

## THE POTENTIAL OF CHRISTMAS MARKETS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIVERSITY: STUDENTS' IDEAS

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### ABSTRACT

The paper presents the results of a study conducted with 18 students, future teachers. In the course of the study, the students are instructed to design an activity (activities) in a Christmas market, with the focus being the implementation of educational interactions aimed at developing positive attitudes in children towards diversity. Students are requested to submit their work in the form of a text or a presentation. The aim of the study is to establish to what extent attending Christmas markets is likely to facilitate the development of positive attitudes in children towards diversity. The main tasks are to analyse the students' texts, to ascertain the presence or absence of educational opportunities in their proposed activities, and to systematise and interpret the results. The research methods used are theoretical analysis, content analysis, and rating scale.

KEY WORDS: *diversity, intercultural competence, education, teachers.*

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### Introduction

The subject of diversity, along with the concepts of acceptance and understanding of differences, demonstrating respect and tolerance for every person, social and educational inclusion of every child, and achieving equity and social cohesion, is extremely relevant in the present time. For processes of social and educational inclusion and inclusive education to be successful, the formation and development of positive attitudes towards diversity are of great importance, to build skills for communication, cooperation and coexistence in a globalised, multicultural society.

The focus on the development of this kind of skills and attitudes in children should be placed not only within the family environment, but also in the course of the educational process at school. Hence, the preparation of teachers both for working in a multicultural environment and for the formation and development of positive attitudes towards diversity in children is of great importance. Based on this perspective, this article is intended for teachers (future and already practising), other pedagogical specialists, and university professors, who educate future teachers.

It also highlights the research problem posed in this article: the under-researched potential of Christmas markets for the development of positive attitudes towards diversity.

The scientific problem is directly connected to intercultural and inclusive education, both very important aspects of the educational process. Their relevance is outlined in a number of documents concerning education, both Bulgarian documents and documents composed by the European Union. Among the documents regulating intercultural education in Bulgaria are the 'Law on Pre-school and School Education' (2015), stating clear objectives that must be followed and mandating the necessity of the formation of intercultural competence in children, 'Ordinance 13 on Civic, Health, Ecological and Intercultural Education' (2016), providing

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directions on how to implement intercultural education, and the ‘Ordinance on Inclusive Education’ (2017), stating that all children should be included in the educational process regardless of their differences. Among the EU documents in this regard are the ‘Declaration by the European Ministers of Education on Intercultural Education in the New European Context’ (2003), the ‘Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education’ (2010), and the ‘Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Importance of Plurilingual and Intercultural Education for Democratic Culture’ (2022).

The study, during which the scientific problem and inquiries were addressed, was conducted at Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, with ten fourth-year students studying for a BA degree in pedagogy on the Intercultural Education course, and eight students from the Erasmus programme on the Intercultural Education course. The sample of 18 people can be considered as sufficient, as the research is qualitative, providing more in-depth results rather than a large number of participants (it is not a representative study).

The study was carried out in four stages. First, the students were instructed to design an activity (activities) in a Christmas market, with the focus being the implementation of educational interactions aimed at developing positive attitudes in children towards diversity. Also, a Christmas market was attended, so that students could learn about different examples and practices, interpret the event through the prism of interculturality, and gather impressions and inspirations. The popular term ‘Christmas market’ has been retained, even though not all people celebrate Christmas; the idea is an instant recognition of the event in its entirety. At the same time, students had complete freedom for suggestions not directly linked to Christmas, but to winter activities in general. Some elements in the markets relate to winter traditions, not specifically Christmas ones. Moreover, by combining different cultural elements, it is possible to fully implement intercultural education, learning about different traditions and forming an understanding and respect for them.

During the third stage, the students presented their papers/presentations in front of the rest of the course. The fourth and final stage was designated for providing feedback, and for reflection.

The main methodological pillar of the study is the concept of ‘intercultural competence’, meaning the components and manifestations of intercultural competence, and also the concept of ‘attitudes’ and its conceptualisation in the context of intercultural competence. In this sense, another key methodological point is the concept of ‘diversity’, meaning its manifestations, possible methods, techniques, means and forms for the formation and development of positive attitudes towards diversity.

The purpose of the study is to establish to what extent attending Christmas markets is likely to facilitate the development of positive attitudes towards diversity in children. The main tasks are to analyse the students’ papers (and presentations), to ascertain the presence or absence of educational opportunities in their proposed activities, and to systematise and interpret the results.

During the analysis of the results, the following criteria and their corresponding indicators were applied: (1) applicability of the ideas: the relevance to the age and needs of the children; the potential for seamless integration into the educational process; the availability of real opportunities for practical applicability of the activity; (2) contained educational opportunities: the correctly chosen methods and means for the realisation of educational interactions; the envisaged feedback and reflection; the potential for further development. The research methods used are theoretical analysis, content analysis, and rating scale.

Theoretical analysis aims to ‘review the results and conclusions from the perspective of certain theoretical viewpoints’ (Ivanov, 2006, 114), in this case, theories related to the importance of intercultural competence and positive attitudes towards diversity in the modern world (Deardorff, Chavdarova-Kostova, Hofstede, etc).

The content analysis performed is qualitative-quantitative, applied in order to ‘process and refine research data’ (Ivanov, 2006, 284). The processing and classification of the set of communicatively significant fragments and their allocation into separate categories were conducted according to the following criteria (Gospodinov, 2016, 292): ‘type of messages’: opinion/idea/response/content; ‘type of producer of messages’: researched persons (students); ‘place of dissemination’: texts prepared by students (papers/presentations); ‘frequency of occurrence’: frequency of identical answers/opinions/ideas; ‘minimum volume’: one word/one expression.

The reliability of the study was ensured by the careful consideration and choice of the research methods, strict planning and organisation, and by following key pedagogical and research principles. Ethical

principles for conducting a study were also followed: the students participated voluntarily, the results are presented in an anonymous and confidential manner (excluding names and students' other details), and a safe and inclusive environment was provided for each participant.

## 1. Literature review

Among the documents that define the term 'attitude' conceptualised in the content field of the term 'competence' is the 'Recommendation of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament on a Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning', adopted in 2006 and updated in 2018 (Council of the European Union, 2018). The definition of 'competence' in the documents is presented as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In seeking to provide full clarity and an understanding of the conceptual and terminological apparatus, the compilers of the 'Recommendation' formulate all three elements of the concept: 'Knowledge is composed of facts and figures, concepts, notions and theories that are already established and support understanding of a domain or subject; skills are defined as one's ability and opportunity to reason and use existing knowledge to achieve results; attitudes describe the predisposition and mindset for acting or reacting to ideas, persons or situations' (ibid, 7). Thus, an attitude, and more specifically a positive attitude, is associated with perceiving a phenomenon/event/culture/person, etc, in a positive sense, and modelling one's behaviour in a situation according to the preconception in question.

Positive attitudes towards diversity are formed within several of the key competences, the most clearly distinguishable being in the content area of intercultural competence. This competence is not identified in a separate group in the set of eight key competences, but its components are evident in each of them (Chavdarova-Kostova, 2010). Chavdarova-Kostova (2012) argues that the existence of intercultural competence is a key factor in effective communication, and constructive interactions with diverse socio-cultural groups and individuals. Several other authors (Deardorff, Bennett, Hofstede, Spencer-Oatey...) discuss intercultural competence in detail. It is also mentioned in publications of the European Union and the Council of Europe, primarily in respect of methods for the development of intercultural competence, developmental assessment options, and its importance in the modern world.

According to Fantini and Tirmizi (2006, 12), intercultural competence represents 'a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself'. Deardorff (2006, 247) considers it as 'the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes'. Summarising the existing definitions, Szóke (2018) states that 'intercultural competence is none other than the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with others having different cultural backgrounds.'

Based on the definitions provided, it can be concluded that intercultural competence encompasses the ability to understand and respect each person in every type of situation, and consider all variations of cultural specifics and backgrounds. Also, this competence includes the skills for overcoming cultural barriers and communicating constructively in diverse societies.

Diversity is 'an immanent part of the being of society', as it is 'not only a fact but also a necessity for the biological reproduction of the human species and its development in cultural and economic terms' (Chavdarova-Kostova, 2016, 51). Also, 'the theme of diversity, biological and socio-culturally determined differences, is becoming immanent for contemporary society, which can no longer be thought of only in the context of homogeneity; heterogeneity is becoming more the norm than the exception' (ibid, 58).

The word itself, diversity, stems from the Latin root *diversus*, which means 'various' (Georgieva, 1998). Hence, it can be stated that the contemporary term relates to all of the differences presented in the world, in nature, animal and human species, and even objects. Therefore, diversity is considered 'the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; a range of different things or people' (Cambridge University, n.d.).

Regarding the human relations aspect, 'diversity embodies inclusiveness, mutual respect, multiple perspectives; it refers to the ability to be mindful of all dimensions of human differences and defining diversity in the broadest sense to mean the inclusion of all persons regardless of racial and ethnic background, nationality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, veteran status, religious, secular, and spiritual beliefs, ability, age, and socioeconomic status' (Office of Diversity and Inclusion, 2022, 1). The term diversity 'is

used to describe a wide range of physical, cultural, psychological, and behavioural differences ... (e.g. national origin and culture, gender, race and ethnicity, age, disability, and social class)' (Chui et al., 2015, 1).

In this context, 'basic types of differences within diversity can be divided into two main groups, biologically and socio-culturally determined differences' (Chavdarova-Kostova, 2016, 52). The main biologically determined differences include sex, skin colour and other anthropological features related to the concept of race and the distinctive characteristics of different races, genetic and chromosomal abnormalities determining the child's development, acquired disabilities, and age-related characteristics. Socio-culturally determined differences include ethnic differences arising from belonging to a group with a common ancestral/ethnic root; linguistic differences related to speaking a common language with other people (from the community), most commonly referred to as the mother tongue; religious differences, arising from belonging to a group professing common beliefs and practising corresponding traditions and rituals; national distinctions related to citizenship and the official language of the state; and differences due to the socio-economic status of the family, determined by characteristics such as parents' education, parents' occupation, family income, and housing area (ibid).

All these differences (and others) are encountered every day within societies, in kindergartens and school, in the workplace, at university, at shops, at restaurants ... The interculturally competent person should acknowledge and appreciate these differences (and not ignore or neglect them), respect them, and show understanding, tolerance and solidarity towards their bearers, and be able to communicate constructively and adequately according to the situation with each person, regardless of the differences. This type of communication and the general pattern of behaviour is determined by the viewpoints and attitudes formed in a person, whether they are positive towards diversity, difference and intercultural communication, or negatively oriented.

Concerning the formation of positive attitudes towards diversity, it can be said that 'The process of changing public attitudes towards acceptance of this fact [diversity], however, takes time, and its effectiveness itself has a set of determinants. It is a complex and multidimensional process, presupposing readiness for its daily implementation at different levels and by different subjects, with a clear awareness of commitment and responsibilities, and considering the bidirectional nature of phenomena referred to by words such as social integration, social inclusion, social cohesion' (Chavdarova-Kostova, 2016, 58).

There are numerous options for the formation of positive attitudes towards diversity, implemented in the process of forming intercultural sensitivity (Benett, 2017), and intercultural competence (Benett, 2004). Among the less studied educational forms within which it is potentially possible to realise educational interactions in this direction are Christmas markets.

The history of Christmas markets begins with Vienna's December Market in the Middle Ages, first held in 1296, 'when Duke Albrecht I authorized 14-day fairs in the month of December' (Djinis, 2022). In the early years, only meat was offered at the markets, but over time, other products began to be sold as well, leading to the more familiar format today, including seasonal treats, decorations, and crafts, accompanied by singing and dancing. 'Christmas markets received a big boost in the 16th century when the teachings of German protestant reformer Martin Luther suggested that the birth of Christ was a more appropriate gift-giving day than other saints' days. The churches, who originally encouraged markets to be held nearby to get more people to attend services, soon found themselves competing against the markets for their congregation. This was when the practice of Christmas gift-buying began to take off, and festive markets have been popular ever since' (Wilson, 2018).

## 2. Results

The participants were between the ages of 18 and 23, with the following distribution by place of residence: Bulgaria (ten), Spain (three), Germany (three), and Japan (two). A total of 18 students' texts (papers and presentations) on the topic 'Developing positive attitudes towards diversity through attendance at Christmas markets' were analysed. In the course of the content analysis performed, one category was differentiated, as all the papers and presentations addressed an identical topic. The different aspects of the individual texts are highlighted by their classification within seven units of analysis. The unit of analysis 'others' includes the less frequently mentioned ideas. Table 1 illustrates the students' suggestions, and the frequency with which they were recorded.

Table 1. Units of analysis for Category 1. Activities

Units of analysis	Absolute/relative value
Dishes from various countries	15 (83.33%)
Music in various languages	10 (55.56%)
Handmade items/souvenirs	8 (44.44%)
Project preparation	7 (38.89%)
Christmas stories from various countries	6 (33.33%)
Children's songs/dances	6 (33.33%)
Others	12 (66.67%)

The total number of students' suggestions for activities when attending a Christmas market is greater than 18, as each of the individuals surveyed recorded more than one idea. The largest number of units recorded is related to the presentation of dishes from different countries. At Christmas markets in Bulgaria, traditional foods from Germany, Spain, Austria, Belgium, etc, are usually featured.

According to 15 of the students, food is a good tool for increasing interest in other cultures and building positive attitudes towards diversity. The suggestions were predominantly focused on a planned tour of the given market (specifically the dishes on display), including explanations of both the specific foods and the culture of the country they are associated with. One student believed it is appropriate for the specialties to be presented by the vendor himself, while another feels this could be done by the parents, who should also be invited. The other people surveyed assigned this role to the teacher, to plan the tour and systematise the information they wanted to present to the pupils. Four of the students thought that making posters by the children would also be useful, each child (or in a group) could choose a dish and gather information to present to the others.

Following in number are statements aimed at utilising the music played at each of the Christmas markets, as in Bulgaria songs are usually not only in Bulgarian, but also in English, Spanish, German and other languages, both popular performances and Christmas songs, specifically children's songs. Ten people described activities in this aspect. Three of the students suggested games for song/music identification, with subsequent explanations about the given culture, and another three considered setting tasks: composing one's own (short) song or verse, which could then be translated with the help of a teacher, parent or the Google translate platform;<sup>2</sup> looking up information about the singer of a favourite song and the country from which they originate (sometimes, even if the song is in English, the singer/songwriter is from another country); and learning about traditional Christmas (winter) songs performed in other selected countries. The other four students proposed having the teacher conduct a tour of the market and provide information about the different songs (based on prepared data about the most common performances/cultures).

Apart from the indispensable elements, such as food and music, most Christmas markets also featured a range of souvenirs: Christmas decorations, figurines, gifts, jewellery, and more. Some of these are sold for charitable purposes, which could also serve as an additional educational element of the visit, introducing opportunities to participate in philanthropic activities, and forming positive attitudes towards charity itself. Five of the eight people focusing on such activities in their papers mentioned charity specifically as an important component. In their opinion, a suitable option would be to involve the children in making items (some of the markets offer the opportunity for handcrafting) which could then be used for charitable purposes in the school. The other three participants suggested that the souvenirs in question could be used as a gift for parents or another child. Each of the students also recognised the possibility of linking the figures (ornaments) to interculturality, in the form of stories about the traditional decorations of different cultures, traditions related to the holiday, and the manner of their crafting.

One of the ideas of the surveyed individuals was the preparation of a project by the pupils (seven people). The suggestions concerned the preparation of posters, presentations, poems and stories, maquettes, mock-ups, cards and decorations, and Advent calendars; to systematise and present information about Christmas

<sup>2</sup> <https://translate.google.com/>

traditions and customs, rituals and tales of different cultures. Five people thought that the projects could be finalised before or after the visit, and that the tour itself should be an additional opportunity to obtain the necessary information and to share impressions. Two of the students believed that the projects could be completed during a walk around the market (the Advent calendar and card-making projects).

Six people shared an opinion about the benefits of telling Christmas stories from different cultures, and six others believed that performing/observing children's songs and dances would be valuable. The suggestions for telling/reading Christmas stories were predominantly linked to realising the activity during a visit to a market: the students felt that the specific atmosphere would create a Christmas/festive spirit. Regarding songs and dances, three people referred to the usual performances during Christmas markets, their idea being along the lines of observing and explaining the music and dances in other countries. Two other students envisaged the organisation of a performance by children to take place during the market.

Less frequently mentioned ideas were distributed in the 'other' unit: researching Christmas traditions in other nations (four people); telling stories from other cultures (four people); acting out Christmas scenes (three people); and filling in an interactive world map with stickers, Christmas/winter traditions, customs, stories (one person).

In the majority of the students' texts, the educational opportunities preceding and following the visit itself and the activities organised within the market were correctly identified. The researched people focused on preliminary discussions, the presentation of interesting facts and data, and the preparation of materials, both by the children and the teacher, displaying photographs and videos of winter festivals, celebrations, dances, festivities, and quests for information. Also, the texts addressed providing feedback to the children, the implementation of reflecting on their experiences, and organising additional activities to enhance the skills and attitudes developed.

The students' ideas regarding the development of positive attitudes towards diversity through attendance at Christmas markets are analysed based on two criteria: practical and organisational applicability, and educational opportunities.

## 2.1. The results according to Criterion 1. Applicability of the ideas

The first criterion refers to the feasibility of the activities: to what extent can the students' proposals be implemented in pedagogical practice, and whether their organisation is achievable. Three indicators correspond to this criterion: relevance to the age and needs of the children; potential for seamless integration into the educational process; and the availability of real possibilities for the practical applicability of the activity or organisation. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

As is evident from the data, for the first indicator there is not a single paper that fell in the 'to a very low degree' category, which is also true for the other two indicators. Categorized as age and needs-appropriate 'to a medium degree' were two of the students' ideas. In the two proposals (related to designing a project and learning about dishes from different cultures) the age group of the children and the ways in which the chosen activities meet their psychosocial, emotional, and age-related needs were not clearly stated. However, the ideas were presented in detail, and the context suggests the intention of working with children at the primary stage. For this reason, the texts were registered in the mentioned column.

Table 2. The results according to Criterion 1

Degree Indicator	Very high	High	Medium	Low	Very low
Indicator 1	7	9	2		
Indicator 2	7	7	4		
Indicator 3	8	7	1	2	

The other 16 students described clearly the interrelation between the planned activities and the needs of their chosen age group. However, nine of these papers were recorded as being tailored to children's ages and needs 'to a high degree' (rather than 'to a very high degree'). This included six of the activities for listening to music in different languages, as the possible scenario of the songs not being suitable for children was not outlined, and no guidelines were provided for adequate action in such cases; and four of the activities for creating objects by hand, there was no planned option for children who are unable to participate actively for various reasons.

For the second indicator, again, the highest was the number of surveyed individuals whose texts met to a high and to a very high degree the set goals and objectives. Fourteen of the students wrote propositions that could be seamlessly integrated into the teaching and learning process, i.e. incorporated in an adequate and acceptable manner into the educational interactions, without requiring the reduction or elimination of other intended activities. Four of the texts were added to the 'medium' column of this indicator. The opinions expressed in these texts are also in the direction of fruitful integration in the course of educational interactions, but the relation with previous and subsequent activities was not highlighted in sufficient detail. In this indicator, as in the first, there were no papers that were distributed in the graphs 'to a low degree' and 'to a very low degree'.

For the third indicator, relating to the organisation and practicability of the ideas, there were two texts that were assessed as meeting the requirements 'to a low degree'. These were the proposals for the organisation of a performance by children to be presented at a Christmas market. This activity is not impossible, but the planning and organisation involve a number of elements, such as coordination with the school management and parents, discussions with the municipality and municipal bodies (which in general prepare the markets), and the long-term preparation of the children's performances. In this respect, children's performances are more difficult to implement practically, and this should be considered and addressed by the students.

Three of the participants conceived the idea of children preparing sketches (scenes), with only one of the papers placed in the 'to a medium degree' category, and the rest being distributed in the 'to a high degree' category. Like performances, sketches require a higher level of planning and organisation, elements mentioned in the higher-rated texts but missing in the third.

Of course, each of the ideas requires planning and preparation on the part of the teacher, the consideration of possible costs, discussions with management and parents, and the rigorous calculation of the time and other resources required. For example, some of the projects were more complex and demand more time from the children, to gather information, prepare materials and present them; for a tour of stalls offering different dishes, the possible existence of allergies and the inability of some of the children to consume certain foods should be taken into account; reading stories and storytelling involves providing a warm and cosy space for the pupils and the teacher; a similar stall should exist in the market for the making of items, etc.

However, these components were explored in detail by the students, whose designs were classified in the graphs as 'to a high degree' and 'to a very high degree', and options for their optimal solutions were indicated.

Simultaneously, some of these 15 respondents even drafted indicative budgets for potential costs, shared ways to combine the chosen activity with other educational activities, and clarified what materials would be needed, and how the teacher and pupils could obtain them.

## 2.2. The results according to Criterion 2. Educational opportunities

The second criterion relates to the educational opportunities in the students' proposed options for educational activities. The three indicators are correctly chosen methods and resources for the implementation of educational interactions (adequate, having the potential to support effective educational interactions); planned feedback and reflection; and the possibility of further development (long-term educational objectives, ideas for improvement and development). The results for this criterion are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. The results according to Criterion 2

Degree Indicator	Very high	High	Medium	Low	Very low
Indicator 1	14	4			
Indicator 2	7	5	4	2	
Indicator 3	12	4	2		

The data for the first indicator shows that each of the texts is distributed in the two graphs, 'to a high degree' and 'to a very high degree'. Here, students easily identified the most appropriate educational methods and the optimal way in which they should be applied in order to implement meaningful educational interactions. Among the most frequently recorded methods were encouragement, personal example, conversation, discussion and debate. They are also presented in conjunction with certain didactic methods, such as narration (the various stories from different cultures), explanation (about dishes, music, languages, traditions ...), demonstration (creating an object, preparing a project ...), etc, supporting the influence and effect of educational methods. Specific educational means were also differentiated, favouring the formation of positive attitudes in children towards other cultures: songs, stories, presentations, objects (souvenirs, toys, decorations), creative materials, etc.

The results presented indicated that all the students were able to select adequate methods to form positive attitudes towards diversity in children in the process of visiting Christmas markets.

For the second indicator, there was a greater difference in the grouping of the papers: there were also some that were defined as meeting the requirements to a 'medium degree' and to a 'low degree'. There were two ideas (one concerning the preparation of a project on Christmas traditions around the world, and one relating to children's creative performances) that did not address the possibility of providing feedback to the children and of engaging in reflection, key elements in the educational process. In another four of the students' proposals, feedback and self-reflection were touched upon, but not in sufficient detail or in strong enough correlation with the other components of the educational activities they described, especially when compared to the 12 texts distributed in the first two graphs. The students' ideas evaluated 'to a high degree' and 'to a very high degree' integrated the provision of feedback and the implementation of reflection in the designed activities in a appropriate and fruitful way: in the form of discussion, in the framework of brainstorming, in the course of creative activity, by asking direct and/or indirect questions from the teacher.

Sixteen of the students reflected in detail on the possible opportunities for the further development of the activities, with two others considering these aspects, but not stating specific ways in which this could happen productively and effectively. None of the papers fell into the last two graphs of the table. This fact highlights the conclusion that most of the students were able to suggest adequate options for the ongoing development of positive attitudes in children towards diversity.

### Conclusions and recommendations

While the study is successful regarding its aim and objectives, it has certain limitations. First, the size of the sample: the research is qualitative, as mentioned above, but a larger sample would have the potential of providing more data, and therefore formulating more in-depth conclusions. Nevertheless, this study is also intended as a base on which further research could be conducted. Second, the sample included students from only one university in one city; it would be more beneficial for future studies to include not only more participants, but also for them to be from different universities. Third, there is not enough scientific literature which examines specifically Christmas markets with regard to the formation of positive attitudes towards



diversity in children. In this sense, the current paper may serve as a starting point for further examinations of different cultural events as educational forms.

The analysis of the results allows the formulation of key conclusions regarding students' skills in planning and organising educational activities with a focus on forming positive attitudes in children towards diversity.

The data and their interpretation suggest unequivocally that the vast majority of the individuals surveyed were able to suggest options for educational activities that are feasible in educational practice. Students conceptualise the importance of the specifics of the educational interactions according to the different age groups, needs, interests and abilities of pupils. Simultaneously, a large number of surveyed individuals share ideas with a high potential for seamless integration into the educational process, in terms of the consideration of the required time and resources, prior preparation, and follow-up activities, to include a Christmas market visit in the planned interactions.

In this context, students also focused on appropriate ways to adequately and productively organise the visit so that it would be beneficial to the children.

Likewise, the results highlight the skills of most of the students to select educational methods that are suitable for a specific situation and class, aimed at the educational goal set, and designed with consideration of their optimal effectiveness. In most of the papers and presentations, feedback, reflection and reflection are also foreseen, which illustrates the understanding of the students of their important role in educational interactions.

Long-term educational goals are also recognised as key elements: the idea that a visit alone is not enough to form positive attitudes towards diversity, that well-thought-out interactions in this direction are needed before and after the event itself, to lay the foundations, and subsequently to reinforce established attitudes. The specified conclusions align with the aim of the study, therefore proving that Christmas markets do have a potential for the formation of positive attitudes towards diversity in children.

Also important is the fact that the results of this study correlate with the results of other studies about diversity. A tendency observed is that most research focuses on actual activities in a multicultural environment, and review diversity within the scope of intercultural competence (Jokikokko, 2005; Nakui et al., 2011; Benett, 2013; Schwarzenenthal et al., 2019). Likewise, some researchers conduct their studies with university students, and give them specific tasks which are then analysed (Summers, Volet, 2008; Dickson et al., 2011; Denson, Bowman, 2013). There are also papers that confirm that attendance at different cultural events has the potential to develop positive attitudes towards diversity (Ostrower, 2007; Wang et al., 2019).

The research conducted also leads to three key conclusions related to assigning such tasks to students:

- Such types of tasks prove to be useful for students, future teachers, as they imply a careful consideration of a number of elements, taking into account a set of factors and conditions, in order to prepare an effective educational activity;
- In addition, similar tasks can lead to creativity in students, and develop their creative abilities, skills that are valuable and necessary for the implementation of a quality educational process;
- Participation in such tasks could enrich the professional development of future teachers, specifically with regard to methods and approaches for the formation of intercultural competence (and positive attitudes towards diversity) in children;
- In such a way, future teachers could also develop their abilities to encourage children's creativity, as this is one of the prerequisites for the formation of empathy, an important value in the context of positive attitudes towards diversity. According to a 2019 study, creative urges promote empathic behaviour in humans, as a positive correlation was found between imagination (a key element in creative processes) and altruism, when a person sees another in need, they imagine how they can help before performing an action (Gaesser et al., 2019).

Several interrelated recommendations are also important when setting similar tasks:

- It is important for students to visit (alone or together with the teacher) a Christmas market or a similar event before they start working on the assignment. Even if they have previously attended such a market, it is crucial to consider it through the prism of the task, and to note important elements in this sense, and components related to planning and organisation, generating ideas;

- A good option is to provide freedom to future teachers to choose specific activities (relating to meals, music and stories ...), and not to set a certain framework. In this way, they can exercise their imagination and search for inspiration;
- It is useful to present papers (presentations) in front of the whole course and conduct a discussion on them, with the aim of familiarising all the students with the various ideas and ways of carrying out the activities.

There are several possible variations of this type of assignment, three of which are:

- The assignment of work in groups, not for everyone to work individually, but for several students to consider a common idea, to develop the skills of teamwork, cooperation, listening, presentation of one's own opinion, and more (Caruso, Woolley, 2008).
- It is possible to implement peer assessment as a final step in the assignment. In this way, skills for adequate assessment, objectivity and providing constructive feedback can be developed (Harrison, 2010).
- An option is for the assignment not to be connected specifically to a Christmas market, but to another event involving multicultural elements (food, music, traditions, souvenirs...).

The formation of positive attitudes towards diversity is essential in the modern world. The development of values such as tolerance, empathy and solidarity in children, the formation of skills for showing understanding and respect for other cultures, and the development of abilities to communicate and to work in a multicultural environment, are among the tasks of pedagogical specialists, who should first develop these components themselves, in order to be able to conduct quality and full-value educational interactions in these aspects.

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# KALĖDINIŲ RENGINIŲ GALIMYBĖS UGDYTI TEIGIAMĄ POŽIŪRĮ Į ĮVAIROVĘ – STUDENTŲ IDĖJOS

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## Santrauka

Straipsnyje pateikiami tyrimo, atlikto su 18 studentų, būsimų mokytojų, rezultatai. Tyrimo metodologinis pagrindas – *tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos* sąvoka, tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos komponentai požiūrių į įvairovę tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos kontekste.

Tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti, kiek apsilankymai kalėdinėse mugėse gali ugdyti teigiamą vaikų požiūrį į patį įvairovės pripažinimo ir toleravimo reiškinį. Analizuojant tyrimo rezultatus taikyti šie kriterijai ir juos atitinkantys rodikliai: 1) idėjų įgyvendinimas: vaikų amžiaus ir poreikių atitikimas, galimybė sklandžiai idėjas integruoti į ugdymo procesą, realių galimybių praktiškai pritaikyti veiklą prieinamumas; 2) ugdymo galimybės: teisingai parinkti edukacinės sąveikos metodai ir priemonės, numatytas grįžtamasis ryšys ir refleksija, tolesnio vystymosi galimybės. Tyrimo metodai: teorinė ir turinio analizės, vertinimo skalė.

Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidžia daugelio studentų gebėjimą pasirinkti konkrečiai situacijai ir klasei tinkamus ugdymo metodus, kurie kreiptų į užsibrėžtą ugdymo tikslą, siekiant optimalaus veiksmingumo. Daugelyje pristatymų (lankymosi mugėse planų) numatytas grįžtamasis ryšys, refleksija ir savirefleksija, iliustruojanti, kaip mokiniai suvokia sąveikos ugdymo procese svarbą. Kaip pagrindiniai elementai pripažįstami ir ilgalaikiai edukaciniai tikslai: vien vizito, siekiant formuoti teigiamą požiūrį į pačią įvairovę, neužtenka, būtina apmąstyta sąveika šia kryptimi prieš ir po renginio, jos pagrindų aptarimas, vėliau – suformuotų nuostatų įtvirtinimas. Pateiktos išvados atitinka tyrimo tikslą ir pagrindžia kalėdinių mugių galimybę formuoti teigiamą vaikų požiūrį į įvairovę.

Šiuolaikinio pasaulio aktualija – teigiamo požiūrio į įvairovę formavimas. Vaikų vertybių, tokių kaip tolerancija, empatija, solidarumas, puoselėjimas, supratimo ir pagarbos kitoms kultūroms, gebėjimo bendrauti ir dirbti daugiakultūroje aplinkoje ugdymas yra vienas iš pedagogikos specialistų uždavinių. Kad galėtų vykdyti kokybišką ir visavertę švietimo sąveiką šiais aspektais pirmiausia jie turėtų patys šiuos komponentus apmąstyti.

**PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** *įvairovė, tarpkultūrinė kompetencija, išsilavinimas, mokytojai.*

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