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SOCIAL RISKS OF INTENSIFIED INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract

Modern society enters the fundamentally new stage of development characterized by unprecedented growth of interconnection between local social systems. It manifests at structural, culture and information levels. This article considers general trends of modern intercultural communication. It analyses major risks, caused by intensifying cultural communicative processes. It also highlights factors of intensification of intercultural dialogue, and examines main channels of information exchange. When analyzing negative effects of intensifying dialogue of cultures the writers study the emergence of discrepancy between the area of cultural values and the structure of social relations, explore the issues, related to the development of intergroup conflict intensity, raise the question of value-based relativity and the inconsistent ideology of society individuals. The research hypothesis is that at the current stage of society development most of known problems, brought about by the intensifying intercultural dialogue, can be summarized as one issue of integrity and coherence of social worldview. From this perspective, the article analyses the structure of everyday view of the world and proves the point of view. Consequently, the question arises concerning the development of self-reflection skills so that members of a society realize their own worldview as a way to overcome effects of excessive intercultural communication. As the essential factor, it seems important to consider the role of educational institutions, as a basic social mechanism, responsible for shaping the view of the world of society individuals. The article makes a conclusion concerning the importance of education as a leading defence mechanism of modern society.

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1. Introduction

This article is aimed at the problem of risks, resulting from the current processes of intercultural communication that reach a new level of intensity due to the development of information and transport technologies. The relevance of the research topic is supported by the uniqueness of the modern cultural processes, as well as a number of social problems that stem from the current state of culture. Modern society, being a complex dynamic system, struggles to adapt to present external and internal changes, however, the more the intensity of transformation processes increases, the more problematic the preservation of social stability becomes in the conditions of developing social changes. This manifests in such different destructive trends, as escalation of intergroup conflicts, increase in crime, violation of certain defence mechanisms of society, based on the type of worldview paradigms of society members. Search for ways to overcome this common trend is highly relevant, as it encourages resolving the entire range of urgent social issues.

The object of research is the correlation between culture and information processes in modern society and their key functional elements. Such a broad definition of the object enables to involve consideration of major trends in present intercultural communication, its factors and conditions, localized in the structure of society, as well as consequences of current cultural processes, affecting various levels of social life outlook. The subject of studies is the importance of education functions in surmounting social risks, associated with the present level of intercultural communication. Theoretical and practical value of this work is related with theorizing on the topic of interconnection between cultural processes in society and state of social processes, as well as defining the possibilities of educational institutions to impact the situation.

2. Problem Statement

Local society is – an open system, it interacts with natural objects and adjacent social systems. The intensity of external interaction of social systems varies, which correlates with a number of factors, starting from political and ending with technical (that includes the development level of transport technologies, scientific and technical innovations of data storage and transfer, and etc.). Varying levels of external communication of a local society – represents the basis which makes researchers examine the positive and negative aspects of external social communication. One of the seminal works on the topic is the research by Popper (2013) «The open society and its enemies», in which the scientist argues the importance of openness of a social system for its development and perfection. Under the current globalizing conditions it can be stated that the intensity of interaction between local societies is on the increase which raises the issue of rising degree of openness of modern local societies. One of the sides of this process seems considerably intensified intercultural communication, the results of which determine the outlook of modern culture (Narykov, 2014).

Researchers perceive the intensification of intercultural communication from different perspectives. At the same time, the concept of «dialogue of cultures» tends to be replaced by the concept «mixing cultures», characterizing the loss of identity as a result of interaction. Beside that, substantial social shifts are evident, caused by the emerging discrepancy between cultural sphere and different functional spheres

of society (Danilova, 2016). This article raises the question about risks, which arise as a result of the intensive process of intercultural communication. In this regard, the opportunities open either for highlighting the conflicts of worldviews among the representatives of different cultures, or for analyzing not such evident issue of disrupting the consistency in the system of social values of society individuals and deformation of their behavioural patterns.

In the context of social risks, stemming from the unprecedented level of intercultural communication, it gets increasingly important to define whether and how it is possible to regulate this situation. Here, there are, at least, two possibilities: lowering the intensity of intercultural communication and decreasing (or regulating) its impact on culture and society. Taking into account modern technologies, as well as rates of migration, decline in the level of intercultural communication appears hardly feasible. Transformation into the society of close type entails too many dire consequences (Popper, 2013), which has both theoretical explanation, and practical evidence, i.e. the example of developmental social and cultural trends of the USSR at the time of «iron curtain». It ought to be noted that artificial restriction of intercultural communication only adds to the appeal of cultural heritage of other societies.

Consequently, the question arises in what way it is possible to affect the results of intercultural dialogue in case the level of its intensity remains the same (or, bearing in mind the current trends, –increases even more). The authors' hypothesis states that the key factor, defining the risks of modern intercultural communication, is the nature of social cognition, realized by individuals, in other words – the overwhelming way of forming the world view, which causes the present cultural shifts. Therefore, depending on how developed the outlook of society individuals is, this defines to a great extent the results of intercultural communication. Here we put forward a very important idea that the degree of awareness in individual worldview depends on how developed reflexive practices are, aimed at self-reflection of one's own position and its evaluation. For this reason, education, as social practice, responsible for passing to individuals knowledge and skills, represents the essential social mechanism, capable to develop the characteristics of worldview among society members, as well as overcome certain controversy in the outlooks, resulting from intercultural dialogue.

3. Research Questions

The structure of research implies examining the notion of education and its possibilities to normalize the social process, with the emphasis on rebutting the social risks of intensive process of intercultural communication. It means that, before considering the specificity and meaning of educational activity, it is necessary to determine the general theoretical context, within which the category of education has to be explored. In terms of contents, the investigation contains, in fact, two parts. On the one hand, it highlights the social risks, arising from the intensification of intercultural dialogue in modern world, on the other hand – we raise the question about measures of overcoming the mentioned above negative trends, which leads to the topic of the key role, played by the educational institutions. The major scope of theoretical questions, which are covered by this work, comprises the following:

- reasons and special features of extreme intensification of intercultural interaction;
- effects of intensifying intercultural dialogue at the structural level;
- effects of intensifying intercultural dialogue at the level of interpersonal interaction;

- impact of intensive intercultural communication on the nature and structure of worldview of society members;
- social risks, caused by uncontrolled mixing of cultures;
- awareness of worldview and ability to actively reflect on social reality, as factors to overcome the negative trends in modern society;
- role of education system in forming the well-developed social outlook of society members.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to consider the perspectives and possibilities of modern education system to combat the destructive trends of present day society. To achieve this goal the following range of objectives is set:

- examine the main factors of increasing intensity of intercultural communication;
- analyse the effects for social environment, caused by the current shifts in culture state;
- research the characteristics of individual worldview and its relation with culture;
- highlight the issue of pluralism in modern culture;
- clarify the phenomenon of inconsistency in worldviews of society members and relate it with current social risks;
- consider the importance of developed self-identity as a basis for regulation of worldview and overcoming its controversy;
- establish the major functional aspects of education, responsible for developing reflexive abilities in individuals;
- summarise in the conclusion the definition of the role that educational institutions play in combatting the negative trends in the development of modern society, which stem from extremely intensive and dynamic cultural processes.

5. Research Methods

The present study is interdisciplinary, the problems of intercultural communication refer to such disciplines as cultural studies and philosophy of culture. At the same time such issues as the state of social environment under globalisation conditions, current problems of social interaction, worldview aspects of social activity belong to the research sphere of sociology, social philosophy, social psychology and anthropology. In addition, one of the pivotal aspects of studies – is the issue of worldview structure and the correlation between its separate elements from various perspectives that is unraveled within the epistemological discourse, anthropology, phenomenology. Such a broad range of disciplines, at the level of which constituent questions are raised, treated in this article, determines the extreme difficulty of consequent consideration of the research issue. The variety of the subjects concerned, as well as the necessity to synthesise final results cause the diversity of applied methodology (Kuhn, 1962). The number of major methods of this study includes:

- general scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, abstraction, comparison);
- historical approach, aimed at reflecting the current trends of developing social processes;

- structural-functional method, aimed at unravelling the state of social structure, importance and specificity of education, problems and controversy of dynamically developing society;
- phenomenological approach, aimed at reflecting the process of forming the worldview;
- system approach, aimed at establishing the interconnection between various aspects of the subject under study.

In particular, it ought to be noted the significance of theoretical-methodological insights of philosophical-scientific discourse, within which a detailed study is carried out, concerning the question of structure and dynamics of worldview, its consistency and correlation of separate elements. Within the framework of the present investigation the methodology has been transferred from the research of scientific outlook (inherently aspiring towards rigour and logic) onto the sphere of everyday view of life.

6. Findings

The intensity of intercultural communication process is defined mostly by the way of its realisation. For historical periods, not having advanced technologies of information transfer, with verbal communication as a dominant information channel, the main bearers of a culture code were individuals, while the dissemination of knowledge about other culture was limited by the physical ability of knowledge bearers to travel. For this reason there was natural attenuation of impact, caused by the interaction of society members with bearers of other culture. The key factors, causing the shift of intercultural communication to reach a completely new level, were the advances in the area of data storage, its transfer and massive broadcast (Narykov, 2014). The former established the possibility to accumulate socially important knowledge, the latter – created the opportunity for distance communication. When it comes to the emerging means of information distribution and its massive transfer, it is clear there is breakthrough in the nature of information communication, as here it means the possibility to have information influence on crowds (Holopova & Potkina, 2014).

Technological advances of the XXth century outlined the combination of principles in storage, broadcasting and transfer of information. In addition, a number of brand new formats of information messages emerged (telephone communication, radiobroadcast, television, Internet-communication), which characterizes the increasing intensity of information processes, acceleration of information exchange, as well as creation of cultural product of a new kind (musical pieces, movies, modern multimedia products, presented at the level of Internet-sites). Based on new communication channels new types of sociocultural interaction evolved, which deeply affected the nature of cultural processes (Murtazina, 2011).

Characteristically, new formats of information interaction combine the above mentioned principles of intensification of the information exchange. Thus, TV and radiobroadcast makes it possible to simultaneously transfer and disseminate information, while at the level of modern digital resources all three principles are realised – data storage, its transfer and accessibility for mass audience.

Importantly, as a result of scientific and technological advances natural barriers for cultural communication, related with geographical distance between participants of information interaction and lengthy process of information transfer, gradually become obsolete. All this leads to what Narykov (2014) calls the phenomenon of reducing social space and acceleration of time. At the same time, which is not less important, the possibilities of modern information technologies enable the representatives of different

countries to socialize which proves that social-political barrier, hindering intercultural communication, steadily becomes obsolete as well. Beside the above said moments, it ought to note the vigorous increase in the level of information products (books, music, cinema and etc.), dissemination of which presents one of the key aspects of culture and information interaction.

Considering the effects of intensifying cultural communication, it is necessary to emphasise that it concerns the multi-faceted influence of current cultural exchange on the state of social life. On the one hand, positive shift is evident, related with the enrichment of local culture, possibility of society individuals to familiarize with the achievements of world culture and art. Yet, the perception of cultural products that have a very different origin can result in the mixed worldview, combining elements of different cultural traditions. The problem is that such trends of the worldview pluralism leads to the uncertainty of social position and shift to social relativity. To clarify this idea, it is necessary to refer to the question about what the correlation is between individual outlook and culture.

Culture defines the nature of worldview for society individuals, accepted value paradigms, way of setting goals and selecting the means to achieve them. At the same time, if we speak about the dialogue of cultures, the process of forming the outlook can be realized across various cultural attitudes, accepted by an individual as the foundation of personal worldview. The more complex culture is, the wider is the choice of ideas and attitudes, which forms the view of the world in society individuals. It ought to be noted, however, that this kind of development path for an individual outlook may potentially lead to forming the controversial approach to perception of the society, based on mixing ill-matching (in terms of logic) attitudes within a single vision of the world. One especially notable fact in this respect is that the worldview of average members of society does not imply well-developed criteria to assess the appropriateness, in other words – it does not necessarily follow the principle of aspiring towards logic and consistency of thinking. As Holton (1993) notices, in most cases the worldview of a man contains a number of contradicting ideas and beliefs which determines the contextuality of decisions and evaluations. Such inconsistency of an individual outlook is overcome either in case the cultural environment is homogenous (for example, at the level of traditional societies), or when there is developed thinking, susceptible to self-reflection.

Modern culture is highly heterogeneous, as there is mixing elements of various cultures at the level of social-communicative space. This enables many researchers to raise the question of pluralism of modern culture, its multi-faceted nature (Prigoda, 2009). Considering the impact of external cultural environment on the way of thinking in society individuals, it ought to be noted that, often, the process of perception of separate products of foreign culture results in the uncritical acceptance of inherent meanings (especially noteworthy in this respect seems such cultural production as films, books, music pieces, exposure to which can considerably affect the worldview of a man). That leads to the formation of various and complex in their structure worldview position.

Analysing the risks, caused by the intensification of intercultural interaction, it is necessary to highlight such aspect as the mismatch between the state and structural characteristics of society and cultural set of their members. Merton (1938) in his work «Social structure and anomie» expresses this relation in the following manner: culture defines the axiological structure of a personality, way of setting goals, its hierarchy, acceptable from an individual's point of view methods of achieving these goals and, as a whole, life strategy. At the same time, the structure of society and the nature of current processes determine the

available possibilities of realization for these value sets (Merton, 1938). Mismatch between the accepted system of values and structural characteristics of social interaction creates the conflict, the result of which can be self-exclusion from social relations, lower efficiency of inclusion in various social processes or violation of interaction rules, established in the society. When it comes to particular contradiction in social worldview and society characteristics, this is local social collapse. However the situation, when premises of mismatch between the vectors to implement personal activity and conditions, given at the level of social structure, become global (which is the case of controversy in the contents of culture and society structure), it signals the deepening social crisis (Merton, 2006). The opposite may be true with similar negative effects, in case, when the object to be borrowed is the structural determination of social institutes, differing from the cultural factors of the society, where it is introduced.

Similar trends can be observed now in the Russian society which are caused by active borrowing the elements of western culture, without corresponding changes at the structural level which leads to discrepancy between culture and social state.

Another considerable risk derives from forming the inconsistent and eclectic worldview of society members, acquiring separate elements of different paradigms. Here the bearer may not be aware of the controversial worldview due to the fact that contradicting cultural sets can be realized in his or her mind at different time which leaves no opportunity to compare them and perceive the contrast. This is the case of multiculturalism at the level of an individual worldview. The more uncritical a person's outlook is and the more controversial elements it contains, the less consistent the social position becomes. At the same time, the key factors, determining the nature of actions and decisions, in this case have the external look of the realization context of a separate worldview element. This causes high vulnerability towards external manipulations, as well as lower efficiency of defence processes, built in the worldview of society members.

Apart from the above said risks, another significant threat seems the high intensity of external cultural impact. Rejection of social values, vigorously transmitted (and often violently forced upon) at the level of several channels of information transfer, results in a defence reaction, manifested as rejection of other culture in certain groups of people (mostly – among the representatives of traditional cultures, whose outlook is less eclectic and, consequently, enables to realise the mismatch between the accepted values and those that are actively broadcast at the level of information space). Here there is a risk of transferring the negative attitude to culture towards its bearers which can emerge as an extremely destructive group confrontation. One of the most critical problems now – the issue of extremism – is deeply rooted in cultural contradictions which cannot be resolved due to the highly intensive clash of controversial worldviews.

Especially notable seems the loss of cultural identity of society individuals as well as formation of moral relativity, stemming from the experience of considering various value sets and establishing its conventionality (Mishuchkov, 2015).

Regarding the available possibilities of overcoming the above-mentioned social risks, it ought to be noted that there are two types of measures in this direction – combatting the manifestation of the above said problems and efforts to eliminate its origin. The given above analysis of causes of intensifying intercultural interaction allows assuming that nowadays the intensity of cultures dialogue cannot be seamlessly lowered. Extreme measures, similar to «iron curtain», are excluded from consideration, as the isolation of a social system in current conditions of global interaction means falling behind in a range of directions of

development and triggering a deep internal crisis (Popper, 2013). Therefore, the key part in regulation belongs to dealing with the reason, causing the negative effects of intensive cultural exchange. As such, we put forward the lack of consistency in the worldview of society members. The level of worldview development defines the awareness level of separate value and purpose sets, critical and reflexive nature of thinking. In this regard, the uncontrolled acceptance of worldview sets (including controversial ones), loss of social and cultural identity, demonization of bearers of other cultural traditions, rejection of social norms caused by the external pressure of unrealistic models and sets – all these are examples of inconsistent social thinking. Thus, one of the major aspects, determining the nature of modern culture, is the developed ability in the minds of society members to realise one's own outlook, evaluate its consistency or, on the contrary, inconsistency. This is vital as the worldview of a person, even if inconsistent, struggles to put the experience in the already established vision of the world (Berger & Lukman, 1995), which can potentially disrupt in a significant way the process of social cognition.

Analysing the question, concerning at the level of which social mechanisms the transfer of knowledge and skills takes place, we note that the most perspective seems addressing the educational sphere which is inherently centralized and compulsory. Importantly, educational institutes are aimed at forming the worldview of children and youngsters – those very groups of population that are mostly characterized by the plasticity of outlook and, consequently, are most vulnerable to the external influence of ideas and sets.

Receiving education in this respect enables to discipline the mind, provides the methodology of considering various phenomenon in society and culture, develops critical thinking and the ability to examine consistently different aspects of social life (Ganin & Hutin, 2012). At the same time, as modern research shows, one of the necessities of modern society is not “mould”-like preparation of specialists, but forming free, well-rounded individuals, having the well-developed and independent perception of phenomena and processes under study which corresponds with the aim to unlock the potential of society members (Danilova, 2012). Importantly, at the level of humanitarian education the most relevant issues of social and cultural life are analysed in detail. While sciences have practical importance, humanitarian knowledge affects the individual abilities of society members to realise correct social cognition.

7. Conclusion

As a result of this theoretical study, we conclude that the threat lies not only in culture interaction per se, but in how intensive and uncontrolled this process is. In order to avoid dire consequences when adapting to changes in culture and society structure, it is necessary to take time. And here the unprecedented level of intensity of information exchange is seen as a considerable destabilizing factor. For this reason, the question arises that concerns the natural defence mechanisms which can resist the negative effects of modern sociocultural processes. This research results in the establishment of the fact that one of the significant factors of overcoming social risks of intensifying intercultural dialogue is raising the awareness of social positions among society members which can be realized at the level of humanitarian disciplines taught in education. This can facilitate both the resilience to negative social myths and developing in society individuals the ability to correctly perceive their goals, values and life strategies.

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