

## Specifics of Youth Tolerance: Policy Agenda and Reality in Baltic States

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**Abstract:** Education plays a crucial role in the success of European political integration. That includes educational strategies that recognize diversity, protect shared ideals, accept the differences as well as promote a mutual understanding and tolerance. According to international and national policy documents an 'ideal' member of society has developed good cooperation and communication skills as well as tolerance towards different social groups. In reality, young people maintain values of consumerism and individualism, not valuing tolerance and humanity so highly. The subject of the paper is the characteristics of youth tolerance in Baltic States. The purpose of the paper is to study specifics of youth tolerance in Baltic States, whether it corresponds to the principles set by the planning documents in the area of youth and educational policy. Comparatively-descriptive research design was chosen to measure youth tolerance; it allows obtaining rather vast and detailed information, simultaneously providing opportunity to compare expressions of youth tolerance in all Baltic States. The research includes data from international project "Solidarity Schools in the Baltic States" (2014); during the project school age youth (ages 13-19) in elementary and secondary schools in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were surveyed using quantitative research approach to discover their role in society as active action entities, their level of tolerance and attitude towards the goals of global education and sustainable development. Results help to identify the areas where education could play its role in shaping attitudes of young people towards the necessary evolution of tolerant and democratic society.

**Keywords:** youth, social tolerance, acceptance, social distance.

### Introduction

Different challenges in society force us to look for solutions on local, national and global levels in order to ensure equal division of resources, respect for human rights, tolerance and solidarity among individuals, countries and supranational organizations despite dynamic changes in present-day society and world (Kronberga, 2014). One of the instruments for achieving of these goals is global education approach in the context of formal, informal and life-long education. Global education is active learning process that is based on the values of solidarity, equality, social inclusion and cooperation. It allows people to move from recognition of international development priorities and sustainable human development with understanding of causes and effects of global issues to personal involvement (Globālā skolotāja..., 2013).

Global education approach was developed to apprehend diversity of social groups and encourage development of inclusive society, taking into account the aspect of globalization. Global education approach not only helps forming an appreciation of global issues, but also creating comprehension of their influence on local level and personal involvement accentuating goal-oriented education which is dominated by such values as tolerance, solidarity, equality, justice and inclusion. All these basic values of global education are significant in creation of environment supportive of social diversity (ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, age, gender, abilities, socio-economic standing etc.), understanding its forming reasons and encouraging tolerance towards diversity (Kronberga, 2014).

As we see above, tolerance is one of essential elements of global education. Social science researchers view tolerance as both political and social phenomenon. In the political sense tolerance is the ability to tolerate not just the political views of others, but also their right to express those opinions publicly is at the root of political tolerance in a democracy. In addition, tolerance demands making allowances not only for the political opinions of others but also for other aspects of their lifestyles, especially where these lifestyles differ from one's own (Pattie, Johnston, 2006). Tolerance or broadmindedness in social life is defined as non-intervention into views, actions or practises that are considered to be wrong, but tolerable, thus not subject to banning or limitation. Tolerance is conceding to the views or practices

that are contrary to one's own (Muižniece, 2007). So tolerance is ability to accept different culture and permit its existence. Theoretically, we distinguish 3 attitudes towards foreign culture that can be used to measure a level of tolerance: 1) intolerance or chauvinism, 2) tolerance, and 3) acceptance (recognized as equal or normal) (Triandafyllidou, 2013).

It is popular to interpret tolerance as individual quality. Practice of individual tolerance can be defined as ability to accept and respect views, religious affiliation and behaviour of other people (Osis, Ose, 2006). Tolerance as social practice means commendation/non-condemnation of those whose convictions, behaviours or actions vary from individual's perception of the desirable. Social tolerance is incompatible with any type of discriminating talk or deed, as well as open expression of intolerance. Tolerance means respecting different cultures, forms of human self-expression, as well as their acceptance and correct comprehension. Tolerance is not only moral duty, but also political and legal necessity. Tolerance is active attitude that is based on understanding of human rights and basic values (Austers, Golubeva, 2008).

Many international and national planning documents in the area of educational and youth policy accentuate tolerance as essential human value. The EU Council conclusions of May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 2020 include an acknowledgment that education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socioeconomic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens today and in the years ahead. In the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue (Notices from..., 2009).

National documents in Baltic States also define a goal of facilitating equal opportunities, social inclusion and solidarity for all youth using the means of educational and youth policy. Latvian Strategy for sustainable development until 2030 distinguishes 4 areas that make up the bases for the future society of Latvia: creativity, tolerance, cooperation and participation. Tolerance implies reduction of all types of social exclusion and discrimination, including income inequality, age and gender discrimination in labour market, ethnic bigotry, and institutional linguistic barriers (Latvijas ilgtspējīgas..., 2010). Terms of standards of primary education mentions tolerance as one of the qualities necessary for a pupil that is being developed throughout several subjects, emphasizing necessity to be tolerant towards different gender, age, religious, race, ethnic origin and other social groups in Latvia (Noteikumi par..., 2013).

In Lithuanian planning documents tolerance is mentioned in more general terms as one of the values of the National Strategy on Education for 2013-2022. Education in Lithuania is based on the key values of the nation, Europe and global culture: the unrivalled value and dignity of an individual, love of our fellow, the natural equality of people, the human rights and freedoms, tolerance, and declaration of democratic relations in the society. Education is developing determination and ability of an individual to follow these values in all walks of life and activity (Valstybinė švietimo..., 2013).

Analysis of Estonian planning documents shows that tolerance as socialization of democracy among youth is being paid special attention. General human values (honesty, compassion, respect for life, justice, human dignity, respect for self and others) are enshrined as core values, as are social values (liberty, democracy, respect for mother tongue and culture, patriotism, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, rule of law, solidarity, responsibility and gender equality) (National Curriculum..., 2011). Tolerance as a principle is reflected in guidelines for work with youth (Youth Policy..., 2010; Bart, Muursepp, 2014) and in planning documents for education on all levels as well. It means that principles of tolerance are implemented starting with preschool and ending with long-life education. Besides, studies and policy monitoring is carried out on a regular basis to assess the existing situation.

Despite to existence of formal documents and the goals defined in them, implementation of tolerance in real life meet different obstructions. Educational content that promotes tolerance might not reach its goal if there is no open and inclusive environment in school and society that teaches pupils to accept

diversity (Austers, Golubeva, 2008). Also, makers of education policy often avoid accentuating the issue of tolerance in political documents, turning their attention more to the aspects of patriotic education. Lack of teachers or insufficient qualification, inability to work individually and different students, considering their learning pace, as well as overall orientation of education system towards exam results, not learning and individual growth as main goal – all these things create encumbrances for carrying out socially inclusive functions of education (Austers, Golubeva, 2008).

Considering common historical and sociocultural experience and geographic location of Baltic States it can be assumed that present-day transformation processes affect youth in a similar manner. At the same time youth tolerance can be viewed as one of indicators that allow discovering similarities and differences of processes taking place in Baltic States. So the goal of the paper is to study specifics of youth tolerance in Baltic States, whether it corresponds to the principles set by the planning documents in the area of youth and educational policy.

## **Methodology**

Comparatively-descriptive research design was chosen to measure youth tolerance; it allows obtaining rather vast and detailed information, simultaneously providing opportunity to compare expressions of youth tolerance in all Baltic States. The research includes data from international project “Solidarity Schools in the Baltic States” (2014); during the project school age youth (ages 13-19) in elementary and secondary schools in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were surveyed using quantitative research approach to discover their role in society as active action entities, their level of tolerance and attitude towards the goals of global education and sustainable development.

In the context of this survey tolerance is conceptualized in two directions. One of them implies measuring youth social distances against different social groups. Social distance is feelings or relations of „aloofness and unapproachability”, especially between members of different social strata. The term was introduced by Park and Burgess and popularized by Bogardus, who also formulated a social-distance (or Bogardus) scale, designed to permit the extent of tolerance or intolerance between social groups (Jary, Jary, 1995). Bogardus scale is used in determining social distance, but it is adapted for the specifics of school youth and restructured with 4 categories where the first indicates the shortest social distance and the fourth – the longest social distance (Picture 1).

Survey questionnaire includes several categories of social groups to measure youth social distance: groups at risk of poverty (unemployed, single parents, people with disabilities, youth from poor families), deviant (alcohol and drug addicts, prostitutes, former prisoners, homeless, homosexuals), groups of ethnic/racial diversity (children of Chinese immigrants, young people with different mother tongue, members of other race), as well as relatively successful or socially prestigious (children of bankers, popular singer/actor, new businessman, self-employed) and neutral (youth from the country, people of retirement age, committed Christians).

The second direction of conceptualization reveals one of the action aspects of tolerance or the perception of youth to help the people that experience social problems and that within the context of study of tolerant attitude are critical cases since most society holds prejudices against them: people with physical/mental disabilities, drug addicts, migrants, prostitutes, poor people, refugees, people with homosexual orientation, homeless, Roma people, alcoholics, beggars and elderly. Within the result interpretation, youth tolerance is understood as measurement “should look for ways to help these people”, indifference or aloofness expresses itself in answer “they must solve their problems themselves”, and intolerance – „they must be isolated from society” (Table 1).

The basis of research is made of 1413 young people from Baltic States that attend elementary/secondary school where 555 are from Latvia, 449 – from Estonia and 413 – from Lithuania. Even though one of improbable sample methods – accessibility sampling was used for the selection of respondents, since the questionnaire was filled in by the students of schools involved in the project „Solidarity Schools in the Baltic States”, sample realization adhered to the principles of territorial sampling as well. That way the sample includes youth from cities, towns, peri-urban areas and rural areas. Sampling was limited by project requirements, so in order to obtain representative results it would be necessary to broaden the sampling.

Mostly relative indicators and central tendencies and dissipation parameters have been used for processing of quantitative data obtained in the survey and displaying of division of youth opinions. Although data does not comply with normal division, the arithmetical mean and standard deviation have been used for comparison in the interstate context. Such exception was allowed in order to discover insignificant differences in youth attitudes that are not revealed by central tendency indicators. Besides, nonparametric Mann-Whitney and Kruskal Wallis tests were used for statistical assessment of differences in youth opinions where p-value method was used for result interpretation (significance level 0.05).

## Results and discussion

Surveyed youth from all three Baltic states express relatively different attitude towards various social groups in society which is testified by the fact that youth people are ready to include into the circle of their friends or acquaintances representatives of socially acceptable, prestigious or/and relatively neutral and groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion, but their distance to deviant groups is greater, since young people accept them as residents of their country but not their close acquaintances. These tendencies in attitudes characterize young people from all three Baltic States (see Picture 1).

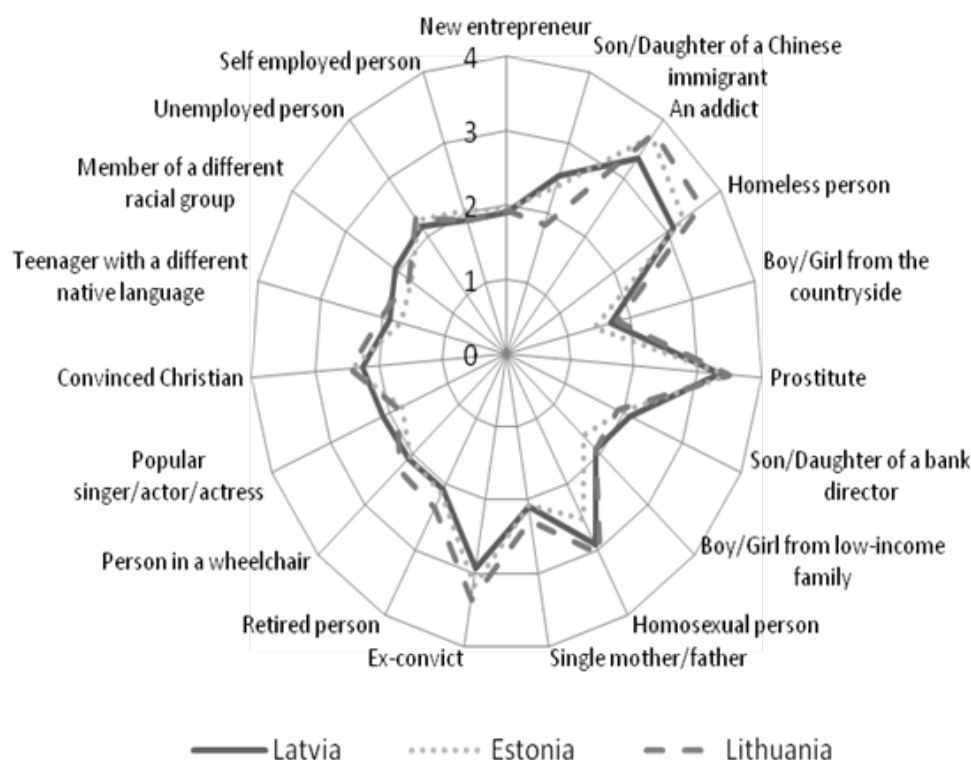


Figure 1. Social distance of youth to different social groups.

Categories: He/she could be a close friend - 1, He/she could be an acquaintance - 2, He/she could be a resident of my city/country - 3, I wouldn't like him/her to live in my city/country - 4.

Source: Authors' estimates based on data of the research "Solidarity schools in the Baltic states"

In Latvia surveyed youth show more tolerance towards young people from the country, young people with different mother tongue, self-employed individuals, young people from poor families and new businessmen (mean<1.99). Their peers from Estonia feel close social distance to young people of following groups: young people from the country, young people from poor families, young people with different mother tongue, popular singers or actors, young people of different racial groups, new businessmen and children of bankers. Young people from Lithuania are also ready to accept into their

circle children of Chinese emigrants, thus expressing greater tolerance towards 3 more social groups comparing to Latvian youth. Lithuanian youth feel closest to young people from the country, representatives of different race, previously mentioned children of Chinese emigrants, popular singers or actors, children of bankers, young people from poor families, self-employed persons and new businessmen.

All surveyed youth in all three countries feel the biggest distance to members of deviant groups (mean>2.93). Alcohol and drug addicts, prostitutes, former prisoners and homeless are those experiencing the lowest level of tolerance. Similar situation can be witnessed towards homosexual people that in Latvia and Lithuania received more negative assessment in comparison with previously mentioned groups (mean=2.93–3.06). Slightly more liberal attitude is shown by surveyed youth from Estonia that has expressed willingness to see representatives of sexual minorities in their circle of acquaintances comparing to young people of other two countries. But the assessment of members of this social group shows the highest dissipation of views (SD>1.08) that indicates the choice of different and even extreme answers within the same country.

Overall high tolerance level is observed towards all socially acceptable or prestigious social groups, although not always young people mention representatives of these groups among the closest and most acceptable. Small social distance is observed towards groups of specific ethnic/racial differences, groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Lower tolerance level is shown towards committed Christians and unemployed. Although the members of these groups did not receive assessment as negative as the members of deviant groups, youth of all three countries would rather avoid including them in their circle of friends and acquaintances. Similar assessments are made in Latvia and Estonia towards children of Chinese emigrants, and in Lithuania – towards pensioners and people with physical disabilities. Although there is rather large dissidence towards children of Chinese emigrants among young people of Latvia and Estonia (SD=1.10), Lithuanian youth, while assessing pensioners and people with physical disabilities, have been more single-minded (SD<1.00) and among them there is no significant dissipation of opinions. Thus not only deviant behaviour, but also religious convictions, racial differences, age, health and displacement from the labour market can be considered to be risk factors of intolerance.

Considering calculated average social distances in relation to all social groups within each country, surveyed Estonian youth shows highest level of tolerance (average index – 2.30). They are followed by Latvian peers (average index – 2.33), and slightly lower tolerance is demonstrated by surveyed Lithuanian youth (average index – 2.42).

Although average indicators reflect rather similar overall level of tolerance in each country, different expressions of dissipation in opinions are observed in all countries. In relation to 16 out of 19 social groups, opinions of Baltic youth cannot be statistically considered as being significantly different ( $p<0.05$ ). Whereas Baltic youth feels similar level of social distance only towards new businessmen ( $p=0.665$ ), unemployed ( $p=0.063$ ) and self-employed people ( $p=0.053$ ).

One of the indicators of tolerant or, quite contrary, intolerant attitude is shown not just by social distance to different social groups, but also by level of willingness of youth to help and share social responsibility. Critical cases in expression of tolerant attitude are considered those towards people that have different social problems and are traditionally held in prejudice by society (see Table 1).

Highest tolerance among surveyed Latvian youth is shown towards people with physical/mental disabilities, elderly people, homeless and beggars. More than 50% of youth acknowledge that society should be looking for ways to help members of these social groups. Whereas relative indifference is expressed towards migrants, prostitutes, refugees, Roma people and alcohol addicts, since about 38-42% of the surveyed consider unnecessary for society to help these groups and are sure that members of these groups must solve their problems on their own. Curiously enough, the answers of surveyed Latvian youth show rather expressed intolerant attitude towards drug addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals and alcohol addicts, since about 40% of the surveyed believe that members of these groups must be isolated from society.

Table 1

**Perception of youth of necessity to help people with social problems**

How do you think people with different social problems should be treated? %	Estonia			Latvia			Lithuania		
	Everyone should help them to live better	They need to deal with their problems on their own	They need to be isolated from the society	Everyone should help them to live better	They need to deal with their problems on their own	They need to be isolated from the society	Everyone should help them to live better	They need to deal with their problems on their own	They need to be isolated from the society
Disabled persons	98	2	0	95	4	0	99	0	1
Drug addicts	51	24	25	36	24	40	74	13	13
Migrants	65	30	5	48	42	10	82	15	3
Prostitutes	28	46	26	20	42	38	37	41	22
Poor people	91	8	1	79	17	4	94	4	2
Refugees	53	32	15	37	39	24	87	9	4
Homosexuals	41	41	18	28	33	39	32	39	29
Homeless persons	87	10	3	67	24	9	69	23	8
Roma people (gypsies)	42	41	17	33	42	25	45	29	26
Drunkards	41	47	12	31	38	31	57	31	12
Beggars	67	26	7	51	33	16	75	17	8
Elderly (senior) people living alone	94	5	1	86	11	3	87	10	3

*Source: Authors' estimates based on the data of "Solidarity Schools in the Baltic States" study*

Picture different from Latvian survey results is seen in the Lithuanian and Estonian results that show relatively smaller part of youth demonstrating intolerant attitude towards particular groups of people. In Estonia about 25% of the surveyed believe that it would be necessary to isolate from society drug addicts and prostitutes which is 15% less than in Latvia. In Lithuania 29% of the surveyed would wish to isolate homosexuals, 26% - Roma people, and 22% - prostitutes. In Latvia and Estonia intolerant attitudes is demonstrated towards similar social groups, even though in Estonia it is not as expressed. In Lithuania intolerance of surveyed people was directed towards other social groups, except prostitutes that face distinct intolerance in all Baltic States. In the sense of dispersion it is similar to Estonia, since it covers about a quarter of the surveyed.

In Estonia more than half of the surveyed believe that social problems of eight groups – people with physical/mental disabilities (98%), elderly (94%), poor people (91%), homeless (87%), beggars (67%), migrants (65%), refugees (53%) and drug addicts (51%) - are shared responsibility of society. Whereas more than a half of surveyed youth in Lithuania consider that public is responsible for all members of groups affected by social problems, except prostitutes, Roma people and homosexuals.

It can be said that there are statistically significant differences of opinion among the surveyed youth of three Baltic States in relation to all social groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). Only in some cases data do not show statistically significant variations. Opinions of surveyed Estonian and Lithuanian youth are similar to each other and are not statistically different in relation to three social groups – Roma people, poor

people and people with physical/mental disabilities ( $p > 0.05$ ). Lithuanian and Latvian youth demonstrate similar views of homeless ( $p = 0.485$ ) and elderly ( $p = 0.709$ ). Opinions of Estonian and Latvian youth are different in their assessment of all social groups.

Surveyed Latvian youth are much less willing to support collective solutions in helping groups affected by social problems and more often show intolerant attitude towards members of some groups in comparison with their Lithuanian and Estonian peers. Although social distance measurements showed less drastically different results, in the capacity criteria when a young person has to choose a particular mode of action and demonstrate his willingness no help, situation is different.

## Conclusions

- Different social distance to different social groups is different among surveyed youth of Baltic States. Lowest tolerance threshold is against members of deviant groups – alcohol and drug addicts, prostitutes, former prisoners and homeless. Youth demonstrate expressed intolerance towards members of these groups and want them isolated from society. Highest tolerance is shown towards socially acceptable, prestigious groups.
- Surveyed youth of Baltic States show definite individualism and unwillingness to get involved in solution of social problems. Surveyed youth believes that society should not solve problems of deviant groups. At the same time opposite opinion is expressed by surveyed youth about helping people with disabilities, elderly, poor people and homeless.
- Assessment of differences among Baltic States shows that slightly higher tolerance level towards different social groups is expressed by surveyed youth in Estonia and the lowest tolerance level is observed among youth in Lithuania.
- The thought that, as a possibility, relatively higher tolerance level among surveyed youth in Estonia can be linked to implementation and monitoring of purposive youth and educational policy can be forwarded as a hypothesis for future research.
- Authors conclude that theoretical statements of tolerant society are not consistent with reality in Baltic States. Results help to identify the areas where education could play a role in shaping attitudes of young people towards the different social groups.
- Authors conclude that agenda of youth and educational policy must include dimension of global education in order to form more impartial and sustainable economic, social, environmental national and international policy that is based on human rights.

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