Current Issues of the Development of Employee Intercultural Competency in a Work Environment (a case-study of small municipalities of Lithuania)

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Abstract

Due to increasing migration, the development of intercultural competency has become more important in the work environment of organizations. Recently, interest in the topic of interculturalism among scientists has increased significantly - there is no doubt that employees of international organizations need to acquire intercultural competency, but this competency of employees in small municipalities of Lithuania has not been studied yet. This study relies on a designed questionnaire which provides for the evaluation of the intercultural competency of employees of small municipalities, as well as the need for its development, and the evaluation of their opinion on the impact of intercultural competency on their career.

Keywords. Management of cultural diversity, intercultural competency, immigration, multiculturalism.

Introduction

In the past decade the European Union has opened opportunities for Lithuanians to freely choose their place of residence; thus, the number of people who leave Lithuania, as well as those who due to various reasons come to Lithuania (e.g. to study, work, seek asylum or simply find better living conditions), has grown. Statistics (The Department of Statistics, 2014) show that the immigration rate is constantly increasing: in 2010 more than five thousand immigrants came to Lithuania, while in 2013 this number grew fourfold and exceeded twenty-two thousand. Due to the expanding international business in Lithuania, more and more importance has been given to maintaining contact with foreign countries. It is noted that self-governing is also more actively engaged in international cooperation initiatives. It sets priorities of cooperation with the municipalities of foreign countries and the ways and means of implementation thereof and sets the goal of forming a positive image of the region (and Lithuania as such) in foreign countries, analysing and disseminating the practical experience of the municipalities of foreign countries, implementing the provisions of laws and other legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania, including national and regional plans, activating regional communities, and helping to draw up projects (Alytaus, 2011). It is not easy to find the most effective way of communication or to establish a strong and lasting partnership in an environment where people have different cultural, religious, and ethical backgrounds and values, speak different languages, and are probably influenced by certain stereotypes.

Although it might seem that communities in such a small country as Lithuania and its regions in particular are culturally homogeneous and the need to develop employees' intercultural competency is minimal, the experience of other countries similar in population and territory, such as Denmark, reveals that a monocultural country in several decades can become a country with an abundance of representatives of different cultures. The latest statistics show (www.dst.dk) that the average flow of immigrants to Denmark today is 80 thousand arrivals a year, which is four times more than Lithuania. People from almost 200 countries live in Denmark. For many years the largest group of these people has been of Turkish origin. Approximately two thirds of all immigrants have kept their foreign citizenship. The situation is opposite for the descendants, where two thirds have Danish citizenship. Nowadays 637 842 immigrants and their descendants live in Denmark, which is twenty times more than in Lithuania. The Dutch government has to solve the problem of how to manage cultural diversity and decrease immigration (Skot-Hansen, 2002). The scientist enumerates various reasons why Denmark faces the need to manage cultural diversity: e.g., managers of shopping centres solve the question of whether to allow Muslim female cashiers to wear certain headwear or to allow Muslim employees to pray during work; politicians do not agree on the question whether children of cultural minorities should speak several languages, whether children of foreigners in kindergartens and schools should be

individually served with the food which is allowed by their religion (Muslims, Jews, Indians, etc.).

All above-mentioned processes are as such consequences of globalization, which, in turn, is surrounded by a variety of assumptions which potentially arise from an insufficient awareness of how to handle change, limited thinking, and fear of otherness. Zakarevičius (2000) identifies factors that shape national features: the way of living and production, national mind-set, religion, statehood traditions, and personal character traits. National psychological traits of each nation create specific norms of behaviour and communication characteristic of a particular nation. Thus, people who come to a foreign country and strive to establish themselves there face the pressure of adapting to the local norms of behaviour, while the local population views their own culture as superior to the ones of the newcomers. Such collision of different cultures very often determines various conflict situations, miscommunication and the emergence of stereotypes. The results of scientific research show that employees are affected more by national culture than their organizational culture (Adler, 2002). It is probable that in the future the number of monocultural countries will decrease, while work in a multicultural work environment or with foreign customers will become casual.

The perception of cultural differences both in society and in the work environment as not a barrier but an advantage and opportunity to use the strengths of each culture to require the development of tolerance, multicultural awareness, and constant development of intercultural competency of employees in organizations. Intercultural competency, which is a complex construct, is developed over a lifetime and includes three dimensions (knowledge, skills and attitudes) which can be developed through formal, informal, self- learning or experience.

When we touch upon the issues of multiculturalism and interculturalism, we should mention the pioneer of this topic, who analysed cultural dimensions in organizations; i.e., Hofstede (1980); according to him understanding people means understanding their origin, which helps to foresee their attitudes and future behaviour.

Recently, interest in the topic of interculturalism among scientists has increased significantly: they analyse various aspects related to multiculturalism, such as intercultural communication, its efficiency, models (Liu and Lee, 2008), formation of intercultural teams and the efficiency of their performance (Lloyd and Hartel, 2009; Oerlemans and Peeters, 2010), application of Western management styles in different cultures (Linehan and Shullion, 2000), possibilities for immigrants to adapt to the new environment and the efficiency of their performance (Jordan and Cartwright, 1998; Bhatti, Battour, Ismail, 2013), the efficiency of intercultural training (Graf, 2003), etc. Scientific literature more often mentions features of global leaders (Hurn 1999; Stanek 2000; Collard, 2007; Bird et al, 2009), especially with emphasis on their ability to manage cultural diversity. Management theory analyses these problems as diversity management. At present moment the concept 'intercultural competence' is expressed through the synonymous terms 'cross-cultural competence', 'cultural competence', 'global competence', 'multicultural competence,' etc.

In Lithuania, research on multiculturalism, intercultural competency, and cultural diversity are quite a new scientific area. Jucevičius (2001) analysed cultural characteristics of Lithuanian organizations in the European context, Pruskus (2003) explored multicultural communication and management, Paurienė (2011) examined aspects of development of intercultural competency, and Petkevičiūtė (2009, 2010, 2011) contributed significantly to research on interculturalism in organizations through her analysis of links between intercultural competence and career progression, features of cross-cultural negotiations, intercultural competency of managers, etc.

The aim of the research is to evaluate the need for the development of employees' intercultural competency in small municipalities of Lithuania.

The object of the research is the work environment of small municipalities of Lithuania and employees' competencies.

The objectives of the research are:
- To overview conceptions of intercultural competency, to justify the need for the development of intercultural competency;
- To analyse the geography of the contacts of employees of small municipalities in Lithuania;
- To establish the trends of communication with foreigners;
- To evaluate employees' intercultural competency and the need for its development, as well as the impact of this competency on career perception.

Methods of the research are comparative analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, survey of respondents, generalisation of results by means of SPSS and Excel programmes, and graphic representation.

The interdisciplinary nature and problems of intercultural research

The guidelines on cultural policy change in the Republic of Lithuania present the analysis of current situation. The guidelines note that the currently applied formation and implementation of culture policy is inefficient and does not allow us to properly respond

to challenge and change and ensure continuity and the renewal of cultural processes. Additionally, the guidelines emphasise that there is a great lack of the analysis, monitoring and impact of cultural processes, thus they are not managed efficiently; it is also noted that cultural policy should not ignore international economic relations (Official Gazette "Žinios" No 80-4152), thus it is possible to claim that Lithuania is taking its first steps towards the management of cultural diversity.

One of the initiatives in the Programme for the Improvement of Public Governance 2012-2020 (Official Gazette "Žinios" No. 22-1009) is to provide efficient inter-institutional cooperation, develop internal and external communication, disseminate best management practices, and encourage public administration institutions to learn from each other's initiatives. Therefore, it is important to include more employees in the process of intercultural competence development in the future and encourage them to share knowledge and best practices on how to deal with certain issues.

We can agree with the position of Repečkienė and other scientists (2011) that national culture is the essential dimension of cultural diversity, thus in the new circumstances of multicultural environment it is important to respond adequately to new cultural challenges while preserving national identity and cherishing one's own culture, because the efficiently managed cultural diversity provides for the realisation of the advantage of not only the organization, but also the whole country.

A multicultural work environment is analysed in scientific literature from two perspectives: 1) as the internal work environment of an organization, where employees from different cultures have to unite to work together, communicate with foreign partners, etc., and 2) as a multicultural external environment, where organizations face the challenge of managing the externally developing cultural diversity, at the same time ensuring equal cooperation and justice with representatives of another culture (social guarantees, language courses and other adaptation programmes). The management of a multicultural environment and successful operation therein requires the development of intercultural competency, which is described by most scientists (Spencer and Spencer, 1993; Chen and Starosta 1996; Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2000; Sercu, 2004 et al.) as a trinary concept, which includes knowledge, skills, abilities, value assumptions and personal traits necessary to perform such activity. Lepaitė (2003), who analysed the development of the term 'competency' in light of the experience of Lithuania and Western countries, views competency as a holistic expression of personal potential with an emphasis on personal character traits, value assumptions, and the ability to realise the accumulated potential and experience through activity. In this case activity is interpreted in a broad sense as a person's self-realization over a lifetime, in the society, and in various areas. The concept of competency as an ability to mechanically perform certain operation or as obtained formal qualifications is no longer relevant for the modern competitive and constantly changing labour market. Lepaitė (2003) notes that successful personal activity in globalized organizations depends on the person's ability to adapt to the changing environment, where personal competency and the potential for its development are the major factors.

It should be noted that due to their interdisciplinary nature, a variety of research on international competency are attributed to a multidirectional research area, where equal attention should be paid to the analysis of the impact of several sciences on intercultural competency. For instance, to be able to evaluate whether individuals have the required knowledge of intercultural competency, we have to analyse their perception of the policy of their own or a foreign country, the most important historical phenomenon, economics, geography, art, etc., as well as their ability to compare and contrast similarities and differences. All these constituent parts compose a country's culture, thus it is very important to be acquainted with culture not only through popular legends conveyed by communities, but also through the country's history, art, geographic situation (e.g., dependence on the neighbouring countries, historical commonality, temperament (e.g. southern nations are more emotional, northern nations are more reserved), and the acceptable way of expressing emotions, etc.). Knowledge is also linked to attitudes – a person who knows the object better has a different attitude from a person who lacks this knowledge.

Dilthey (1907) in his writings about culture used the term of 'lived experience', where 'lived' means the direct resemblance of our significant personal experience models. The aspect of personal experience enriches the term 'culture' with emotion, thus very often foreign literature links intercultural competency, first of all, with cultural sensitivity. Chen and Starosta (2000) note that cultural sensitivity is a person's ability to create positive atmosphere based on mutual understanding with respect demonstrated to cultural differences, which, in turn, opens the way for effective intercultural communication. Thus employees, who face cultural diversity, need to have certain basic knowledge about their own and foreign cultures and the main 'rules' thereof, as well as to be able to behave properly; i.e., be flexible and adapt to new and unexpected situations and be able to

respond adequately (expression of emotions) to the otherness; this is extremely important, because, as we have already mentioned, the emotional aspect is quite significant in intercultural communication.

It is not possible to establish personal attitudes, as well as skills, without communication, whereas linguistic ability is closely related to psychology, philosophy and ethics. Language is not only linguistic knowledge (foreign language skills), but also an expression of mentality, ability to provide relevant context, to choose idioms that a foreign national will comprehend, an ability to express politeness, etc. Thus the analysis of intercultural competency should pay a great deal of attention to its interdisciplinary nature and evaluate it from different perspectives (through language, psychology, knowledge, etc.). As Bieliauskas (1993) claims, the concept of culture can be understood as an expressed or implied set of rules, standardised models of behaviour or thought, and as the harmonization of mutual personal interests. So according to the scientist, two aspects are important here; namely, the harmonization of social values and psychological interests.

Picture 1 presents a model of the interdisciplinary nature of intercultural competency as designed by the authors. Each of the three dimensions presented in the picture (knowledge, skills and attitudes) is closely related with other disciplines and can be analysed in their context.

Various research on intercultural competency reveal that it is acquired while a person passes through a number of stages, which, as Fennes and Hapgood (1997) claim, include the process of individual change from strong ethnocentrism through awareness and understanding, acceptance and respect, and finally, appreciation and valuing, and changing until intercultural competency is acquired.

Ethnocentrism is viewed as a natural situation where people, who have never directly encountered other cultures and do not have any idea of intercultural differences, evaluate the world by the standards of their cultural group. The ethnocentric position is consistent with the nature of culture to protect its own standards and values from the cultural identities of other groups. During the stage of awareness and understanding the person comprehends that intercultural differences exist, understands the reasons of intercultural differences and their impact on human relations, and becomes aware of the impact of stereotypes and preconceptions on the relations between different cultures. During the stage of acceptance and respect, individuals accept another culture without preconceptions and praise another culture even if they know that the norms and values of this culture contradict their own. During the stage of appreciation and valuing, the person begins to understand cultural diversity as a source of growth, development and opportunity. This becomes obvious when another culture provides valuable opportunities, which do not exist in one's own culture. During the stage of changing the person acquires new skills and attitudes which are not characteristic of either the native or the foreign culture. At the stage of intercultural competency, individuals learn to efficiently function
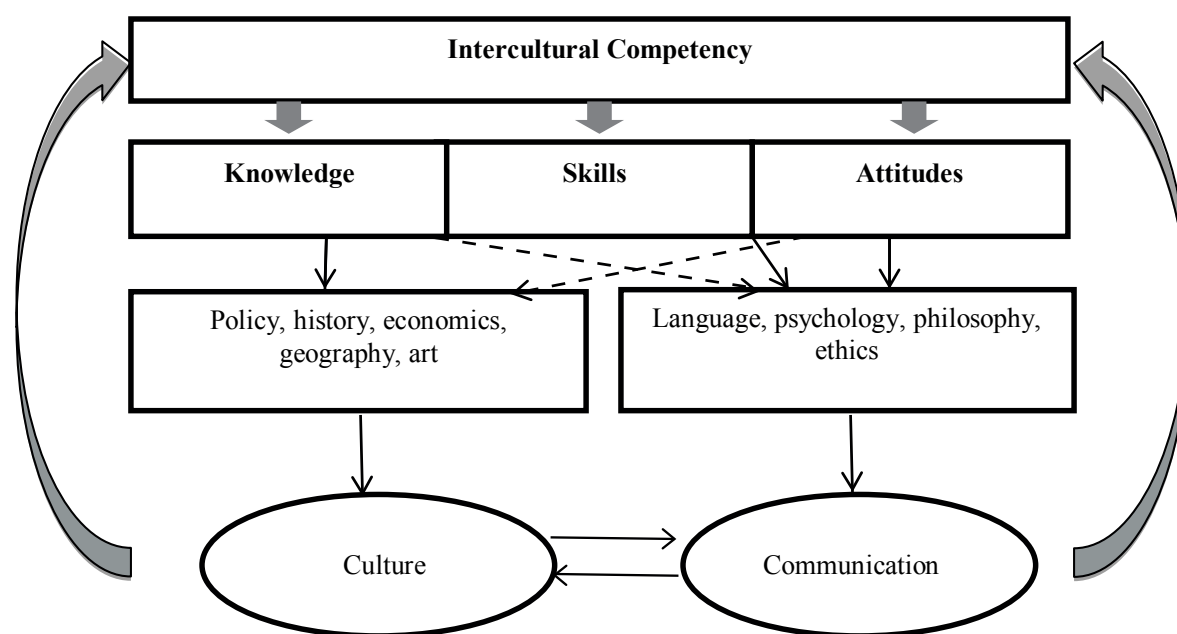
Picture 1. The interdisciplinary nature of intercultural competency (designed by the authors)

and not only preserve their own identity, but also acknowledge specific features of other cultures.

Thus knowledge, individual or personal characteristics and skills become more and more important in any job. That is why, as Lepaitė (2003) states, competency is viewed not as a constituent part of qualification, but rather as a holistic expression of an individual's potential with the focus on personal traits, value assumptions and the ability to realise the accumulated potential and experience in practice.

When analysing employees' competencies necessary for establishing and maintaining successful intercultural contact, one should analyse the knowledge, skills and abilities that their organization has from a social, linguistic and psychological perspective. Furthermore, as some specialists note (Hoopes, 1997; Fantini, 2000; Byram, 2004), intercultural competency should be viewed not as something taken for granted (or a final result), but as a result of a person's constant development and evolution. When we talk about the organization's readiness to manage cultural diversity, first we need to think about its employees' competency which could ensure an individual's ability to manage relevant sources and understand the change and the environment, thus being able to ensure the success of the organization.

Methodology

The research was carried out in June 2014; specialists and the heads of departments of the 15 least populous municipalities were contacted by email with a request to take part in the survey. The survey questionnaire on intercultural competence was composed of five question blocks presented in Table 1. The questionnaire on intercultural competency was designed in order to reveal the respondents' geography of contacts, frequency of communication with foreigners, opinion about the impact of intercultural competency on their career, and the need for the development of this competency. In addition, a separate block of questions was designed to evaluate the respondents' intercultural competency – knowledge, skills and attitudes. To evaluate the scale internal consistency of this block we applied Cronbach's alpha coefficient, calculated by means of the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) programme (version 21). Cronbach's alpha coefficient of individual blocks of questions in the questionnaire is not lower than 0.8, which means that the questionnaire was designed properly.

Answers to the statements, based on the Likert scale, are grouped as follows:
- Strong agreement, corresponding to the assessment 'good' - an average from > 1 to 2 points;

Table 1

The structure of the research survey

Blocks of questions	Aim	Measurement scale	Cronbach's alpha
Questions intended to identify the frequency of the respondents' communication with foreign nationals, development possibilities for their intercultural competence in the workplace, and their perception of the impact of intercultural competence on their career. (3 questions)	The questions help to clarify the frequency of the respondents' communication with other nationals and the policy followed by their workplaces for developing employees' intercultural competences and their perception of the impact of intercultural competence on their career.	Ranging scale	-
Statements intended to evaluate the knowledge of the respondents (16 questions)	The statements help to evaluate the knowledge of employees - foreign language proficiency, courtesy expressions, and formal working protocol.	5-point Likert scale	0.972
Statements intended to evaluate the respondents' skills and abilities (4 questions)	The statements help to evaluate the respondents' skills, the ability to learn from the experienced situations, flexibility, management of the new situation arising due to cultural diversity	5-point Likert scale	0.904
Statements intended to evaluate the respondents' behavioural attitudes (11 questions)	Assessment of the statements helps to establish the respondents' level of tolerance to foreign nationals	5-point Likert scale	0.965
Statements intended to evaluate major elements of intercultural competency (9 statements)	Assessment of the statements allows to define major elements of intercultural competency	5-point Likert scale	0.878

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- Agreement, corresponding to the assessment 'satisfactory' - an average from > 2 to 3 points;
- Neither agreement nor disagreement, corresponding to low-valuation 'of rather unimportant' - an average from > 3 to 4 points;
- Evaluation of 'not important' shows lack of opinion or disagreement with the statement.

116 respondents from the 15 least populous municipalities of Lithuania took part in the anonymous surveys. Their demographic characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

CHARACTERISTICS		*N*	*PER CENT*
GENDER	Female	91	78.4
	Male	25	21.6
	Total	116	100
AGE	under 35	34	29.3
	>35	82	70.7
	Total	116	100
EDUCATION	Secondary	2	1.7
	Bachelor	49	42.2
	Master	65	56.0
	Total	116	100

Results

Table 2 shows that more than two thirds of the respondents are over 35 years old (70.7 %), a little more than a half of the respondents have a Master's degree (56.0 %), whereas every fourth (42.2 %) has a Bachelor's degree.
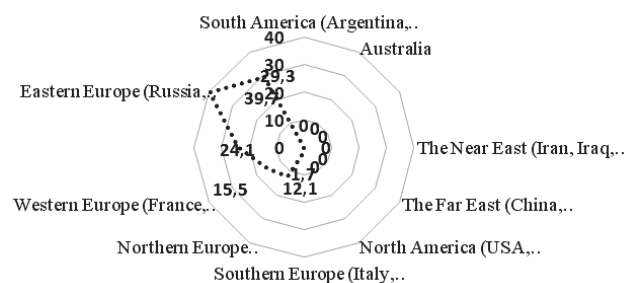
Table 3 illustrates how frequently the respondents communicate with foreign nationals – more than a half of the respondents from municipalities, who have contact with foreigners at work more than once in half a year, constitute a separate group, thus it is possible to assume that the development of intercultural competency should be more relevant for the respondents from these municipalities than for those without such experience. Additionally, the table clearly shows that the frequency of intercultural communication depends on the population of a municipality – thus it is possible to make an assumption that some municipalities have more intense intercultural contact with other countries than others and are motivated by the needs of internal environment, first of all, to be able to get involved in the current change of the global environment. Meanwhile a part of other municipalities in Lithuania develop intercultural contact much less – employees of the municipalities of the Skuodas (75%) and Zarasai (50%) regions noted that they do not happen to communicate with foreign nationals at all.

The geographical position and historical experience of Lithuania determine the map of international cooperation (Picture 2): most frequently the respondents communicate with citizens of Eastern Europe (39.7%) and the Baltic states (Latvia and Estonia – 29.3%), followed by the states of Central Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic – 24.1%). Every third or fourth respondent communicates

Table 3

Frequency of communication with foreign nationals in the small municipalities of Lithuania

No	Municipality	Population in the municipality*	Frequency of communication with foreign nationals (%)		
			More than once in half a year	On average once a year	None
1.	Ignalina region	17 145	100	0.0	0.0
2.	Palanga region	15 367	60	33.3	26.7
3.	Elektrėnai region	24 236	51.1	31.3	18.8
4.	Lazdijai region	21 251	50.1	33.3	16.7
5.	Druskininkai region	20 947	50.0	16.7	33.3
6.	Molėtai region	19 590	50.0	28.6	21.4
7.	Akmenė region	21 685	42.9	28.6	28.6
8.	Pakruojis region	21 997	41.7	8.3	50.0
9.	Pagėgiai region	8 931	37.5	25.0	37.5
10.	Kazlų Rūda region	12 638	25.0	0.0	75.0
11.	Kalvarija region	11 635	20.0	20.0	60.0
12.	Kupiškis region	19 067	20.0	40.0	40.0
13.	Birštonas region	4 370	20.0	40.0	40.0
14.	Zarasai region	17 318	0.0	50.0	50.0
15.	Skuodas region	18 912	0.0	25.0	75.0

*Data of the Department of Statistics, 2014

South America (Argentina,..
40
30
29,3
20
Australia
Eastern Europe (Russia,..
39,7
10
0,00
0
Western Europe (France,..
24,1
0
1,0
The Near East (Iran, Iraq,..
15,5
12,1
Northern Europe..
Southern Europe (Italy,..
North America (USA,..
The Far East (China,..

Picture 2. The map of intercultural contacts of the employees of small municipalities of Lithuania.

from time to time with representatives of the above-mentioned states. The evaluation of the information announced on the websites of the municipality about their international relations confirms the obtained information about the directions of the respondents' intercultural contacts (most frequently municipalities cooperate with municipalities of Poland, Russia, Belarus, Germany, and Latvia)[1].

Such priorities of international cooperation can be explained from two perspectives – first, the neighbouring counties cooperate most closely due to social-economic problems and similar issues to be resolved and a similar cultural heritage and mentality which prevail in the same region; second, quite a lot of residents of Lithuania can speak the languages of the neighbouring countries (Russian, Polish), which they can use to communicate with other post-soviet countries as well. Furthermore, after Lithuania joined the European Union, it became attractive for citizens from post-soviet countries who are looking for work (Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Georgians).

The research also aimed to find out how the municipalities, which have the largest amount of contact with representatives of foreign countries, develop their employees' intercultural competency (Table 4). The development of intercultural competency can be divided into three groups – upon the initiative of the organization, upon the initiative of the employee, or none. Methods of the development of intercultural competency were identified as experiential learning in another cultural context (i.e. business trips or internships) and experiential learning in Lithuania

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[1] The obtained research result fully correlate with another research conducted by the authors (Gražulis, Markuckienė, 2014), which was designed to establish how the academic community and public sector employees of Lithuania get involved into cooperation with the EU public sector institutions due to their work specifics. It follows that irrespective of the location of an organization, the geography of intercultural contacts remains similar, and such vectors of communication give rise to the necessity to set the prioritised directions and organize training programmes with the clear focus on how to develop employees' intercultural competency of organizations of Lithuania.

in workshops and training in learning communities; i.e., when the experience of all members and new information is shared, and this communication creates new knowledge (synergistic effect). It is believed that one of the most efficient methods of the development of intercultural competency is experiential learning in another cultural environment (Stier, 2003); this methods is applied mainly by municipalities of the Druskininkai (50%), Ignalina (33.3%), and Lazdijai regions (33.3%). Such a training practice is evaluated most favourably due to its higher efficiency and the fact that competencies acquired in another country and in another cultural environment make the basis of professional and personal growth and development (Gerulaitienë, 2013).

The obtained results reveal that experiential training on interculturalism conducted in Lithuania are far from popular in the regions; none of the surveyed employees from the municipalities of the Ignalina region, Druskininkai and Moletai have ever participated in such training; only every third-fifth respondent from other municipalities (Palanga, Elektrėnai and Lazdijai regions) take part in such training. The creation of learning communities is evaluated positively, as employees are encouraged to share the acquired experience; thus, such form of training can be a kind of support for an organization in its aspiration to involve as many employees in the process of the development of intercultural competency as possible. The leading municipalities which apply this method are Ignalina region (66.7%), Elektrėnai (37.5%) and Lazdijai region (33.3%). In summary, the results suggest that the need for international, intercultural communication and cooperation in the analysed municipalities exists; however, there is a lack of systematicity in the organization of training. There is also an unanswered question of whether municipalities measure the change of the competency of the employees who took part in training, because in most the priority is given to the employees' experiential and self-learning, or learning in learning communities, which is why it can be difficult to evaluate the employees' progress.

The research reveals that employees of small municipalities in Lithuania have different views on the perspectives of the development of intercultural competency (Picture 3). It was noted that respondents under 35 years old have a more positive view on the trends of the development of intercultural competency in the future: half of the respondents under 35 are convinced that in the future the need for international initiative should increase; however, every third respondent (irrespective of age) believes that intercultural contact will remain the same as it

Table 4

**Development of intercultural competency in municipalities (%)**

Municipality	Experiential learning, workshops, simulation games	Employees are sent on business trips and (or) internships abroad	Spread of good practice is encouraged; employees learn from each other	The development of intercultural competency is not encouraged, it is the employee's responsibility	I don't know, I'm not interested
Ignalina Region	0.0	33.3	**66.7**	0.0	0.0
Palangos Region	**33.3**	0.0	20.0	**33.3**	13.3
Elektrėnai Region	12.5	18.8	**37.5**	18.8	12.5
Druskininkai Region	0.0	**50.0**	16.7	16.7	16.7
Molėtai Region	0.0	21.4	21.4	**35.7**	21.4
Lazdijai Region	16.7	**33.3**	**33.3**	16.7	0.0

is at present. Every fifth-tenth respondent does not have an opinion on the issue of the development of interculturalism. Most often this position is shared by people who do not participate in this process or are involved just a little. More than a half of the respondents (Picture 4) view their intercultural competency as having no impact on their career. On average, every tenth believes that a higher degree of intercultural competency would help them take a better position in their current workplace. In terms of the age of the respondents it can definitely distinguish the respondents' positions on the impact of intercultural competency on their career in Lithuania and abroad –

every third respondent under 35 believes a higher degree of intercultural competency would provide them with more opportunities to make a career, while only 15.3% of the respondents over 35 years old share this view. Only one out of ten respondents over 35 years old, are not interested in the impact of intercultural competency on their career, while none of the respondents younger than 35 share this view. The question arises whether the employees are fully aware of the importance of intercultural competency in their work, and whether they apply it practically. Taking into account the respondents' answers about the development of their intercultural competency,
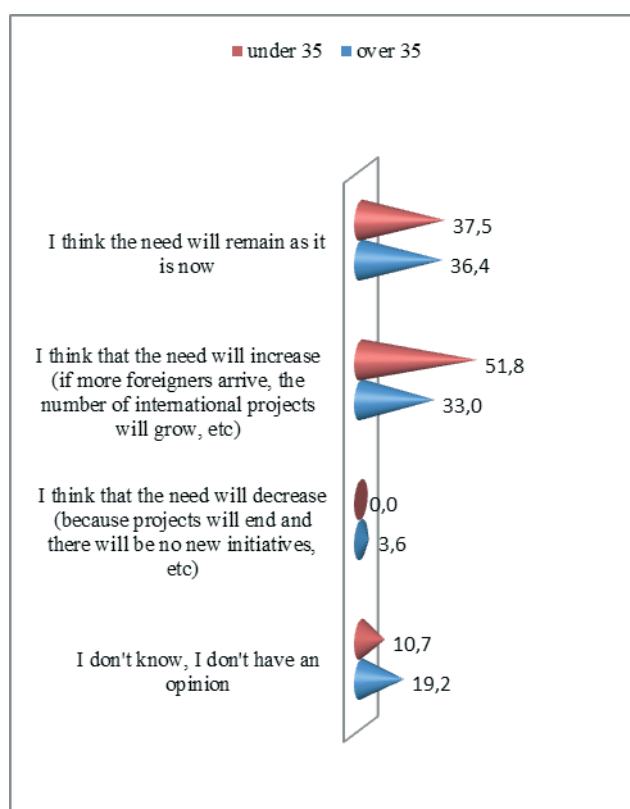
Picture 3. Dynamics of the need for intercultural communication (%)
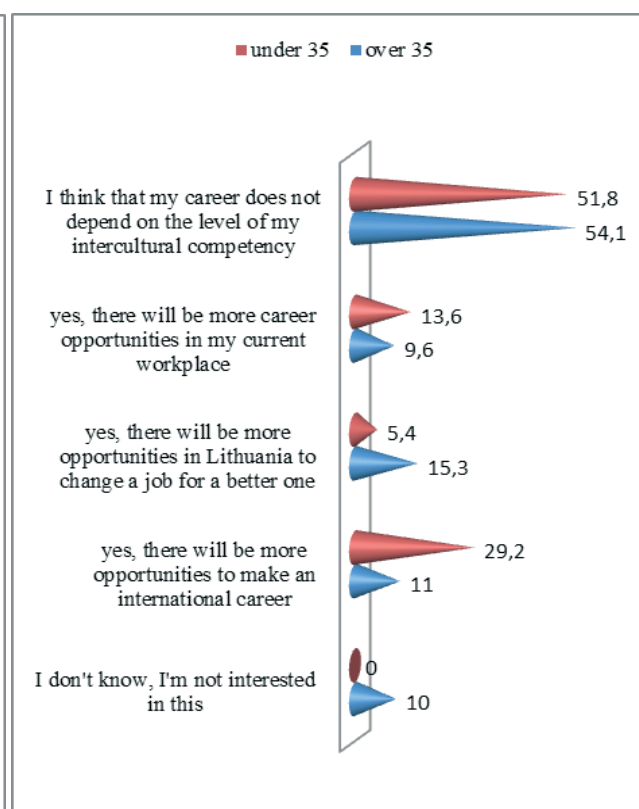
Picture 4. Perception of links of intercultural competency with career perspectives (%)

we can conclude that regions do not place enough emphasis on the awareness of the importance of poor intercultural competency on the employees' careers as well as the focus of the whole workplace (municipality) on future perspectives.

The research also aimed to find out what elements of intercultural competency the respondents view as the most important in communication with foreign nationals and what their opinion on these elements of their own intercultural competency is (Table 5). The absolute majority of the respondents (81%) believe that the most important skill is proficiency in a foreign language, more than a half of the respondents think that intercultural communication requires respect (56.9%), tolerance (53.4%) and politeness (52.6%). On the other hand, only every fourth respondent thinks that it is important to know the most important historic dates of the country they communicate with and to be aware of the most important features of social development. Meanwhile, the lack of such knowledge has a negative impact on communication with foreign nationals, especially when 'uncomfortable' topics are touched upon or when historic dates are evaluated, especially if the data are not certain. As was already mentioned, intercultural competency is first of all related with cultural sensitivity – the understanding that no culture is superior to others – and that all of them should be evaluated on the basis of common human values; thus, we support the respondents' opinions that respect and tolerance for cultural differences are very important. Nonetheless, it is very important to know what those differences are.

Table 5

The major elements of intercultural competency (according to the highest evaluation of the respondents)

No	Elements of intercultural competency	Respondents who gave the highest evaluation (%)
1.	Proficiency in a foreign language	81.0
2.	Respect for values of other cultures	56.9
3.	Tolerance for cultural and racial differences	53.4
4.	Understanding expression of politeness	52.6
5.	An ability to learn from the experienced situations	42.2
6.	Flexibility	36.2
7.	Managing new situations	34.4
8.	Awareness of the most important historical and social phenomenon of other countries	23.3

As we can see from the data presented in Table 6, the respondents have a high level of tolerance (M = 1.97-1.99, SD = 1.014-1.089), average estimates are higher than the scale average. Although the data presented in Table 5 show that the respondents believe that proficiency in a foreign language is the main element of intercultural competency, most of them evaluate this ability as rather weak (M = 2.76; SD = 0.942); i.e., lower than the scale average.

As Bergelson (2014) notes, it is important to understand not only how and what people from another culture say, but also what and why they do not say; in other words, why some topic is taboo. The results of our research reveal that the respondents do not have sufficient knowledge about expressions of politeness (M = 2.60; SD = 1.057), customs (M = 2.89; SD = 1.086) and taboo topics (M = 2.93; SD = 1,129) of foreign nationals, and would hardly be able to indicate such differences in their own and other cultures. It is possible to state that due to the inadequate awareness of other cultures, the respondents evaluate their ability to solve conflicts, which arise out of cultural diversity, as low (M = 2.84; SD = 1.063).

To sum up, the obtained results lead to the conclusion that the respondents are tolerant and have a positive attitude towards foreign nationals, and that they are oriented towards an acceptable method of communication; however, they lack the knowledge and skills of communication with foreign nationals. Thus it must be stated that in order to strengthen the intercultural competency of employees of small municipalities in Lithuania, attention should be paid to the level of foreign language proficiency and training on interculturalism where they would become aware of the most important historical facts, social and cultural features, acceptable ways of expressing emotions, etc., of the countries they have to communicate most frequently with. A lack of such knowledge can pose a threat because inadequate awareness of the subject is generally considered to result in prejudice or stereotypization.

Conclusions

The analysis of the conceptions of intercultural competency and the practical aspects of the theoretical and empirical research on employees of small municipalities of Lithuania lead to the following conclusions:

1. At present Lithuania is making its first steps towards managing cultural diversity. Although migration is increasing and the society is not culturally homogeneous any more, it is very important to preserve national identity and cherish one's own culture; however, it is also extremely important to efficiently manage cultural diversity and use it to the country's advantage.

2. To be able to manage a multicultural environment and function in it successfully, one needs

Table 6

Evaluation of the respondent's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes

Statements to evaluate the respondent's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes	M	SD
I understand and tolerate:		
a) religious diversity	1.97	1.014
b) racial differences	1.98	1.038
c) cultural differences	1.99	1.089
I try to find the way of communication acceptable for foreigners and not to behave inappropriately so as to not offend them	2.12	0.939
When I communicate with foreigners, I am interested in their country's:		
a) culture	2.08	1.002
b) customs	2.20	1.069
c) politics	2.38	0.998
d) interests	2.38	1.064
e) issues of gender equality	2.81	1.177
I observe and I am aware of what I have learned from communication with a foreigner	2.24	0.931
I know how to behave in an unexpected and new situation which arises due to cultural diversity	2.72	1.101
I am able to communicate in a foreign language (languages) in the professional area	2.76	0.942
I know the foreigners', whom I happen to communicate with,		
a) expressions of politeness	2.60	1.057
b) customs	2.89	1.086
c) unacceptable conversation topics (taboo)	2.93	1.129
I am able to compare the above-mentioned aspects with my culture and similarities and differences	2.92	1.063
If conflicts or misunderstandings arise due to cultural differences, I know how to solve them appropriately.	2.84	1.070

Note. The scale ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 is the highest evaluation and 5 is the lowest.

intercultural competency, which is defined by scientists (Byram, 1997; Sercu, 2004; Chenand Starosta 1996; Fantini, 2000; Spencer and Spencer, 1993, etc.) as a trinary concept which includes knowledge, skills, abilities, value assumptions and personal traits. A specific feature of intercultural competency is its interdisciplinary nature: to be able to evaluate intercultural competency, it is necessary to analyse the person's knowledge by applying research methods of management, sociology, psychology and other sciences.

3. Comparison of the results of various research conducted by the authors of the article on the geography of international contacts highlights some trends which do not depend on the place of residence or workplace. Employees in both the capital and regions have most contact with the Baltic States, post-soviet countries and Central Europe. These results help to determine the directions of the development of intercultural competency and the priorities of future research on multiculturalism, intercultural competency, and the management of cultural diversity.

4. The research reveals that the frequency of intercultural communication does not depend on the population of the municipality – thus it is possible to assume that some municipalities have more intensive intercultural contact with other countries than others; thus the need for their employees to develop their intercultural competency is more relevant. The evaluation of the respondents' answers shows that there is lack of systematicity in the organization of training. Furthermore, there is also an unanswered practical question of whether municipalities take care of the change of the competency of the employees who participate in training and try to measure it. As most municipalities give priority to the employees' experiential and self-learning, or learning in learning communities, it can be difficult to evaluate the employees' progress.

5. Although half of the respondents agree that in the future there will be more international initiatives, one third of them believes that the amount of international contact will remain the same as it is now; however, more than half of them view their intercultural competency as having no impact on their career.

6. It was noted that the respondents' attitudes towards foreign nationals are positive; however there is a lack of knowledge and skills of communicating with foreign nationals. Thus, to be able to strengthen the intercultural competency of employees of small municipalities of Lithuania, it is important to pay attention to learning foreign languages and training on interculturalism, and to strengthen the creation of learning teams, so that the employees who have gained more experience would actively share this knowledge with their colleagues.

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Darbuotojų tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos plėtros aktualijos darbo aplinkoje (Lietuvos mažų savivaldybių atvejo analizė)

Santrauka

Dėl pasaulyje vykstančių politinių ir ekonominių pokyčių ir didėjančių migracijos srautų tiek Lietuvos organizacijų vadovai, tiek šalies valdžia privalės megzti naujus kontaktus su jiems galbūt ne taip gerai pažįstamos kultūros atstovais, susipažinti su tų šalių verslo etiketu, derybų stiliumi, sprendimų priėmimu, vartotojų lūkesčiais ir poreikiais. Pastebima, kad savivalda taip pat aktyviau įsitraukia į tarptautinio bendradarbiavimo iniciatyvas, nusistato bendradarbiavimo su užsienio šalių savivaldybėmis prioritetus ir jų įgyvendinimo būdus bei priemones, kelia tikslą formuoti teigiamą savo rajono (kartu ir visos Lietuvos) įvaizdį užsienio šalyse, tirti ir skleisti užsienio šalių savivaldybių veiklos patirtį, įgyvendinti Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymų, kitų teisės aktų nuostatas, nacionalinį bei regiono plėtros planus, aktyvinti rajono bendruomenes ir padėti rengti projektus (Alytaus rajono savivaldybės..., 2011).

Pastaraisiais metais mokslininkų susidomėjimas tarpkultūriškumo tema itin išaugo: nagrinėjami įvairūs su tarpkultūriškumu susiję aspektai – tarpkultūrinė komunikacija, jos efektyvumas, modeliai (Liu ir Lee, 2008), tarpkultūrinių komandų formavimas ir jų veiklos efektyvumas (Lloyd ir Hartel, 2009; Oerlemans ir Peeters, 2010), vakarietiško vadybos stiliaus taikymas skirtingose kultūrose (Jacobs, 2005), imigrantų galimybės prisitaikyti naujoje aplinkoje ir jų veiklos efektyvumas (Jordan ir Cartwright, 1998; Bhatti, Battour, Ismail, 2013), tarpkultūrinių mokymų efektyvumas (Graf, 2003) ir kt.

Lietuvoje tarpkultūriškumo, tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos, kultūrinės įvairovės tyrimai – dar gana nauja mokslinė sritis. Nors mokslininkai yra nagrinėję Lietuvos organizacijos kultūrines charakteristikas Europos kontekste (Jucevičius, 2001), daugiakultūrę komunikaciją ir vadybą (Pruskus, 2003), tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos ugdymo aspektus (Paurienė, 2011), darbuotojų karjerą, tarpkultūrinių derybų niuansus, vadovų tarpkultūrinę kompetenciją (Petkevičiūtė, 2009; 2010; 2011), darbuotojų tarpkultūrinė kompetencija, ypač mūsų šalies regionuose, netirta. Todėl šio straipsnio autoriai išsikėlė tikslą įvertinti poreikį plėsti darbuotojų tarpkultūrinę kompetenciją pagal gyventojų skaičių mažiausiose Lietuvos savivaldybėse.

Šio tyrimo rezultatai (N = 116) leidžia daryti išvadą, kad tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos plėtra būtų aktuali ma-

žiau negu pusei tirtų Lietuvos savivaldybių, nes daugiau nei du trečdaliai jų darbuotojų pažymėjo, kad su kitataučiais bendrauja dažniau nei kartą per metus, tačiau sistemiškų mokymų, skirtų tarpkultūrinei kompetencijai plėtoti, darbovietės neorganizuoja. Nors respondentų nuostatos kitataučių atžvilgiu yra pozityvios, pabrėžtina, kad savo gebėjimą spręsti dėl kultūrinių skirtumų kilusius nesusipratimus jie vertina silpniausiai, palyginti su visais kitais tirtais tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos elementais. Tiesa, daugiau negu pusės apklaustųjų nuomone, tarptautinių iniciatyvų jų darbovietėje ateityje tik daugės, todėl galima daryti išvadą, kad darbuotojų tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos plėtros klausimai ateityje turės būti keliami vis dažniau. Svarbu pažymėti, jog vertinant pagal amžių gana ryškiai išsiskyrė respondentų pozicijos dėl tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos įtakos jų karjerai Lietuvoje arba užsienyje – kas trečias jaunesnis nei 35 metų respondentas mano, kad didesnė tarpkultūrinė kompetencija atvertų jam kelią daryti tarptautinę karjerą, o iš vyresnių nei 35 metų respondentų tam pritaria tik 15,3 proc. Tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos įtaka karjerai visiškai nesidomėjo vienas iš dešimties respondentų vyresnių nei 35 metų asmenų amžiaus grupėje, o tarp jaunesnių tokių nebuvo. Apibendrinant tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos plėtros tendencijas mažose savivaldybėse galima daryti išvadą, kad regionuose supratimas apie tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos įtaką darbuotojų karjerai, kartu ir dėmesys visos darbovietės (savivaldybės) tarptautinių iniciatyvų ir tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos stiprinimo perspektyvoms akcentuojamas per mažai.

Lyginant kelis straipsnio autorių atliktų tyrimų rezultatus apie tarpkultūrinių kontaktų geografiją, išryškėja tam tikros tendencijos, kurios stipriai nepriklauso nuo gyvenamosios vietos ar darbovietės. Tiek sostinės, tiek regionų darbuotojai daugiausiai tarpkultūrinių kontaktų palaiko su Baltijos valstybėmis, posovietinės erdvės šalims ir Vidurio Europa. Tokie rezultatai leidžia nustatyti tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos plėtros kryptis ir ateities tarpkultūriškumo, tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos, kultūrinės įvairovės valdymo tyrimų prioritetus.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: kultūrinės įvairovės valdymas, tarpkultūrinė kompetencija, imigracija, daugiakultūriškumas.