for post-conflict reconciliation (Jelić, Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2014; Penic, Elcheroth & Morselli, 2017). Hence, apart from taking into consideration the ethnic identity as a social categorisation, we also examined ethnonationalism and its relation to multiculturalism and assimilationism. Finally, we examined the importance of two superordinate social categories - Croatian citizens (category that includes members of all ethnic groups in the country and allows minority and majority group members a common in-group identity) and Europeans (in order to encompass supranational identity that allows people to distance themselves from national and subnational identities and to define themselves in more cosmopolitan terms).

In addition, we were interested in investigating the relation of social identities and multiculturalism and assimilationism, as two basic ideological orientations that determine the relations between the

majority and the minority groups in multi-ethnic communities. Multiculturalism emphasises equality and respect for ethno-cultural differences (Ghosh, 2018). Verkuyten (2003) argues that promoting multiculturalism among children in schools results in less social exclusion based on ethnicity and higher concern for equal treatment, especially among children in the majority group. Furthermore, he suggests that, in the majority group, multiculturalism is associated with lower importance of ethnic identity (Verkuyten, 2005a). However, it is important how the majority group members perceive minority group members in terms of dual social identities (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2010). According to Teney (2011), there are two types of assimilationism: weak and strong. While the weak form allows minorities to keep and cherish their heritage in the privacy of their homes, strong assimilationism is a complex process in which minorities not only fully integrate themselves into a country of domicile, but also lose some aspects, or even their entire heritage. In general, and in line with SIT (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel Turner, 1979), the minority group members are more likely to endorse multiculturalism more strongly and assimilationism less strongly than the majority group members, whereas for the majority group members the situation is the opposite (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2012; Verkuyten, 2005a, 2005b). However, it would be wrong to claim that groups are homogenous in their attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilationism and to ignore the importance of the social context. As research shows, when a multi-ethnic community is highly functional and intergroup relations are not disrupted, the majority group members endorse assimilationism less strongly (Jelić et al., 2014; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Furthermore, the strength of people's identification with their ethnic group is also an important determinant of multiculturalism and assimilationism (Verkuyten, 2005b; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

To summarise, drawing on the SIT perspective, we investigate the importance of different social identities (ethnic, Croatian, European and ethnonationalism) in the function of social context (Vukovar, Daruvar region, Baranja region, and Istria) and group status (Croats as the majority group and Serbs, Czechs, Hungarians, and Italians as respective minority groups). Furthermore, we explore the relation of these social identities to ideological attitudes- multiculturalism and assimilationism.

We expected that the ethnic social identity would be more important to both majority and minority group members in Vukovar in comparison to other contexts. Furthermore, we expected that ethnonationalism would be more pronounced in Vukovar (a post-conflict community) than elsewhere. We further hypothesised that the attachment to Croatia would be stronger for the majority group, and that this majority - minority difference would be the strongest in Vukovar and the least strong in the Daruvar region. On the contrary, we expected the European identity to be more salient for minority groups. We also expected that ethnonationalism would be more strongly related than ethnic identity regarding attitudes towards multiculturalism (negatively) and assimilationism (positively) regardless of the context. Finally, we expected this relation to be stronger for the majority group i.e. the group with a higher status in the society. Hence, we expected the majority group members to hold more positive attitudes towards assimilationism and less positive ones towards multiculturalism than minority groups, especially in Vukovar, and least of all in Daruvar.

Material and methods

Participants

The participants were 745 students (285 men, 455 women, and 5 participants did not specify gender) from 15 elementary ($n = 275$) and 12 high schools ($n = 470$), with the age range from 12 to 19 years ($M = 15.68$; $SD = 1.092$). The sample consisted of 455 Croats and 290 members of ethnic minorities (Serbs, Czechs, Hungarians, and Italians). The distribution across regions is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 *Sample composition by region in Croatia and group status*

Group status	Vukovar	Daruvar	Baranja	Istria	Total
Majority	156	97	63	139	455 (61.1%)
Minority	119	63	50	58	290 (38.9%)
Total	275 (36.6%)	160 (21.5%)	113 (15.2%)	197 (26.4%)	745 (100%)

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered in groups, during regular classes. Participation was voluntary and parental permission was obtained for underage students. All questionnaires were completed anonymously and were administered in the native tongues of the students. However, the minority members could choose whether they wanted to complete the questionnaire in Croatian or in their native language. In most classes, administration lasted a little under one school period (45 min), and during this time only a researcher was present in the classroom with the students. Students from all ethnic backgrounds had a high proficiency in the Croatian language, so the oral instructions were given in Croatian. However, the researcher was able to provide individual explanations if any of the students asked for any.

Measures

Social identities. The importance of different social identities was assessed with single-item measures. Participants indicated the extent to which belonging to a specific social category is important to them. Categories were as follows: *my ethnic group, Croatia, and Europe*. The responses were indicated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 6 (*highly important*).

Ethnonationalism. Ethnonationalism was assessed by three items adapted from Čorkalo Biruški and Kamenov's (1999) research: "*My nation is better than other nations*", "*I would rather belong to my nation than any other nation*", "*In all historical conflicts with other nations my nation was always right*". The responses were indicated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*highly disagree*) to 5 (*highly agree*). Higher values indicated more pronounced ethnonationalism. The reliability of the scale in this research ranged from $\alpha = .74$ in Daruvar region to $\alpha = .80$ in Vukovar.

Attitude towards multiculturalism. The attitude towards multiculturalism was assessed by the five-item scale used in Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković's (2007) research. The items described acceptance of diversity (e.g. "*Ethnic minorities enrich the culture of every nation*"; "*Every state is obligated to protect the rights of national minorities*"), and the responses were indicated on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*highly disagree*) to 4 (*highly agree*). The reliability of the scale in this research ranged from $\alpha = .68$ in Vukovar to $\alpha = .79$ in Istria.

Attitude towards assimilationism. Attitude towards assimilationism was assessed by the five-item scale used in Čorkalo Biruški and Ajduković's (2007) research. Examples of items are "*All children should be attending classes on the Croatian language, with no exception for minorities*", and "*The majority nation should determine the way education should be organised in a country*." The responses were indicated on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*highly disagree*) to 4 (*highly agree*). The reliability of the scale in this research was between $\alpha = .75$ in Baranja region and Istria, and $\alpha = .82$ in Vukovar.

In attitudinal scales higher values indicate a more positive attitude towards the respective attitude object (i.e. having a greater tolerance of diversity or a greater inclination towards the assimilation of ethnic minorities). The neutral point is 2.5, which means that values below this point may be interpreted as indi-

cating negative attitude, and values above this point as indicating positive attitude.

Socio-demographic characteristics. The questionnaire also included some socio-demographic variables, such as age, gender, nationality, and residential status.

Results

Table 2 provides an overview of the means and standard deviations for all dependent variables across different social contexts.

Importance of different social identities

In order to examine the effects of social context and group status on the importance of different social identities and ethnonationalism, we conducted four univariate ANOVAs, for each dependent variable separately: 2 (ethnic majority/minority group status) x 4 (social context: Croato-Serbian in Vukovar, Croato-Czech in Daruvar region, Croato-Hungarian in Baranja region and Croato-Italian in Istria).

Regarding the *importance of ethnic identity*, ANOVA yielded a significant main effect of social context ($F(3,728) = 7.35, p < .01, \eta^2 = .029$), with ethnic identity being the least important to students in Istria ($M = 4.20; SD = 0.092$) and statistically lower from students in Vukovar ($M = 4.72; SD = 0.072$) and the Daruvar region ($M = 4.67; SD = 0.095$). Although we hypothesised that ethnic identity should be most important to both majority and minority group members in Vukovar (a post-conflict community), there was no significant difference in how students in Vukovar, Daruvar and Baranja region ($M = 4.51; SD = 0.111$) valued the importance of belonging to their ethnic groups.

Apart from ethnic identity, we also examined the salience of *ethnonationalism* in the function of social context and group status, where we expected ethnonationalism to be more pronounced in Vukovar than elsewhere due to high tensions between Croatian majority and the Serbian minority. However, results revealed only a significant main effect of the social context ($F(3,613) = 10.39, p < .01, \eta^2 = .048$) with a pattern similar to the importance of ethnic identity. This form of ethnic attachment was least present among students in Istria ($M = 2.30; SD = 0.085$) who differed significantly from the students in the Baranja region ($M = 2.88; SD = 0.104$) and Vukovar ($M = 2.86; SD = 0.067$). Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no significant difference between students in Vukovar, Baranja and the Daruvar region ($M = 2.59; SD = 0.103$). It is important to note here that ethnonationalism generally was not accentuated in our sample since the highest average score obtained is not above the neutral mid-point on our measure (see Table 2).

Table 2 Means and standard deviations for social identities, ethnonationalism, and attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilationism

Dependent variables	Vukovar			Daruvar region			Baranja region			Istria
	Croats <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Serbs <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Croats <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Czechs <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Croats <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Hungarians <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Croats <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Italians <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)		
Social identities	Ethnic group	4.74 (1.202)	4.70 (1.161)	4.55 (1.261)	4.79 (1.034)	4.63 (1.231)	4.38 (1.123)	4.28 (1.131)	4.11 (1.175)	
	Croatia	4.82 (1.343)	2.92 (1.448)	4.78 (1.363)	4.79 (1.305)	4.77 (1.298)	4.06 (1.236)	4.10 (1.363)	3.23 (1.465)	
	Europe	3.76 (1.503)	3.59 (1.475)	4.16 (1.461)	4.43 (1.174)	3.53 (1.364)	4.62 (1.028)	3.82 (1.341)	3.89 (1.543)	
Ethnonationalism	2.85 (1.089)	2.87 (1.155)	2.51 (0.972)	2.67 (0.970)	2.96 (1.077)	2.80 (1.062)	2.36 (0.968)	2.25 (0.841)		
Multiculturalism	3.15 (0.543)	3.59 (0.390)	3.54 (0.459)	3.55 (0.441)	3.28 (0.586)	3.45 (0.455)	3.46 (0.568)	3.60 (0.455)		
Assimilationism	2.35 (0.650)	1.44 (0.530)	2.14 (0.756)	1.89 (0.728)	2.40 (0.682)	2.02 (0.576)	2.10 (0.686)	1.71 (0.540)		

Table 3 Correlations between different social identities and attitudes towards multiculturalism and toward assimilationism in all regions

Region	Social identities	Majority			Minority		
		Multiculturalism	Assimilationism	Assimilationism	Multiculturalism	Assimilationism	Assimilationism
Vukovar	Ethnonationalism	-.25**	.41**	.08	-.06		
	Ethnic group	-.03	.14	.28**	-.15		
	Croatia	-.08	.25**	-.09	.11		
Daruvar	Europe	.02	.07	.10	.15		
	Ethnonationalism	-.13	.39**	-.01	-.17		
	Ethnic group	.26*	.03	.15	.08		
Baranja	Croatia	.06	.11	-.26	-.03		
	Europe	.20	.21	-.01	-.02		
	Ethnonationalism	-.54**	.43**	.17	.07		
Istria	Ethnic group	-.14	.06	.18	-.10		
	Croatia	-.26	.11	-.09	.21		
	Europe	.22	.14	-.08	.19		
Istria	Ethnonationalism	-.34**	.46**	-.13	.21		
	Ethnic group	.11	.15	.02	.03		
	Croatia	.01	.02	-.00	.28*		
Europe	.08	-.08	-.19	.13			

Note. ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Considering the *importance of Croatia*, ANOVA revealed three significant effects. As expected, a significant main effect of group status was revealed ($F(1,725) = 63.58, p < .01, \eta^2 = .068$), with Croatia being more important to Croats ($M = 4.62; SD = 0.068$) than to ethnic minorities ($M = 3.75; SD = 0.085$). Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of the social context ($F(3,725) = 22.51, p < .01, \eta^2 = .073$), which revealed that students in Daruvar region ($M = 4.79; SD = 0.111$) and Baranja region ($M = 4.42; SD = 0.130$) placed higher value on belonging to Croatia compared to students in Vukovar ($M = 3.70; SD = 0.084$) and Istria ($M = 3.67; SD = 0.108$). However, a significant majority/minority status x social context interaction ($F(3,725) = 17.01, p < .01, \eta^2 = .055$) indicated a different pattern of results concerning salience of Croatian identity that depends on both factors. As can be seen in Figure 1 (Appendix), being a Croatian citizen is generally more important to Croats than minorities but the difference between the majority and the minority group in the importance they place on Croatian identity depends on the intergroup context. Thus, this difference is the largest in Vukovar ($F(1,725) = 130.12, p < .01$), mostly due to the Serbian minority who place little importance on Croatia. A similar pattern but with smaller difference can be seen in the Baranja region where the Hungarian minority expresses lower Croatian identity than the majority group ($F(1,725) = 7.60, p < .01$). However, in Daruvar region Croats and Czechs do not differ ($F(1,725) = 0.00, p > .05$) in the importance they place on Croatia, due to the fact that the Czech minority places just as high importance on Croatia. Istria region seems to be specific in a sense that both Croats and Italians place lower importance on Croatian identity than in other regions. However, majority-minority difference is still present in Istria, as Croats show stronger attachment to Croatia than Italians ($F(1,725) = 16.21, p < .01$).

As for the *importance of Europe*, an ANOVA conducted also revealed three significant effects. As expected, a significant main effect of group status was revealed ($F(1,729) = 7.92, p < .01, \eta^2 = .010$), with the European identity being more important to ethnic minorities ($M = 4.13; SD = 0.087$) than to majority members ($M = 3.82; SD = 0.070$). However, an effect size of this difference is negligible. Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of the social context ($F(3,729) = 6.85, p < .01, \eta^2 = .027$). Students in Daruvar region ($M = 4.29; SD = 0.114$) expressed higher European identity than students in Istria ($M = 3.86; SD = 0.110$) and Vukovar ($M = 3.68; SD = 0.086$). Again, a significant majority/minority status x social context interaction ($F(3,729) = 5.44, p < .01, \eta^2 = .021$) was obtained. Majority-minority difference in the importance of Europe was statistically significant only in Baranja region ($F(1,729) = 16.68, p < .01$), where Hungarian minority evidently had more salient European identity in contrast to Croats. Moreover, in the majority sample, Croats in Daruvar showed the strongest attachment to Europe and statistically different from Croats in Vukovar and Croats in Baranja region. As for the minority sample, European identity was clearly more important to Hungarians and Czechs than to Italians and Serbs (see Figure 2).

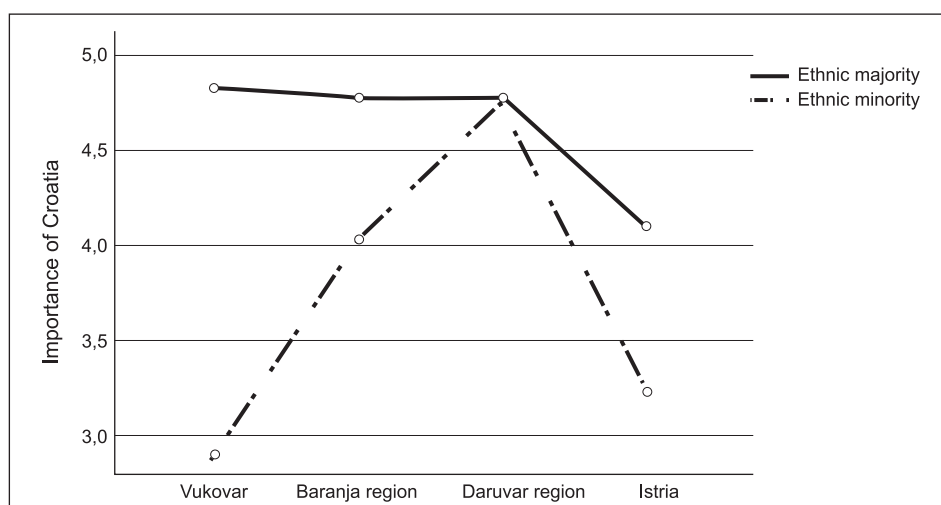


Figure 1. Importance of Croatia as a function of social context and group status
 Note. Scale range from 1 (not at all important) to 6 (highly important)

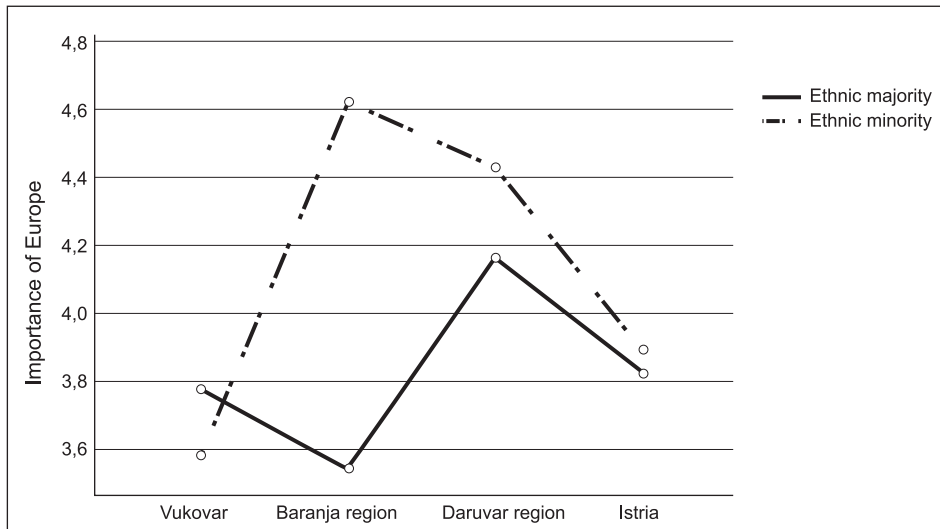


Figure 2. Importance of Europe as a function of social context and group status Note. Scale range from 1 (not at all important) to 6 (highly important)

Attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilationism

Differences in attitudes towards *multiculturalism* were also evident. As expected, a significant main effect of group status ($F(1,682) = 21.21, p < .01, \eta^2 = .027$), suggested that minorities ($M = 3.55; SD = 0.032$) are more inclined towards multiculturalism than majority group members ($M = 3.36; SD = 0.026$). There was also a significant main effect of the social context ($F(3,682) = 6.02, p < .01, \eta^2 = .024$), and once again, the majority/minority status x social context interaction ($F(3,682) = 6.36, p < .01, \eta^2 = .026$) was significant. The majority-minority difference in the attitude towards multiculturalism was statistically significant only in Vukovar ($F(1,682) = 51.12, p < .01$), where Serbs were evidently more inclined to multiculturalism than Croats. Notably, the simple effect of social context was not significant in the minority sample ($F(3,682) = 0.99, p > .05$). As for the majority, we can argue that there are two homogenous subsets of results, Croats in Daruvar and Istria on the one side, and Croats in Vukovar and Baranja on the other side (see Figure 3).

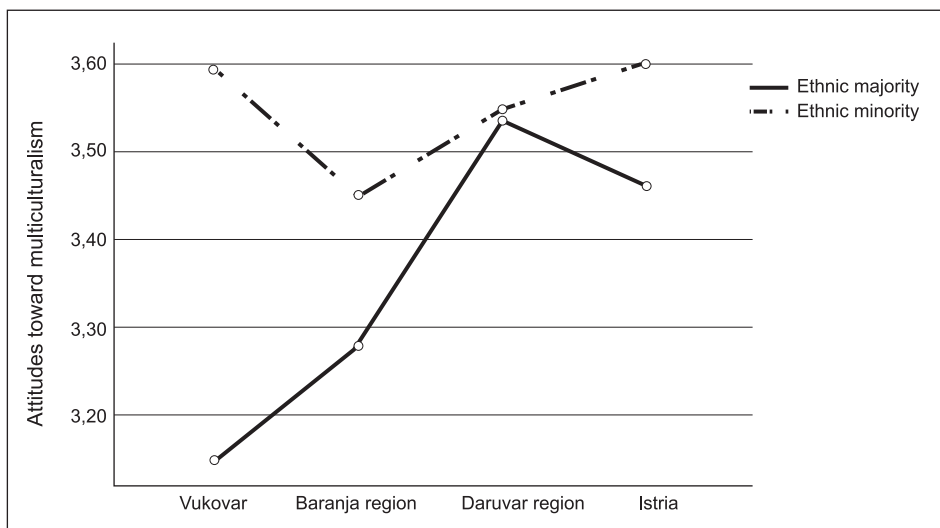


Figure 3. Attitudes towards multiculturalism as a function of social context and group status Note. Scale range from 1 (highly disagree) to 4 (highly agree)

A final ANOVA with attitudes towards *assimilationism* as a dependent variable revealed three significant effects. In line with the expectations, a significant main effect of group status ($F(1,672) = 77.89, p$

< .01, $\eta^2 = .093$), showed the majority group ($M = 2.24$; $SD = 0.034$) as being more prone towards assimilationism than the minorities ($M = 1.77$; $SD = 0.042$). There was also a significant main effect of the social context ($F(3,672) = 6.53$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .023$), with students in Baranja region ($M = 2.21$; $SD = 0.065$) having more positive attitudes towards assimilationism than students in Vukovar ($M = 1.89$; $SD = 0.041$) and Istria ($M = 1.90$; $SD = 0.053$). A significant majority/minority status x social context interaction ($F(3,672) = 10.17$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .037$) indicated that Croats were more prone towards assimilationism in all contexts in contrast to minorities, but also that there were some differences within each subsample. In accordance with the findings for attitudes towards multiculturalism, there are two homogenous subsets of results in the majority sample, Croats in Daruvar and Istria with more positive attitudes towards assimilationism on one side, and Croats in Vukovar and Baranja on the other side. In the minority sample, Serbs held the most negative attitude towards assimilation ($F(1,672) = 119.96$, $p < .01$), the only other significant difference was between Hungarians, and Italians, with Italians having a more negative attitude towards assimilation (see Figure 4).

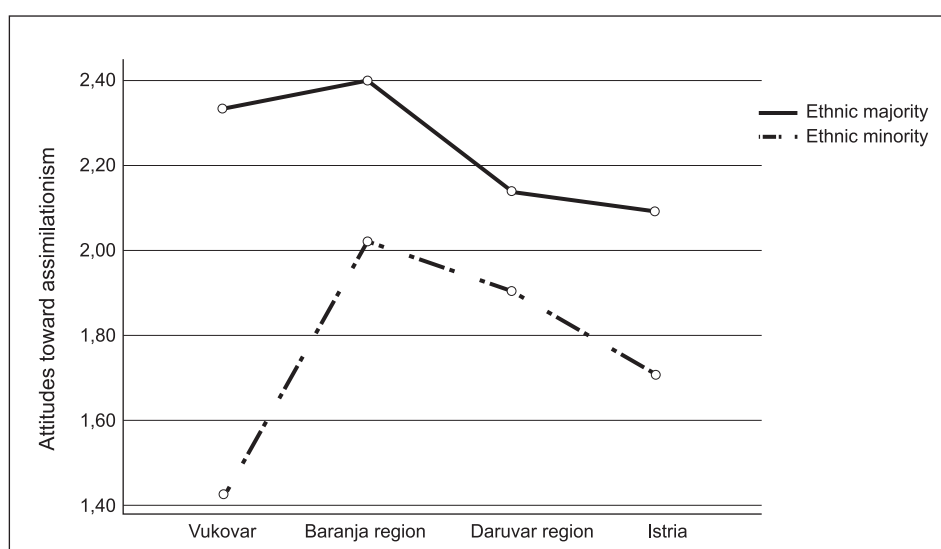


Figure 4. Attitudes towards assimilationism as a function of social context and group status Note. Scale range from 1 (*highly disagree*) to 4 (*highly agree*)

Correlations between measures of social identities and attitudinal measures

Correlation analysis between measures of different social identities (ethnic group, Croatia and Europe) and attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilationism was done separately for each ethnic group (majority and minority) in every social context (Vukovar, Daruvar region, Baranja region and Istria) (see Table 3). In general, this analysis confirmed our expectation about ethnonationalism being more strongly related to attitudes towards multiculturalism (negatively) and assimilationism (positively) than ethnic identity.

In the majority sample, attitude towards assimilationism was moderately positively related to ethnonationalism in all contexts, while attitude towards multiculturalism was moderately negatively related to ethnonationalism in all contexts except in Daruvar region. In Daruvar region, ethnic identity was weakly positively related to attitude towards multiculturalism.

In contrast, in the minority sample there were only two significant correlation coefficients. In Vukovar, the ethnic identity was weakly positively related to attitude towards multiculturalism and in Istria there was weak positive relation between attachment to Croatia and attitude towards assimilationism.

We also examined the relationship between the attitudinal variables, that is, between assimilationism and multiculturalism. Depending on the context and group status, these attitudes were weakly to mod-

erately negatively related, or coefficients were not statistically significant. These findings were expected and are in line with previous studies that have shown that being more prone to multiculturalism means being less prone to assimilationism, and vice versa (Jelić et al., 2014; Levin et al., 2012).

Discussion

In this study our aim was to investigate the salience of ethnic identity, ethnonationalism, Croatian, and European identity in the function of social context (four different minority-majority contexts in Croatia) and group status (Croats as majority group and Serbs, Hungarians, Czechs and Italians as respective minority groups). Furthermore, we explored the relation of these social identities to two basic ideological orientations that determine the relations between the majority and the minority groups – multiculturalism and assimilationism. In other words, we wanted to explore whether majority – minority differences are indeed representative of the country in general or actually differ depending on the group in question or micro-level regional context in question.

In multi-ethnic communities the majority and the minority group members are very aware of their ethnicity as the multi-ethnic context makes it salient. Therefore, we expected ethnic identity to be very important to all our respondents. However, differences still exist suggesting different patterns of intergroup relations in a specific region. Not surprisingly, the ethnic identity is more important in Vukovar than in Istria. However, it seems that it is just as important in Daruvar region as well as in Baranja. In Istria, that is known for their emphasis on regional identity (Istrian identity), the ethnic identity is much less relevant than elsewhere.

We also included a measure of ethnonationalism as a different form of attachment to one's own ethnic group. Our findings show the same pattern as for ethnic identity i.e. ethnonationalism is significantly less pronounced in Istria than elsewhere (although across our whole sample ethnonationalism was on average relatively low). Both of these findings suggest that Istria, even though multi-ethnic, places less importance on ethnicity. In our research, we did not analyse the importance of regional identity, but we had a measure of Croatian (national) identity. Again, in Istria Croatian identity is lower than elsewhere, both for the minority as well as for the majority group members. All of these findings suggest that Istria does not follow the usual pattern of results and in the future regional identity should also be assessed. It seems that Istrians, both members of minority and majority groups, see their social identities as interchangeable and situation dependent. Istrians do not have one fixed and salient identity, at least not among identities we investigated in this research, and that is why their estimations are lower than the students in other contexts. In all other contexts, as expected, Croatian identity is generally more important to Croats than to minorities. However, it is noteworthy that the difference between the majority and the minority group in the importance they place on Croatian identity depends on the intergroup context. This difference is largest in Vukovar, mostly due to the Serbian minority who place little importance on Croatia. On the contrary, in Daruvar, Croats and Czechs do not differ in the importance they place on Croatia. It seems that in the majority sample Croats are rather homogenous in their strong attachment to Croatia (with Istria being an exception), while in the minority sample, Serbs and Italians, not differing between themselves, showed less attachment to Croatia in contrast to Hungarians and Czechs.

Finally, we focused on the European identity as a possible supranational identity that could unite both groups or perhaps serve as a "substitute" identity (instead of attachment to Croatia) for the minority ethnic groups. The results show that majority-minority difference in the importance of Europe was statistically significant only in Baranja, where Hungarians evidently had a more salient European identity, in contrast to Croats. However, when we analyse the importance of specific social categories (ethnic group,

Croatia, Europe) within each sample, it seems that Croatian identity is the least important of the three to all minorities except Czechs – for them Croatia is as important as their ethnic group and more important than Europe.

Taken altogether, our results show that Istria region is very different from Vukovar or Baranja. While in Istria ethnicity is less important, just as Croatian identity, in Vukovar ethnic identity is the most important identity and the differences between Croats as the majority and Serbs as the minority group members are more pronounced than elsewhere. Daruvar region, on the other hand, shows least differences between the majority and the minority group and shows that the two groups are well integrated.

In line with these data, the results showed that majority-minority difference in attitude towards multiculturalism was statistically significant only in Vukovar, suggesting polarisation of the two groups, with Serbs being more inclined to multiculturalism than Croats. In other contexts majority and minority groups did not differ significantly in their attitude towards multiculturalism. We believe that this finding has to be highlighted as it suggests that these are highly functional multi-ethnic communities where intergroup relations are not disrupted (as suggested by Jelić et al., 2014; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). It is also noteworthy that the respondents on average scored higher for multiculturalism than for assimilationism regardless of their group status or intergroup context. As expected, the minorities also score lower on assimilationism than Croats in all contexts, with Serbs holding the most negative attitude towards assimilation. This is in line with earlier studies (Čorkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2012; Verkuyten, 2005a, 2005b).

We hypothesised that social identities might be correlated with attitudes towards multiculturalism and assimilation. Specifically, we expected ethnic identity and especially ethnonationalism to show highest positive correlation with assimilationism (and negative with multiculturalism), while Croatian and European identity might be more strongly correlated with multiculturalism. The results confirmed that in Croats as the majority group it is ethnonationalism, rather than ethnic identity, that is moderately related to attitudes towards multiculturalism (negatively) and assimilationism (positively). This finding corroborates recent studies suggesting that ethnonationalism, and not ethnic identity, is detrimental for post-conflict reconciliation (Penic et al., 2017). The only exception is Daruvar region, where ethnonationalism shows no correlations to multiculturalism. Instead, it is the ethnic identity that is positively related to multiculturalism, suggesting that Croats from Daruvar to whom ethnic identity is more important also have a more positive attitude towards minority rights of the Czechs in their region. This is exactly the opposite finding from earlier studies showing that multiculturalism is associated with lower importance of ethnic identity (Verkuyten, 2005a). We believe that this finding again confirms that in Daruvar the two groups are not in competition. Understanding that my group is important to me can lead to being more open to the needs of the other group when the two groups interact well.

Another finding that differs from previous findings is the positive correlation between Croatian identity and assimilationism in Croats in Vukovar. While ethnic identity is not related to that attitude, Croatian identity is. We believe that this finding suggests that in the Vukovar region, due to the fact that Vukovar for Croats is a symbol of the Croatian War of Independence, Croatian identity has different meaning than in other multi-ethnic communities in Croatia. It is not superordinate identity that has the ability to unite people of different ethnicities (like in the USA). Unfortunately, in Vukovar there seems to be yet another polarising identity, similar to ethnonationalism, as already shown by the fact that the Serbian minority places low importance to Croatia unlike their Croatian peers. As for the minorities, our hypotheses proved to be wrong; European and national identity are not related to multiculturalism. Croatian identity is positively related to assimilationism, but only among Italians from Istria. This is an intriguing finding suggesting that in Istria, the members of the minority group who are attached to Croatia and consider it their homeland have a more positive attitude towards assimilationism. The only other significant correlation was found between ethnic identity and multiculturalism in Serbs from Vukovar.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study was the first to investigate various social identities and their relation to assimilationism and multiculturalism in four multi-ethnic communities simultaneously. Furthermore, by conducting this study in fifteen primary and twelve secondary schools, we made sure that our sample is representative of the youth in the four mentioned communities.

However, several limitations of this study need to be taken into account. First of all, social identity measures in this study consist of only one item. Only ethnonationalism was measured by a four-item scale, whereas all other social identities were measured by an item referring to the importance that any participant places on a specific social category. Future studies should test our findings by using other validated and reliable scales.

Furthermore, future research could profit by using an additional measure of regional identity. We believe that the importance of regional identity might vary depending on the functionality of a multi-ethnic region and shed more light on findings pertaining to Istria region as well as Daruvar region.

Finally, researchers should also focus on qualitative methods that might offer deeper understanding of the differences between specific regions in intergroup relations.

Conclusions

Taken altogether, these results suggest that even within the same country different social contexts form social identities of the majority and the minorities in different ways. In the case of Croatia, results offer the perspective of four different ways in which a multi-ethnic community can function. Daruvar region (Croat-Czech context) represents a case of an integrated, if not even assimilated community with little difference between the majority and the minority group and no intergroup tensions. Here, the ethnic identity of the majority group is positively related to multiculturalism, clearly suggesting that the two groups are not in competition. Istrians are notorious for their regional identity and it is also evident in these data. Indeed, in Istria ethnic and national identity are less important than in other multi-ethnic regions in Croatia and the findings depict an integrated multi-ethnic region. In Vukovar, however, the situation is quite the opposite; ethnicity is very important and it seems that the identity is based on the differences between the majority and the minority. All differences between the minority and the majority group are more pronounced here than in other parts of Croatia. For example, the difference in the importance of Croatia is the largest in Vukovar compared to other regions, and a positive correlation between Croatian identity and assimilationism was found only among Croats in Vukovar. At the same time, Serbs hold the most negative attitude towards assimilation among all minorities. Finally, Baranja region does not stand out in any way and should be further investigated in future studies. Due to the ethnically complex situation in Baranja, where salient minorities are both Hungarians and Serbs, it would be interesting to see which of these two minority groups is more salient and relevant for shaping intergroup attitudes to the majority group.

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