Border Crossings, Moving Borders: Young peoples' constructions of identities in Lithuania in the early 21st Century

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Introduction

Citizenship and civic identity have been traditionally associated with a defined, limited and exclusive area or territory (Mackenzie 1978). Over the past sixty years, this conception has become gradually and partially eroded, through processes such as globalisation, large scale migration, and the development of dual citizenship. The development of the European Union has contributed another layer of complexity. Citizens of the countries that comprise the Union are now formally also citizens of the European Union, and this citizenship confers on them rights and privileges that are superior to the rights given by their country nationality. As the European Union has expanded, this citizenship - and these rights - have been extended to include an increasing number of Europeans. The border of the European Union has moved between its inception in 1956 and its most recent expansion in 2004, and further border movements are planned in coming years.

The **aim** of this paper is to present small-scale qualitative investigation into how young people – aged between 11 and 18 - are constructing their identities and becoming aware of their actual or potential European identity. The study focuses on two groups of countries, all of whom can be thought of as having recently, or being about to, 'cross the border' into the European Union: the candidate states of Turkey, Croatia and Macedonia, and some of the countries that joined the Union in 2004: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. Here the main focus is on findings from Lithuania. The **research question** that was addressed in the study: As the borders of the European Union continue to demonstrate their flexibility, even an ambiguity, are there (in the minds of these young people) limits to Europe: where does the frontier lie?

Methods applied for the study included semi-structured focus groups discussions and interviews, and interpretation. Limitations of a study come from the subjectivity that is characteristics for any qualitative research. Also, the fact that the discussions were carried out in Lithuanian language, and then translated into English language for analysis and comparisons, add to the limitations.

Young people's identities and the European dimension

Identities are increasingly recognised as being both multiple and constructed contingently and, for some, in a context that includes Europe. Such identities may include a range of intersecting dimensions, including gender, age and region. It appears that a growing number of young people in parts of the European Union are acknowledging an at least partial sense of European identity alongside their national identity: the degree to which this is acknowledged varies by nationality, gender and social class, as well as by age (Lutz *et al* 2006). European and national identities are not alternatives, but potentially complementary feelings that can be held in parallel (Licata 2000). However, it remains to be discussed and explored what does this multiplicity mean for the young people involved.

Two particular frameworks of ideas are used for framing this analysis of what a sense of European identity might mean. Michael Bruter (2005), analysing the emergence of mass European identity, describes the identities of citizens as having two component elements, each individual having a different balance of the 'civic' (identification with 'the set of institutions, rights and rules that preside over the political life of the community') and the 'cultural' (identification with a certain culture, social similarities, values' (p 12)). Lynn Jamieson, writing with Sue Grundy describes the different processes by which some young people 'come to present themselves as passionate utopian Europeans, while for

many being European remains emotionally insignificant and devoid of imagined community or steps towards global citizenship' (Grundy and Jamieson 2007: 663).

The discussion of the matter goes around the following questions: Do young people identify variously with the cultural and civic aspects of Europe, and how does this relate to the presence of the same two components in their identification with their country? To what extent are young people passionate or indifferent about each? Do young people acknowledge their multiplicity of identities, and how much to they insist that their identity is singular, essentialist and immovable?

Does their sense of their own identity require the construction of 'the Other', a contrasting outside or alien identity to be held in juxtaposition to their own identity? This question is of particular significance to the subjects of this study: as the borders of the European Union continue to demonstrate their flexibility, even an ambiguity, are there (in the minds of these young people) limits to Europe: where does the frontier lie? This is a research question that was addressed in the study.

Methodology of the study.

Short characteristics of the context of respondents of the study

Lithuania became a member of the European Union in May 2004. However, there was an additional prior change to the status of the country in mid 1991, when it became independent of the USSR (Judt 2005: 646, 655). These events mean that in 2010 people under 19 in the country (as well as in Estonia and Latvia) have some particular characteristics.

Other than those over 70, this is the first generation to be born in the three independent states, and to have been wholly socialised into these self-governing communities. They will have no personal memories of the Soviet period, or of the events leading to the establishment of the independent countries. Any narratives they construct of the events before 1991 will have been mediated by parents, teachers and various histories. They will also have become aware, over the past six years, of their country's membership of the European Union. Although they will all have this in common, these young people are by no means an homogeneous group. During the Soviet period there was considerable migration into the three territories from other Soviet Socialist Republics. In Lithuania, there were also some longstanding communities of Polish or Belarus origin, and the creation of the Polish-Lithuanian border in 1945 paid scant respect to the ethnic origin of any residents. There was also migration out of the territories – many of the immigrants were transient, and a number of the indigenous population moved to other parts of the USSR, not always of their own free will. A number of the migrants into the territory married local people, and settled permanently. Since independence, some people of migrant origin living in the three countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) have taken up citizenship of one of the three countries, and others have not. Many of those of migrant origin have adopted the language of the country in which they now live.

The young people with whom this paper is concerned – eleven to eighteen year olds – therefore include those who have both parents of Lithuanian origin, speaking the Lithuanian language; and there were several respondents, whose parent is of some other nationality and the other Lithuanian.

These are big and complex questions, and putting them directly to young people will not lead to coherent or meaningful answers. They may not have considered them, and feel obliged by the interview context to provide 'an answer'; they may feel constrained by how they reply to a direct question; they will almost inevitably use the language and constructions of the questioner in making any response. The focuses of this study is on how these young peoples' ideas are *socially* constructed. Social constructions are created through social interaction, in a social context, so methodology (applied by A. Ross) has been to conduct focus groups with small groups of five to six pupils, all about the same age. In a focus group, the researcher introduces a few open-ended questions, and encourages the pupils to discuss these between them so that they are interacting with each other, rather than with the researcher.

Pupils are using ideas, language, and vocabulary of their own choosing, rather than responding to the interviewer. The researcher is non-directive – elucidating, guiding, but not focusing or constraining. Thus in an interview it was asked how they think Europe affects their lives, but if they collectively chose to discuss other aspects of their lives, attempts to 'get an answer' were limited.

The discussion points were broad, and the result of extensive discussions and trials.

- How would you describe your identity? (if necessary, prompting with 'What do you all have in common?', or, when [Lithuanian] was suggested, 'What does being [Lithuanian] mean to you?')
- Do you ever describe yourselves in other ways, or feel you have difficulties always using this identity?
- Do you think your parents feel the same way about this as you?
- Do you think everyone in Lithuania feels the same way?
- How does being in Europe affect the way you think about your identity, and about your future?
- What is particular or different about Europeans?
- Can you imagine [Russia/Belarus/] becoming part of the European Union?

The focus groups took place in March 2010, locations as in the Table 1.

Table 1

Schools, where focus groups were carried out

Country	*number of schools*	*number of classes*	*number of pupils*
Lithuania	6	8	40

In each location, two or three schools with different social mixes were selected, and in each school focus groups were usually conducted with two groups of pupils – about five or six 12-13 year olds, and a similar group of 15 to 16 year olds. Permission was sought from all the young people to participate in the focus groups, and, for those under 16, also from their parents or guardians. It should be emphasised that it was not attempted to achieve a representative sample, but to identify the diversity of views expressed. The study is not concerned with legal nationality or status, but young people whose home is now in the country (so if there are significant minorities or migrants, these have been included).

Names used with quotations are changed, though general attempt to use names that this generation of Lithuanians have, was implemented.

The project would not have been possible without help and assistance from a large number of people. [1] Schools and parents have been recruited, arrangements made for visits and, critically, help given in translating many of the transcripts into English. The analysis that follows covers firstly the major themes and then moves towards some tentative conclusions.

Major themes: Europe and nation as a focus for identity

European culture and civic institutions

The culture of Europe was less apparent in the young people's talk than was their reference to the civic practices of Europe. In particular, there were many references to the possibility of travel to other European states, and of studying and working there. Many of them, particularly the older students, said that they had considered higher education outside their own country, very often in other European Union states. They seemed well aware of the possibilities and options, as they were of the issues concerning work in other, generally western, European countries.

Lithuanians were generally more positive about identifying with European culture. For example:

> The European Union has changed people's opinions about Lithuania. Now people don't think that we are *beviltiškas* [hopeless], and we can achieve something, we can give something to others. Now we feel that we are necessary, we are needed… (Kristina K, ♁ 16¾)

Some cited European-wide rights and freedoms;

[1] Thanks to Giedre Bagdonaite, Alina Petrauskiene,and Vaiva Zuzeviciute, the Cice4 (Children's Identity and Citizenship Education, coordinated by London Metropolitan University, London, G. Britain) National coordinator at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania, Giedre Kvieskiene, Jurgita Norvaisaite Irena Zaleskiene, the Cice4 Institutional coordinator at Vilnius Pedagogical university, Lithuania, to the European Commission's Jean Monnet programme for supporting the project and the fieldwork.

> We are free from Russia, and Russian has censorship – they are not as free as we are – and it's a difference. (Migle J, Lithuanian ♀ 15½)

National culture and civic institutions

Generally, most young people were more talkative about their own country, rather than Europe. There were many references to the national language, which for many was one of the defining facets of their unique cultural identity: it was spoken by very few other people in the world. As Vaiva S (Lithuanian ♀ 17) put it: 'Our language is one of the oldest languages in Europe, and it's hard to learn it – so in languages we are different from other countries.'

It was generally the **Lithuanian** students who were more positive (though not uncritically) about their national culture than young people in Estonia and Latvia. For example, Brigita K (♀ 15¾), discusses how her pride in her country compares to that of her parents, and the dilemmas of emigration:

> I like this country, I'm proud of it, everything is close and homely. … My dad, he's a real patriot, he has no plans to leave our country, but my mum, she's like me, and she has a wider perspective – sometimes she discusses, as I do, the possibility of leaving ... the people who are leaving are running away from the problems … of course they love our country, but they leave … all the problems for someone else to sort out. They're not trying to do anything to solve it themselves.

There were widespread fears about the decline in population, from a falling birthrate and emigration. (This was also true in the other Baltic countries.) Vaiva S (♀ 17) sees aspects of national pride even in this:

> We were the first in Europe to have our own constitution – it was in the second world war . … When we were trying to get our freedom and independence, and there was more fighting for our freedom, we talked about it more - now we are talking less and less about our citizenship. We don't feel patriotic, because we emigrate to other countries, and live and work there – but we send the money for our families. There are some communities in other countries, and they don't forget Lithuania – they always remember it and try to show to foreigners who Lithuanians are.

But many young people also expressed a sense of change in the meaning of being Lithuanian. They were less patriotic than their parents, and saw that globalisation and EU membership were changing aspects of the culture.

> Other cultures are coming to Lithuania and … our cultures and traditions are getting a little less important to people. (Edgaras F, ♂ 15½)

Some thought Lithuanians had a negative image in Europe, and that many people did not know where the country was.

> If other countries hear anything about Lithuania, they hear bad things, not good ones. (Migle A, ♀ 15 ¾)

> Other countries really don't know where Lithuania is. (Grinvydas A, ♂ 15¼)

Pride in Lithuanian national identity was not confined only to those of pure Lithuanian descent. Tadas (♂ 16) explains:

> Well, I wouldn't identify myself as a 100% Lithuanian, because I'm not. Only one-fifth of my blood is Lithuanian. The other parts are from Poland, Russia, Ukraine and even Georgia. So I couldn't say that I'm absolutely Lithuanian. But, because I'm living here, and I'm feeling a little patriotic, I think I could identify myself as a Lithuanian. Yes.

Andrius A (♂ 12½) began by talking about his feelings of being Lithuanian, only later in the conversation revealing that he was of partly German descent.

> I like to be Lithuanian. … It's a unique country, it has its own achievements, her own language. It's a great country – but now the times are not very good. … My grandmother is from Germany, she's my father's mother, but we feel really Lithuanian. We talk in Lithuanian. My dad feels real Lithuanian – he doesn't even speak German. My parents have lots of plans to go on living in Lithuania.
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> Half of my blood is from Russia – well my dad is from Russia, and his father is from Russia, obviously, but my mother is Lithuanian and I was born here in Elektrenai, so that I can say that I'm Lithuanian, for sure. (Edgaras F, Lithuanian ♂ 15½)

Multiple Identities and acceptance of diversity: the frontier

While most students in all three countries saw themselves as having multiple identities, there were differences in the way that this was expressed. Very broadly, while many of the young people of Latvian/ Lithuanian/ Estonian decent were prepared to identify with their own country and with, to an extent, being European, these groups seemed less happy with the young people of Russian origin professing to be both Russian and European. Many of the Russian descent group also indicated some level of identification with the local state. Language was seen as important. Brigita K(Lithuanian ♂ 15¾) complained '…in our capital, where most of the people should be Lithuanians, there are a lot of Russians – even some of the names on the shops are in Russian.'

Assessing perceptions of tolerance towards such differences was not easy. It might be tentatively suggested that the Estonian students were less tolerant than the Latvian and Lithuanians. More interesting was the difference in perceptions of those with Russian ancestry in national language schools in the three countries – the Lithuanians were far more accepting of diversity than the Estonians, with the Latvians somewhere in between.

To provoke discussion on where they thought the eventual 'frontier' of Europe might lie, groups were asked whether they thought Russia or Belarus might ever become members of the European Union. The reaction of almost all those surveyed was strongly against Russian membership. When asked why, various explanations were offered, including the geographical reason that most of Russia was outside Europe, but most demonstrated a concern of possible Russian dominance, even aggression. It was socially different, unlikely to cooperate and support smaller countries, was undemocratic and autocratic, and likely to allow potential terrorists into Europe (Interviewing was carried out in immediately after reports of bombings on the Moscow subway, March 2009). It would also allow further Russian migration into the Baltic countries. Such cautionary resistance was also shown by the Russian-descent young people in Riga and Tallinn: they did not see Russian membership either potentially likely or desirable. Even the Russian-origin young people in the Latvian provincial town were against the idea, on the grounds that Russia did not need to be propped up by the European Union, and indeed, it would be better for Latvia to be in some form of association with Russia than with the European Union.

There was a clear impression that, for the time being at least, these young people saw themselves as being on the frontier of Europe. Their country was now on the desirable side of the border, and the border had the function of keeping those beyond at arms length.

Discussions and Conclusions

The study was oriented on letting these young people describe their identities in their own words. What we see is a series of attempts to come to ways of describing themselves in the situation in which they find themselves – of various ancestries and language groups, in countries (Latvia, Estonia, including Lithuania) that have had chequered histories, in which their ancestors may have had very different roles. But these young people were able to construct explanations of who they were that were contingent on their current circumstances. They could, where necessary, begin to cut loose from their parents' (and their teachers') preoccupations. They were, to an extent, aware of the past, but their concerns were for the future. These findings provide a platform for teachers. Because, it seems, the legacy is more powerful even for young people (12 -18 years old), the history is more powerful for shaping picture of the future than we, teachers, superficially, think.

The young people seemed more proud and appreciative of their country's culture, its language, and sometimes its sport than they did of its politicians and civic structures, although a number were clearly aware of and proud of their independence, freedoms and rights.

In Lithuania, the majority group of Lithuanian descent appeared to be most relaxed towards the minority. Although there were references to parents being involved in the struggle over the television station in 1991, there was much evidence of an easy relationship between young people from the two groups, that was reciprocal and appeared to result in a relaxed atmosphere in which both groups could discuss cultures, histories, feelings and identities in an open manner that tolerated diversity and flexibility. The expression of multiple identities was easy, common and appeared to be found as useful (Hall, 1992; Sen, 2006).

The greater the tension between groups in a plural society, the more likely it seems that the majority and the minority will adopt singular and rigid identities, accentuating difference and 'othering' (Schopflin, 2001). In contrast, where tensions are lower, both minority and majority are able to adopt multiple identities that enable individuals to flexibly situate themselves with several descriptors, each of which can come contingently to the fore as circumstances require (Ross, 2008). This allows for distinctions to become less evident and for the stress on commonalities rather than differences. The adoption and acceptance of multiple identities allows for the recognition and acceptance of diversity, which in turn supports identities to be contingent and multiple is a society (Power, 2000).

The impact of Europe, and particularly the European Union, was significant for most of these young people. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the principal way in which they say it impacting on their futures was instrumental. Current labour and demographic trends in all three countries, including Lithuania, mean that many young people are considering seeking either further and higher education in western Europe, possibly followed by a period of employment. Although some think that they will reject this possibility – citing their love of their national culture, for example – the point is that they are aware of the possibility. The European Union was not only seen in terms of individual mobility. There were references to the economic security and support the Union brought; to the security and defence brought by NATO membership (eg . Mölder, 2006; Molis, 2008).

For these young people, the European Union was important. Many expressed feelings of affinity with Europe, of being European – perhaps not as much as being Lithuanian, perhaps, but nevertheless, of having a European identity. The significant borders had shifted – they had been created by the actions of their parents' generation in 1991, and had been consolidated by accession to the Union in 2004. The first event, just before they were born, established a new and important eastern boundary: the second event dissolved the boundaries with western Europe. There were still threats to their nation-states: internal divisions in the population diversity, economic viability, the significant loss of population through emigration, and concern about a powerful eastern neighbour.

The opportunity to embrace multiple identities that was afforded by the new context was welcomed by the great majority, of whatever origin, offering a way of constructing difference and change in the context of globalisation.

For teachers the implications are twofold. On the one hand, the western orientation is clear, and on the other hand, multicultural education should be at focus, because, there are still many fears and myths about other neighbouring countries. Perhaps even in initial teacher training these issues should be at focus, but surely in professional development.

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