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Local, National and European Identity in the Age of Globalisation – a Sociological Perspective

Abstract

This paper examines the significance of different dimensions of identity in the context of European enlargement and globalisation. The analysis touches upon the subject of identity, which is treated as a processual, dynamic and contextual phenomenon. According to contemporary deliberations, it is risky to state that an identity is something that one can possess. It is better to speak of a continuous process of identification that allows individuals and groups to define themselves or others.

Key words: local identity, regional identity, national identity, European identity, globa-lisation

Introduction

The anthropological and sociological descriptions of Polish cultural and historical heritage under transformation concentrate on the contradiction between the East and West. In addition, the process of supranational integration and the search for European identity are challenged by national and cultural sovereignty in both applicant and accession countries. Furthermore, there are two parallel processes to be observed: on the one hand, a strong return to origins and roots of national identity – the so-called 'new era of nationalism' – and a globalisation and convergence of culture on the other. Since cultural globalisation is a Janus-faced reality, it influences and steers the process of cultural change in two different ways. However, through the global culture industry and mass media, it contributes to unification of cultures and to an intensification of differentiation processes. Bauman's 'glocalisation' concept illustrates 'globalisation' combined with 'localisation' (1997). In this context the term of regional (or local) identity arises. In the field of anthropology there are other interesting questions: what might be the end result of the process of cultural globalisation? Will it be a 'global culture' and will it be one culture only? Undoubtedly, strengthened regional and local cultures remain an important effect of globalisation but they also bring a new quality into national identities. Furthermore, they play a significant role in creating supra-national relations in a framework of the European Union.

Nation and Nation State

A widespread argument is that there exist two concepts of a nation's origin. Connected with this distinction one can distinguish two different types of nations: ethnic- or culture nation and state-nation where political criteria are important, such as institutions of the state, and adaptation to the law and citizenship. For ethnic- or culture nations other factors are crucial and basic: language, religion, social descent and the willingness to share a sense of common activities with other members of the nation. The 'nation' in its original meaning is not based on the principle that ethnic-cultural and political boundaries should coincide – a principle that, according to Ernest Gellner (1996), forms a key characteristic of nationalism. In spite of this, the distinction is associated with a normative factor that only nation-states are considered to be modern, functional and progressive.

In a typological theory of nation, people pass in their evolution from primary ethnic group through the stage of nationality, and as a final result of that process they become a full nation. This concept contains an element of valuation because the nation is seen as an aim, which can be reached by different nationalities. Similarly, the state can be attained by the nation as a desirable stage of this process. For this reason, since the last century, the essence of nation seems to be a territorial state that has developed a direct link with its citizens. It is well known today that the concept of citizenship is a product of the market and democracy, and the history of modern Europe is mostly determined by the development of citizenship in relation to collective identity, in particular state and national ones (Richardson 2001). Obviously, culture and language are of vital importance in processes of modernisation, but that still does not mean that they constitute the core of the nation and of nationalism. This brilliant argument is also formulated by Gellner (1996).

For 19th century states, nationalism became a unique element of modernisation, as long as it remained identified with the existing territorial state. The high degree of coordination and unity achieved by the nation state could remain exclusively territorial and administrative in kind, but it also required cultural homogeneity. In a typical, ideal nation state, the inhabitants are organised and mobilised by state norms, institutions and state activities that encompass the entire territory (Calhoun 1993). In 19th century Europe the nation state developed amid specific modernising international relationships (political, economic and military) and wars played a crucial role in the construction and consolidation of national identity. Thus, there is a close connection between national identity and national states that derives from the last century (the so-called 'age of nationalism') when ethnic factors were of fundamental importance. In addition, the conception of citizenship and nationality emerged to some extent from the idea of the nation state, so characteristic for Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries (Mach, Niedźwiedzki 1997).

In the ideal sense, a nation state is a state of one nation. Undoubtedly, this kind of thinking provides practical difficulties, especially for many ethnic groups who only constitute part of a multinational state and attempt to create their own state, sometimes at any price. It seems that the duration of the nation state can be improved by its homogeneity, for instance the cultural one, but it is hardly

achieved in a situation of immense mobility between nations and the possibilities of the communication system in the contemporary world. For that reason, the role of national states in creating homogeneous cultures is rapidly changing. This is a new kind of social vacuum that can be filled by local, regional cultures, which also provide ground for social identifications.

Identity and National Identification

National identity is a subject which was widely discussed, especially in the aspect of European Union enlargement and its consequences for European culture and societies. The European Union and its institutions gradually provide a new framework within which applicant countries redefine their own vision of domestic social life and transform their international relationships.

Although the term 'identity' has a long history, it was not until the 20th century that it came into popular usage and became one of the most important categories in social sciences, including sociology. Implying sameness and continuity, it is a ground for building an individual and collective identity. Regarding the changes in contemporary Europe, it seems to be an important theoretical and practical problem. For many societies this kind of identification is a process of naming national phenomena and defining themselves in relation to other countries and nations in Europe. That concerns not only the so-called postcommunist nations but also western countries, which try to develop a sense of identity with changing European relations. As previously said, identity as a social construction is defined by two important features – continuity and sameness, but it is a myth to think of identities as impervious to change.

Identities, both individual and collective, evolve over time. An eternal human need to create identity reflects analogous collective requirements, which allow groups of people to define themselves as a nation (or an ethnic group) with a history and common sense of existence. National identity is not the only single area in which an individual can find his/her identification. There are some important identities such as local, religious, gender, racial, age and class. All of them play a great role in the process of construction of a social reality and creating an individual life. One of the features of human identity is its dynamic nature and its constant evolution throughout life. This is a response to the activity of others, the way in which people define themselves in relation to somebody else, within a concrete social situation. The creation of one's identity is a long lasting process that consists of many identifications with different groups and individuals (Bokszański 2005). Thus, in the course of life, personal identity is affected and confirmed by an understanding of other people within the common group (it can be a national or a local group). Regarding this point of view, national identification as an individual attribute, contrary to the popular opinion, can be treated as a changeable feature. One of the necessary conditions of changing one's nationality is acceptance given by others who provide the social framework for building one's identity and creating the social circumstances that allow this to occur. In gaining more experience, individuals can

restrict their own first identification and, without discarding it completely, the new identifications emerge.

The notion of nationality expresses itself in the relations between the individual and the ethnic group, in personal identity, inherited tradition and identification with the wider group – national or regional. National and regional identifications can exist in parallel and the relations between them may differ in many ways. In some nations, national identity is strongly tied to the state, while in others, the state is not regarded so much as the founder or guardian of the nation (Smith 2003). In the case of the nation state, citizenship and nationality basically overlap but there is no such nation where all members of the nation reside in one state. Thus, the problem of national minorities and their rights arises. Europe is an example where various types of migration and political changes have led to a situation in which every nation has enclaves beyond its main area of settlement. Some of the conflicts, which have arisen in that context, are still vital and dangerous nowadays. The countries of Central--Eastern and Southern Europe can serve as an example. Furthermore, historically the distinction between citizenship and nationality plays a more important role for the countries of Central-Eastern Europe than for Western Europe. In the majority of those countries the notion of nationality is defined parallel to that of state affiliation. For instance, the lack of Polish state for one hundred twenty three years of partition between three neighbouring countries has influenced the perception of both terms 'nation' and 'state' among Polish society. That is perhaps one of the relevant reasons why 'state' has been widely considered as 'foreign' and unworthy of respect and trust after the World War II.

In popular opinion, nationality is the community into which an individual is born, analogous to a system of kinship. On the contrary to citizenship, nationality is seen as a subject, which is persistent and cannot be chosen. Therefore, nationality is strongly associated with spiritual kinship and the sphere of consciousness (Eriksen 1993). For this reason the concept of national identity is dependent on national stereotypes. National identities, which are social constructions, reflect national stereotypes both related to their own nation and to other nations, particularly to those of their neighbours. Although the concept of national identity is very difficult to grasp, there are many similarities between individual and collective identity, which can describe the constituent fabric of the term of identity. According to Kołakowski (1995) the first of these similarities is the idea of 'national spirit' (Hegel's 'Volksgeist'), which can be seen in many dimensions of cultural life and also in collective forms of behaviour. Although the existence of 'national spirit' cannot be empirically proved, it is widely believed that it remains one of the elements which builds national consciousness and allows a group of people to feel integrated, especially in difficult times. National identity requires historical memory, which can store real and imaginary events of the common past. Aside from this, a significant role in national existence is played by the anticipation of the future and the so-called 'exordium temporis' – the beginning of common history. Other features illustrating specific traits of national identity can reflect the comparison between individual and collective identity. First of all, the term seems to include awareness among the members of a collectivity (a nation) of differences existing between them and

outsiders. It refers to real habits, the cultural heritage of other nations or people and also to the imaginary vision of others. There are no ethnic groups which do not reveal characteristics common to all such groups, but following this kind of division, people insist on stressing the features that distinguish them thus allowing them to see the differences. The recognition of others is closely connected with the consciousness of belonging to a specific community which is treated as their own group or nation. The distinction between 'outsiders' and 'us' is rarely free from evaluation; even more, national consciousness is based on the idea of opposition. In this way, an individual, as a participant of social life, is strongly involved in a cultural heritage which constitutes the shape of the nation. It is obvious that the whole system of norms and values is the grid of perception of the other and cannot be dismissed as being unimportant. People having the consciousness of belonging to the nation also feel attached to it and demonstrate their solidarity with this collectivity. This kind of emotional commitment can widely differ between members of various nations (individually among one nation, too) and it can be considerably distinct in different historical periods. The specific sign of national identity is its relation to the idea of totality. As a trait describing the collectivistic phenomenon, it can be used to influence an individual, in the sense of his/her activities and personality. This is a kind of psychological dependence in which one's life-changes are determined by the nation's development or, to be more precise, one is oriented to this totality in a positive or negative way. In addition, the idea of a mission can also be included in the idea of national identity. Mission, in a word, is the idea that the nation plays an important role in the development of the world by fighting for new values of modernisation or, on the contrary, by restoring traditional values corrupted by the contemporary materialistic world. As aforementioned, the significance of national identity in Europe is based on historical circumstances and undoubtedly it reflects specific features of European civilisation.

European Identity – a Myth or a Planned Prospect?

European identity is a notion which was strongly rooted in the social discourses of most of the European Union applicant countries. Regarding European Union enlargement, there is a wide discussion on national identity in the accession countries, too. New circumstances in Europe, the reconstruction of political order connected with the downfall of communism and the next stage of European integration implied the necessity to redefine the contemporary vision of European identity and its significance in the process of EU enlargement. In addition, the process of transforming national identity in many European countries posts the question of European identity as a whole. On the other hand, it is difficult to say whether European identity is something that someone can easily express. Furthermore, identity as a social construction does not have a completed form. It is rather a continuous process of identification and the ways in which individuals or groups are identified (in a passive aspect of identity) and in which they identify themselves or others as Europeans.

First of all, it is widely believed that Europe has never been a cultural unity and even the idea of pan-European political order seems to be the utopian thinking of many countries. Hence, European identity remains an 'artificial product', in particular in comparison with the various nations that compose it. Obviously, European identity is not simply the sum of national identities; furthermore, each of them cannot be recognised as representative. This would constitute a risky evaluation and assessment of different cultures.

The main characteristic of European culture is the cult of variety and flexibility to combine different styles and customs. In other words, European culture is a fusion of distinctive traditions and the synthesis of two types of rationality (instrumental and coherent) whose outcome was a new cultural entity. The overlap of two traditions – Jewish and Graeco-Roman, which were, in many regards, opposite – has built a unique European multiplicity and prepared the ground for Christian civilisation (Walas 1995). In addition, the 19th century evolution and modernisation that was continued in the twentieth century brought financial profits and economic achievements yet fostered the crisis of western values staggering the balance between two types of rationality. While the importance of the instrumental rationality increased, the significance of coherent rationality deceased. In spite of this, there is no reason to deny that the rational strategy of thinking and acting emerged in Europe on a large scale and gave rise to the present-day advanced technological civilisation (Giddens 1991). These technical achievements were not accompanied by a parallel development of the normative sphere. Activistic European culture underlies the practical activity and allows Europeans to fuse two distinctive features: activism and anthropocentrism. The result of this has been a specific kind of domination over the world and an optimistic vision of the future, which has led European culture to the immense accumulation of innovation. Furthermore, the traditional institutions, values and cultural patterns were disintegrated and constant progressive rationalisation caused the atrophy of domestic cultural features. That was the shape of the 20th century too, which was reflected, for instance, by widespread ideas of a return to traditional Christian values.

Now, there is time to ponder over the fundamental question of the cultural inheritance of Europe and its future within a new era of European existence. The necessity for redefining and rebuilding European identity is clearly observed and constitutes a great challenge to contemporary Europeans. The outstanding ability to adapt new ideas, flexibility and openness are all essential traits of western civilisation and a sign of its vitality. In addition, Europe seems never to be homogenised culturally to the same extent as the classical nation state, with all the advantages and disadvantages this implies. Due to cultural barriers, complete unity, like, for instance, in the U.S., remains to date a future vision. Furthermore, the scenario of cultural homogeneity in Europe is often used as a warning and possible risk or danger. In this context, many debates about globalisation concentrate mainly upon its implications for the nation state and national identity. European integration is a Janus-faced process, which provides the framework within which the national state is able to reach the pinnacle of influence and power but it acquires its own costs, not only institutionally but also societally.

Analogous to the political system, collective identity within European Union countries must be multilayered. The European Union constitutes the political framework for the participating states, which have to give way to an approach that is conscious of the developed and constructed nature of national identity and sovereignty. These features seem to be still refreshed and vital. The supranational organisation and international political form in integrated Europe remain closely connected with classical thinking based on the pattern of nation state and national sovereignty. Although the national state attempts to maintain itself in a changing environment, it seems that the integration process amounts to a reshuffling of domestic relations within European countries and their sovereignty. There are some important issues to be pointed out: is the instrument of national identity still available to Europe today and something paramount for European integration? Or, on the contrary, is the national formula a subject to erosion at the beginning of the 21st century? One of the most crucial factors that should be included into this analysis is the interplay and interdependence between the phenomenon of cultural globalisation and local cultures.

Globalisation and Regional Cultures – Towards Local Identity

The very phenomenon of cultural globalisation is undeniable. Therefore, there is hardly a word used as universally today as the term 'global'. There are global problems, global systems, global terrorism, and businesses which are globalising.

The discussions on the nature of the process of globalisation, which run through classical theories of sociology, have claimed that this process has accompanied modernisation and shaping of capitalism. Regardless of what globalisation is connected with, it does not mean the cultural uniting of the globe in the sense of an indisputable domination by Western civilisation values. Although the globalisation of the culture market is a fact, it still does not mean that a single universal world culture is emerging. The contemporary world does not succumb to homogenisation under the influence of the cultural values presented by, for instance, world media or one particular culture. This is also connected with a new understanding of culture. The traditional notion of culture, which is derived from a classical anthropological definition, holds that each culture is fixed, stable and homogeneous. The new interpretation states that culture is constantly made through change. The structure of contemporary culture is a network, which is formed by people who talk to each other, share ideas, information and resources (Featherstone 1995). Thus, the development of local, regional cultures is rather a chance to adopt new features at national, supra-national or European level.

The cosmopolitan cultural forms may be seen as new cultural factors which enrich and change the structure or composition of the local cultures affected by them. The spread of consumer global culture 'only' means the insertion of specific commodity forms into the local cultures. In other words, global flows of ideas, signs, goods and people all serve as an effective mechanism of cultural globalisation. It can cause both the unity and diversity among local cultures. The mass production and distribution of cultural values do not lead to the emergence of a world culture;

rather an even greater cultural differentiation should be expected. It is not obvious that the emergence of cosmopolitan cultural forms can be equated with cultural homogenisation. The interface of both tendencies can be observed: unification and particularisation. The aim of the second one is to escape from the dominant patterns and emphasize differences through local and regional cultures. The globally transmitted cultural elements not only change the structure of local culture but at the same time may also enliven the 'traditional life worlds' (Hannerz 1996). Thus, globalisation is such a social change which, on the one hand, connects humanity on the basis of its shared fate and actions in various spheres, and, on the other hand, generates the fragmentarisation of social life by setting in motion various mechanisms on the local level. Such globalisation can be examined within three dimensions: the economic, political and, last but not least, cultural. The resulting cosmopolitan cultural forms should be seen as unique in each particular case.

The term 'glocalisation' reflects such kind of relationship between the core and the periphery cultures. In this process, the global is tailored to the local and vice versa. The possible outcome is not a simple local adaptation of the global features. In this sense, cultural globalisation stimulates cultural recreation, at the regional level as well. Thus, the glocalisation notion implies the resurgence and strengthening of local cultures in response to global cultural flows. The results of global cultural flows may be twofold; on the one hand, they may activate cultural tradition, on the other hand, cultural transmission does not by definition bring about a cultural homogenisation of the local cultures. In conclusion, cultural globalisation causes both the unity and diversity among local cultures and the similar influence could describe cultures at the national level. In short, cultural differentiation takes place at the level of the nation state or local culture. It results in the growing cultural pluralism and the specific vision of identity.

In the sense of identity and social identifications, it has to be pointed out that unity is compatible with diversity. It is becoming more popular to embrace a multilayered identity as an indicator of contemporary complicated multicultura-lism. People can participate in a variety of identities: local, regional, national and supranational. In other words, they can recognize themselves as belonging to the local culture and small communities and to the national or European culture at the same time. Often they combine these attachments in varying degrees of intensity. Forcing people to choose between these different identifications does not capture the subtleties of identity, however. Nevertheless, questions of identity are significant because they do much to determine the shape of political alignments. They influence the everyday life as well, in the sense of creating social life at each level; local, regional, national and supranational. The notion of identity and its role in a prosperous development has gained force. Since the nation state has lost some of its position in the face of globalism, new collective thinking is formed on a local, cultural and situational basis. Reasons like the ecological, historical and economically competitive facts are in the background.

Conclusion

Identity is a complex phenomenon, which is constructed in social life. As a form of individual and collective consciousness, it is directly or indirectly involved in social actions. Except for continuity and sameness, another face of its nature is crucial – its peculiarity. This trait allows others to recognize differences and specific features of various national and local cultures. In this context, the enlargement of the European Union provides a new framework for cultural relationships in Europe and strengthens European culture as a whole. Raised national and local identification is seen in both Western and Central-Eastern countries. More importantly, it is demanded of nations to rethink their identities. Since their political roof – the nation state – is being reshaped, the significance of national identification changes. Especially in the area of culture, new countries and new regions in the sense of their cultures can enhance the unique construction which western Europeans have as their common heritage. European culture can find its chance for modified continuation in its ability to change and to adapt new ideas and new physical manifestations of change. The renewed sense of national identity is based on the cultural fabric, often those of different regions, and is one of the vital sources for new stages of European integration. In this way, a new vision of European identity can be formed by the support of changing national and local consciousness.

It is important to underline that the new kind of identification lives on the contextual, cultural and regional basis. These bases are often smaller than the nation states. The status of the nation state evolves in front of globalism and raising individualism. New transnational cooperation and alliances of regions construct the international relations. The European Union and global economy offer an alternative political, economical and cultural context for local communities. New regional thinking emerged. It can also influence a new vision of European identity based on the raised local consciousness.

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Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje zagadnienie zróżnicowanych wymiarów tożsamości w kontekście rozszerzenia Unii Europejskiej i procesów globalizacji. Ukazuje zarówno znaczenie kategorii tożsamości, jak też jej swoistą naturę, określaną w terminach procesualności i dynamiki oraz jako zjawisko definiowane kontekstowo. Odwołując się do współczesnych rozważań, ryzykowne byłoby stwierdzenie orzekające o tożsamości posiadanej przez kogokolwiek jako rodzaju własności. O tożsamości zwykło się mówić raczej jako o permanentnym procesie identyfikacji, który pozwala dookreślać się jednostkom i grupom.