Interpersonal Skills in Dealing with Multiculturalism: Bosnian Borderland Case

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Abstract

The article tackles the issue of interpersonal skills that provide and ensure a foundation for intercultural dialogue and communication as recognized by the author within her own research project carried out in spring 2015 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Multitude of cultures is contemporarily a part of everyday life for many democratic countries. At the same time, cultural similarities and differences have begun to play a substantial role in the public discourses and individual biographies encountering multiculturalism on a daily basis. It consequently demands from the members of such culturally diverse societies to generate given code of communication, axiology and attitudes that enable culturally heterogenic dialogue. Otherwise, we may deal with cultural antagonism that can lead to social and political tensions questioning democratic functioning of such states and countries. Taking it into consideration, the subject of research concerns interpersonal skills manifested by the members of Bosnian multicultural communities of Sarajevo, where cultural diversity occurs both within the families as well as communities in which they function. Hence, cultural differences are part of their everyday life, manifested within cultural legacy of own community, cultural system of the family, family socialization, experienced problems resulting from cultural differences within own family and beyond it, attitudes to different representatives of cultural communities, and last but not least, within values by reason of which the cross-cultural dialogue and multicultural coexistence are possible. Consequently, multicultural, interpersonal skills should be acknowledged and practiced as a potential and concurrently as a chance for recognition of the priorities of cross-cultural education, crucial for all the democratic states worldwide.

Keywords: interpersonal skills, multiculturalism, communication, borderland, axiology, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo

Introduction

Social, educational and pedagogical scientists and alike have long been interested in interpersonal competences and the specific components involved in effective interaction (i.e. social skills), due to the fact that interpersonal relations and communication are of paramount importance in the process of daily functioning of individuals and communities. Moreover, it plays particular role within the framework of intercultural discourse, as it constitutes a factor decisive in terms of managing relations and conflict in cross-cultural context. It must be remembered that developing cultural awareness accompanied by the ability to understand the role that cultural prescriptions play in shaping communication provide assets due to the fact that intercultural ignorance inhabits and often disables the ability to create meaningful interpersonal relationships with people of different cultural background.

Communication stress the importance of trying to establish a community with someone; to convey common information, ideas and attitudes, associating, appertaining or establishing links between them. Wilbur Schram understands communication as the process of establishing a communion, or a nature of perceptions, ideas or concepts between the transmitter and the receiver of the message through a communication channel (Schram W., 1995).

Thus, abilities such as recognition of other people’s needs, cooperation, acknowledgment and shaping positive and socially desired values, generating effective solutions within compromises, negotiating and making the social surrounding an area of constructive dialogue are all indispensable in cultural borderland. The latter generates specific changes and transformation within the framework of economy, culture, education and society, influencing the course of individual biographies, too. Such process is accompanied by cultural exchange of values, norms and patterns enhanced and advanced by interpersonal skills that are related to the notion of communication, interpreted in many ways. It can be, for instance,
considered as a process of exchanging information, and it is assumed that it can take place through verbal and non-verbal channels, entailing number of features, methods and conditions that should be met in order to make such communication effective. On the other hand, verbal communication should be “reliable, i.e. non-tendentious, based on competitive statements and attractive for the interlocutor” (Szerląg, 2001). As far as competences are concerned, they are viewed as, for instance, “one’s ability and readiness to perform task at a given level, as a result of integration of knowledge, significant number of minor skills and comprehension in making assessment” (Kwiatkowska 2008). J. Szempruch stresses that competences reflect “abilities and readiness to perform tasks at a level corresponding to given standards, including interpretative, communicational competences, creativity, cooperation, as well as informative and pragmatic skills (Szempruch, 2006). Consequently, typology of competences can embrace (Dylak, 1995) interpersonal competences such as leadership, being team player, ability to negotiate etc, intellectual competences such as organization skills, being source-oriented, high motivation, stress-resilience, and communicational skills predominantly concerning clarity of communication in written and verbal form.

Communication competences put emphasis on the following features:

- active listening,
- remaining relevant and applicable balance between listening and speaking,
- appropriate, conscious management of body language (its comprehension and ability to adjust body langue in cross-cultural context is of paramount importance),
- clear and comprehensible public speaking and expressing oneself in writing.

B. Ciupińska (2005) stresses that interpersonal skills are substantial in the process of getting to know one’s personality, as only then it is possible to become aware of own assets and drawbacks in order to coherently develop own potential and improve relations with the culturally diverse surrounding. Additionally, body language and awareness of its nuances are essential as they:

- convey feelings and emotions through mimicry, gestures and etc;
- illustrate verbal communications through visual interpretation of the statement;
- regulate the course of discussion and reactions between interlocutors by gestures, mimicry etc;
- allow to adjust to a current situation by expressing empathy and understanding, or quite the contrary – manifesting puzzlement or distrust.

Taking the above into consideration, it can be concluded that interpersonal (social) skills constitute a set of life skills applied upon everyday communication, facilitating interaction with others in effective, constructive and positive manner. Thus, through awareness of the way one interacts with others it is possible to practice, improve and advance own personal skills, including verbal communication, non-verbal communication, listening skills, negotiating, problem solving, decision making and assertiveness. Moreover, it must be remember that moral values that lay foundation of interpersonal communication are often related to a given manner of behaviour or attitude toward others. Therefore, soft (social, communication or interpersonal) competences are useful and necessary and can be decisive in terms of the social dynamics of any community, yet are particularly vital in case of cross-cultural communities such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

**Bosnian borderland**

Bosnia-Herzegovina sets a very interesting example of a contemporary borderland society that constitutes a meeting point for representatives of ottoman, Muslim culture (a reminiscence of almost five hundred-year long Turkish rule), Balkan traditions, orthodox church influences and western-European lifestyle that was established during the Austro-Hungarian occupation, therefore, in the course of the history, this intercultural society has created a crossroad for the West and the East, the Orient and the Occident. Despite the dramatic war accompanying the fall of Yugoslavia, contemporary Bosnian society sets an example of a community model capable of combining different customs, traditions and code of conduct experiencing the heterogeneity of the culture in the prose of everyday life. While analyzing the issue of socialisation and
upbringing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, F. Hrustić, a Bosnian sociologist, claims that apart from common set of values there is a number of cognitive processes manifested upon daily communication involved, which according to the author entails understanding of human nature and needs, as well as readiness to learn and will of getting to know the unknown (Hrustić, 2010). In the context of interpersonal skills, the process of learning is understood as learning in order to broaden moral horizons, to modify own behaviour (creative conduct in accordance with moral principles and social expectances), to live together and to exist consciously, which makes up the sum of previous steps. Referring to his country also as a place of research, Hrustić indicates the following principles and values which constitute the axiological sphere underlying social specificity of contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina, emphasizing:

- sense of community and similarity in the context of cardinal values,
- legal, political, social and economic equality,
- equality in terms of inalienable dignity, equal cultural, political, confessional and economic rights,
- shared common values such as justice, honesty, decency, honour, creative activity, solidarity, devotion, love, hope, responsibility, respect,
- cognitive curiosity (Hrustić, 2010).

In the context of interpersonal skills in culturally diverse environment, the above values become a part of symbolic culture of culturally heterogenic social groups and significantly influence the nature of interactions. Furthermore, they become a point of reference and a specific “code” according to which given social, cultural and political phenomena are read, interpreted and assessed in the course of interpersonal communication. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that in multi- and intercultural societies some tensions will always occur regarding the dominance of socially and morally desirable values, as not all processes taking place within inter- or multicultural society favour the accomplishment of borderland values, internalized in the course of socialization. Yet, strengthening cross-cultural communication and enhancing interpersonal skills can facilitate conditions for tolerance and other above-mentioned values (Babić, 2002). Hence, contacts with the representatives of other nations, religions, ethnic groups or languages should assist the members of society in overcoming the unambiguous paradigm of a monoculture. This, in turn, supports the idea of experiencing acceptance, understanding and respect for others. Intercultural world of a borderland may be defined within the framework of tools, categories of values and their correlation with intercultural communication. On the basis of own qualitative research focusing on the Bosnian identity, the selection of the key values (tools of axiological socialisation) in the context of Bosnian borderland includes the following:

- cognitive values allowing to gain and process the knowledge and information regarding “the other” culture and its representatives (code of conduct, preferable set of values, traditions regarding various religious holidays);
- pro-social values enabling members of the Bosnian borderland to participate actively in various enterprises contributing to the integrity of the community such as common cultural events, festivals, participation in culturally diverse forms of entertainment;
- moral values perceived as internalized, core concepts setting a hierarchy and structuring internal and external world of the individuals concerning their motivation, direction of activity, emotional attitudes and pattern on interpersonal communication. The empirical material proved that human dignity, respect for the values of life and non-violent approach to conflict constitute the foundation of such categories of values (Pilarska, 2014).

Therefore, relations between the world of values, intercultural communication and borderland identity constitute a co-depended structure, with borderland axiology structuring and dynamising intercultural communication, which is a foundation for conceptualisation of intercultural, borderland identity, as researched in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and presented in works of Bosnian researchers (Hrustić, 2010; Bringa, 2009). This correlation reflects direct and mutual connection between entering the world of values in the course of primary and secondary socialisation, empowered by intercultural communication, rooted in the cultural surrounding and leading to the establishment of multidimensional, multicultural identity enriched with aforementioned values, specific for a cultural borderland. In the context of socialisation in borderland the axiology ipso facto creates and accomplishes the priorities of intercultural education leading towards the borderland identity. Hence, the axiological influences in the course of socialisation stimulate experiencing relations with the cultural surrounding that may become inspiration of axiological importance for interpersonal skills (Szerlag, 2001).

In the past, Bosnia was subject to extremely contradictory powers affecting not only its current political shape, but also shaping its social nature and the specificity of intercultural commutation taking place in the cultural borderland, that
is constituted by a heterogeneous society in terms of ethnic, confessional or national provenance, providing a unique
example of synthetic form of eclectic cultural code (Banac, 1996). Bosnian society is constituted by three major
ethnic/confessional groups, namely Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and Muslims. As proved by previous findings of the
author (Pilarska, 2011) Bosnian Muslims provide extraordinary example of unconventional pattern of perceiving own
identity, being a combination of various, at times contradictory, cultural codes, such as south-European (Yugoslav facet),
ottoman, Mediterranean, Muslim and Slavic. They altogether outline a very dynamic and rich competent for establishment
of Bosnian identity that can serve as model example of a multi-layer, intercultural construct manifested through cross-
cultural communication. Thus, Bosnian cultural borderland is characterized by the following aspects:

- moving beyond the border of homogenous, “inherited” in the course of primary socialization cultures (see: 
  Nikitorowicz, 2005) on the basis of everyday life interactions;
- socially articulated image of the features of being a Bosnian, revealing a set of values dynamising Bosnian
  identity such as sociability, emotionality, openness, and cordiality. They, in turn, establish a set of altruistic and
  social values as well as a precise premise for projected activities and assignments of intercultural education
  enhancing interpersonal, social skills (see: Pilarska, 2014);
- “Bosnianhood” as an area of everyday life existence and rituals exposing culture-generating function of spare
  time, experiencing and shaping communal values along with social and educational aspects of everyday life
  intercultural interactions that provide a foundation for establishment of cross-cultural communication and
dialogue;
- Bosnian social identity;
- universality of perceiving individuals on the basis of axiological polymorphism.

All the above-mentioned factors shaping and dynamising Bosnian cultural identity result from the specificity of Bosnian
socialization and enculturation that involve the following:

- cognitive openness towards the Others (insignificant prejudices towards the Other as far as Balkan nations are
  concerned – frequent references to collective, local identities, e.g. “us ex-Yugoslavs, people from “here”, etc,
  see: Pilarska, 2013);
- sense of attachment to the social and cultural surrounding;
- importance of the neighborhood as a community crucial for the secondary socialization;
- lack of cultural assimilation (social and cultural identity shaped on the basis of socialization and enculturation is
  not a summary of such influences, but its creative, dynamic outcome);
- communal perception of axiological interpretations of the reality, i.e. eclectic perception of moral values,
  regardless of ethnic or confessional origin;
- mechanism of social regulation structuring relations with the world on the basis of given values such as
  openness, understanding, resourcefulness and cordiality regardless of national, ethnic or religious determinants
  or denominations;
- the value of local topos as an area of material and mental area crucial for ontological sense of security (local,
  community-based identity, regardless of the fact whether such setting is culturally homogenous or
  heterogeneous).
- Axiological specificity of Bosnian cultural borderland, influencing the process of interpersonal communication,
  involves:
- secondary emotional bond shaped upon everyday contacts with cultural diversity – interactions with the
  representatives of culturally diverse community are grounded within common set of values and are superior to
  inter-generational transmission occurring within primary socialization (Pilarska, 2014);
• sense of ontological security defined by common axiological area, worked out upon everyday life negotiations and tensions eliminated within the framework of, and on the basis of, a life style allowing for cultural and social closure within private situational contexts;
• similarities of customs, patterns of spending free time or material culture as a result of dynamic transformation of cultural code rather than passive accommodation or adaptation;
• ontological and axiological approaches towards core values can be subject to modification regardless of their primary character due to emotional and intellectual interpretation of cultural meaningfulness as a part of everyday life patterns.

In respect to the above, it may be concluded that the multi-layer, intercultural Bosnian identity manifested on such cultural borderland in communicative discourse with the surrounding, is constituted by Bosnian personal, social and cultural identity, as expressed through intercultural communication.

Taking the above into consideration, it must be remembered that the moral horizon is established by certain combinations of values constituting ethical sphere of each individual and community, expressed within interpersonal skills upon daily communication and intercultural contacts. B. Wojciszke, applying American social psychology paradigm, consolidated the model of the structure of culturally universal types of values and their interrelations (Wojciszke, 2002), stressing that „moving beyond own interest” origin, as well as values related to the “openness to change” appear most desirable and suitable in terms of a cultural borderland and shaping interpersonal skills. Undoubtedly, this does not fulfill the interpretative frameworks of structures of values, but indicates axial dimension specifying the community on the basis of preferable values rooted in the two polar opposites, i.e. “conservatism versus openness to change” as well as “concentration on own interest versus moving beyond own interest”. Such polar opposites imply another key aspect of borderland interpersonal skills, i.e. the intercultural communication that is linked to the process of openness. Therefore, the reflection on interpersonal skills in culturally diverse environment shall take into account given basic properties of values, i.e. the assumptions that from practical perspective and in the context of willingness and activity they constitute a dynamic element of cultural identity nonetheless, still retaining its objective nature, i.e. statically reflecting the social, traditional and common for all people nature of values such as honesty or loyalty. Analyzing interpersonal skills and their foundation in the axiology of a cultural borderland as reflected in cross-cultural communication, it must be remembered that values are most often derived from developmental tendencies of a culture and society, philosophical or religious concepts of a human, various forms of social ideology, social policy of a state etc (Schulz, 2003), as only in such context the ground for common moral sphere may be found and established. Moreover, it must be bore in mind that values are experienced and realized in the process of communication, hence their key importance for interpersonal skills in this regard. Axiological diversification, occurring in the course of cross-cultural communication in the borderland, and empowering the emergence of interpersonal skills, refer to phenomena that may be characterized in the following chronology:

1. Imitation of attitudes, opinions and assessments (also stereotypes) shaped by values establishing symbolic universe of a given group. It takes place in the course of socialisation and education, including the mechanisms of identification with the traditions of own group. At this stage, according to A. Szerlag, “such position of values functions as a part of a codifier, sanctioning activities expressed by the subject, with all anticipation acts referring to the reality of multicultural sphere that are also rooted in such values” (Szerlag, 2001). Therefore, “if values in favour of the diversity became objective, then - while undergoing process of self-identification - individuals or groups assign meaning to such values and as a consequence such individuals acknowledge the cultural personality pattern, actively adjusting to the conditions of a multicultural society” (Szerlag, 2001).
2. Relations with the surrounding become stratified on the basis of gained experiences, i.e. the perception of multicultural diversity is subjectively defined by individual set of values, attitudes, feelings, intellectual or interpersonal competences.
3. Diversity of the expressed social roles, resulting from the multilevel cultural reality, making the subjects permanently redefine their ontological positions, hence the axiological awareness of own self allows them to exist in a multicultural diversity expressing own self through cross-cultural communication, relying on and with reference to interpersonal skills.
Taking the above into account, it is crucial to define, establish and point to these social competences that occur essential for the participants of a cultural borderland to interact productively and constrictively, moving towards negotiations, reaching compromises and peaceful, yet dynamic existence. Hence, the objective of the research was to examine the degree and specificity of experiencing or manifesting social skills that are demonstrated by participants of Bosnian borderland on a daily basis through their interpersonal communication.

Method

The research project embraced two independent tools capturing specificity of interpersonal skills expressed by respondents from Sarajevo cross-cultural community. The applied Social Skills Inventory (SSI, Riggio, 1986) is a widely used 90-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure the possession of basic emotional and social communication skills consisting of six subscales, i.e. emotional expressivity, emotional sensitivity, emotional control, social expressivity, social sensitivity, and social control. Participants respond on a five-point scale from “not at all like me” to “exactly like me”. The scores of these subscales can be summed to obtain a global index of one’s social skills. Concurrent validity was demonstrated with respect to constructs like empathy, self-esteem, nonverbal sending ability, and nonverbal sensitivity.

The other utilized quantitative questionnaire, i.e. Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ, Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988) is a 40-item self-report measure in which participants are asked to rate their ability to handle a variety of interpersonal tasks on a five-point scale ranging from “I’m poor at this; I’d feel uncomfortable and unable to handle this situation, I’d avoid it if possible” to “I’m extremely good at this; I’d feel very comfortable and could handle this situation very well”. It covers five different social competence domains, namely initiating relationships, personal disclosure, negative assertion, emotional support, and conflict management. In a series of studies, the authors showed that the ICQ is reliable, has a sound internal structure, and correlates sensibly with other theoretically related variables as well as with peer rated social competencies (Buhrmester et al., 1998). For the purpose of the present study, the ICQ was translated into Bosnian using the translation-back-translation procedure (see Behling & Law, 2000).

Researched Group

The researched group embraced 120 respondents living in Sarajevo, capital city of Bosnia-Herzegovina, coming from three ethnic-religious backgrounds, i.e. Bosnia Serbs, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims. As far as the age of the respondents is concerned, the project embraced persons in the age group of 16-65, including men and women, regardless of their profession, social status and other stratifying factors. The selection concerned strictly cultural origin (coming from a multicultural city) and entering cross-cultural relations on a daily basis, which is a natural consequence of living in such culturally diverse environment. The survey was carried out in April-May 2015 in public spheres, which is concurrently part of the material ground for entering cross-cultural contacts in such area (Bosnian life style implies number of social rituals in public coffee houses, i.e. kafana). To remain ethnic-religious balance the questionnaires were addressed to 40 representatives of Bosnian Serbs, 40 Bosnian Croats and 40 to Bosnian Muslims.

Outcomes

Upon processing the acquired data it was possible to establish and define set of skills and competences of interpersonal character, useful in dealing with, and being part of cultural diversity. The designed research tools allowed to get insight into the core social skills desired and manifested by the participants of culturally diverse Bosnian community of Sarajevo. Simultaneously, the respondents expressed their attitudes towards various aspects related to everyday life in a culturally diverse community, stressing the importance of the following features, arranged into three categories, namely social (s), personality-oriented (p) and emotional (e), all intertwined yet explicit for its own class:

- responsibility (s)
- empathy (s)
- tolerance(s)
- ability to influence others (s)
• team work (s)
• tenderness and kindness in dealing with others (s)
• active attitudes towards social surrounding (ability to cooperate with others on the basis of dialogue, partnership and negotiations (s)
• openness and supportive approach (stemming from the cultural code of conduct in Bosnian society, i.e. readiness to provide support, friendly small talks, rule of reciprocity, principal of cordiality regardless of the degree of familiarity with others); (s)
• easy adaptability towards new communication styles; (s)
• sense of real, social and cultural bonds (personal ones) within local community (s)
• ability to conduct dialogue and logical argumentation of the expressed statements or beliefs’ (s)
• social awareness as an ability to respond to a social situation (s)
• conflict management (e.g. being able to put begrudging feelings aside when having an argument, when having a conflict with a companion, really listening to his or her complaints and not trying to "read" his/her mind, being able to take a companion's perspective and really understand his or her point of view) (s)
• active listening exerting the effort to understand what other people say (s)
• using common language (channel of communication) showing by words, manner of speaking and by body language that there is a common ground between the interlocutors or participants of the interaction (s)
• highlighting similarities, i.e. finding areas of similarities and emphasizing them (e.g. common interests, goals etc) (s)
• mutual respect (courtesy as a principal rule of communication) (s)
• win-win solution, i.e. finding a solution that has benefits for both parties (s)
• reasonable concessions for the negotiation (regardless of its topic) to move forward (s)
• being learning-focused, i.e. conflicts as opportunities to get feedback on how well communication, so that necessary changes can be made (s)
• being solution-focused (p)
• self-management (as one of the pillars of emotional intelligence) understood as ability to control own emotions when they are not aligned with what would be considered appropriate behaviour for a given situation (p)
• initiation (e.g. being an interesting and enjoyable person to be with when first getting to know people, presenting good first impressions to people you might like to become friends with, going to parties or gatherings, etc) (p)
• disclosure (knowing how to move a conversation with an acquaintance beyond superficial talk to really get to know each other) (p)
• creativity (p)
• sustained communication - consistent and sustained communication about matters of interest, opening communication lines, increasing likeability and credibility (p)
• ability to recognize own assets and drawbacks (p)
• information sensitivity (ability to recognize information crucial for understating the cultural diversity amidst the information overload – finding useful and valuable information on cultural differences, etc) (p)
- emotional awareness i.e. identifying one’s emotions and their effects (e)
- emotional support (responsibility and accountability as indicators of emotional maturity building trust and encouraging others to strike up relation and communication with a given person) (e)
- emotional self-control, i.e. controlling harmful emotions and impulses (e)
- empathy - sensing emotions and points of view of other persons, active interest in their concerns, anxieties and worries (e)

Chart 1. Classification of the interpersonal skills categories as resulting from the research outcomes

Source: own study on the basis of research results.

It is evident from the above that the overwhelming class of **interpersonally desired skills are of social origin, followed by some personality-oriented, self-aware qualities, accompanied by emotional maturity**. Yet, in quantitative perspective the overwhelming number of interpersonal skills refer to social abilities reflected in number of competences such as communication skills, problem-solving skills, acting as a team-player, active listening, comprehension of the body language etc. No matter how challenging and demanding (individually as well as institutionally in the context of educational objectives) these features seem, promotion of the above-mentioned skills can contribute to the process of strengthening cross-cultural.

As a consequence, the members and active participants of a cultural borderland (intercultural society) may contribute to the growth of values they adopt in the process of interpersonal communication, including the following categories:

- prosocial values reflecting the attitudes and activities moving beyond own interests determined by empathy or kindness, favouring dialogue, understanding and constructive relations in the cultural borderland (societal skills)
- values determining openness towards change, including self-management and stimulation, supporting mutual intercultural contacts, enriching them and catalysing positive direction of the interaction 9permoalty, self-awareness oriented values)
- Therefore, in relation to the preliminary, pilot research outcomes all those involved in the process of formal as well as informal (cross-cultural) education should take into consideration the following axiological priorities while designing educational and pedagogical objectives, crucial in the process of communication and dialogue in the cultural borderlands, as the research outcomes prove:
- altruism as a key interpersonal attitude, which according to M. Lobocki “refers to the set of attitudes and behaviour reflecting acceptance and friendliness towards others, involving understanding and aware activities for the sake of others and widely perceived community” (Lobocki, 2002);
the value of a human, which is defined by M. Łobocki as “intrinsic spiritual existence remaining in inseparable connection with the spiritual and mental existence of a human” (Łobocki, 2002): other authors refer to this notion as collective manifestations of own self in a community, with inextricably assigned right to health, respect and life, subsequently making all the members of such society responsible for such prerogatives (Babić, 2002). Respectively, internalization of such a value results not only in awareness that a human constitutes an independent and complete creation, but acknowledges that such an individual functions as a personalistic existence for others, stressing its interpersonal, communicative nature;

- responsibility, which defines not only the sense of self-responsibility, but also involves the responsibility for the partner of a dialogue in the intercultural contact, which in turn shapes mature, in-depth intercultural relations grounded in highly-developed social skills;

- freedom, which is understood as a value linked to the responsibility and sense of democratic community that provides a framework for liberty and consideration for the Other hence facilitating altruistic, pro-social responsible activities for the sake of a community, providing foundations for the process of constructive intercultural communication;

- tolerance, which role in the context of communication in borderlands is defined by J. Nikitorowicz as “a process allowing individuals to establish positive bonds despite differences between, carry out intercultural dialogue with the guarantee to sustain integral autonomy and to ensure multiculturalism” (Nikitorowicz, 1995). Therefore this value appear crucial for intercultural relations on borderlands, as it practically recognizes and confirms co-existence in such areas tough cross-cultural communication;

- justice, which is – due to its nature - perceived as a foundation for the sensitivity towards diversity, granting the individuals the right to equal, just treatment regardless of the lifestyle manifested and values behind such code of conduct. It additionally becomes a ground for the dynamics of social and political changes occurring in multicultural societies and countries.

It is also important to stress that as it results from the research outcomes, interpersonal skills concern not only social competences and this explicit area of human’s functioning, but also make reference and are conditioned by internal personality-oriented features and emotional abilities such as reading other people’s emotions, empathy etc.

Discussion

This aim of this paper was to identify which interpersonal skills are crucial for cross-cultural dialogue in a culturally diverse society, exemplified by the group of respondents from multicultural Sarajevo, in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As far as axiological assumptions of interpersonal skills are concerned, it is essential to promote and experience in a culturally diverse environment affirmation, understanding of human’s needs, learning and getting to know social as well cultural heritage of the local communities, practicing freedom and respect for all confessions and representatives of cultural differences youth activation through civic education and last but not least - creation of constrictive, cross-cultural, interpersonal relationships.

Society of intercultural character is specified not only by the presence of individuals belonging to various nations, races or religions, but it is also an area which gathers those, who are advocates of different political viewpoints, seemingly difficult to reconcile (Łobocki, 2002). Each of the cultures existing in a given area presents its unique material and non-material heritage handed down from generation to generation. Moreover, the cultural borderland implies coexistence of various systems of moral values, what - in turn - facilitates pluralism and relativism that reflect the multitude and axiological ambiguity of the intercultural borderland, as expressed in everyday communication through interpersonal skills. Such features of intercultural societies can be acquired through daily trainings upon everyday interpersonal experiences, or within specially designed courses concentrated on shaping this type of competences. It is, however, not only learning through experience or modeling in a given situation, but also implies learning given rules and principles that would allow to apply given experiences in shaping specific competences. In order to establish such common sphere shared by all the members of intercultural society, some certain criteria should be met, namely:

- antinihilistic axiological orientation;
• dynamism expressed within openness to changes;
• dialogue and discourse;
• ethic tradition;
• creative assimilation;
• axiological maximalism (formulating criteria and conditions for moral enrichment of the world’s societies) (see; Michalik, 2004).

Such perspective enhances perception of the borderland communication resulting from interpersonal skills as a dynamic, inspiring sphere of experiencing diversity not only in the ontological, but also communicative, interpersonal context. It takes place due to the fact that dialogue and discourse allows to broaden and widespread commonly accepted values and norms, to combine points of views and moral stands, as well as to overcome particularism and stereotypes, as it results from the research outcomes. Moreover, such approach avoids the trap of universality as “universality is the opposition of diversity, as it is only diversity that makes up the phenomenon appropriate for the open process of thinking that recognizes and cherish differences, individuality and even different life options, moreover […] in order to embrace this, what's general and common, we must get to know and appreciate this, what's different (Anderson, 1997). As a consequence, the denial of simplified tendency to universalize corresponds with the stages of intercultural learning since such approach does not negate the sheer existence of differences, does not even attempt to join them nor to reduce them to the lowest common axiological denominator, but allows to change the profile of a given culture towards pluralism and interculturalism in the course of interculturally oriented communication, applying desired interpersonal skills. Thus, the need to work out skills that would constitute a foundation for constructive interaction and then, understanding and permanent, ethically rooted relations. It is important to stress in the context of designing programmes and activities promoting interpersonal skills and shaping social competences, the key difference between universality, pluralisms and particularization, as the cooperation between representatives of various axiological backgrounds cannot be brought down to some cosmopolitan clichés or universal platitudes. Therefore particularism is the opposite to the community, and consequently the efforts for the sake of common axiological borderland shall focus on pluralism that enables dialogue, mutual respect, justice and tolerance as desired interpersonal skills manifested within own moral stand.

All things considered, that communication skills cannot be shaped in a short-term period so it is crucial to improve them upon formal or non-formal education. The necessity to acquire communication competences is the key to smooth and constructive cross-cultural dialogue, yet it must be remembered that everyday intercultural communication results from the axiological perspective, as increased participation in a given culture rises awareness regarding the principles and rules derived from given values. The dynamics of defining, negotiating, entering relation and active participation enables the individual axiology to become a set of dynamic variables, empowering interpersonal skills, subject to universal rights of human dignity, due to the recognition of a certain category of common, shared values which “in individual and common perception do not generate tensions, hence are not of dual nature, but are related to the existence of equal system both for the individual and the group […] and those are values of stable character, guaranteeing relative homeostasis in the relations of individuals or group with culturally diverse surrounding (Szerlag, 2001).

Consequently, from the practical perspective being aware of the following, recommended questions when interacting with those of diverse cultural background, can improve interpersonal skills in cross-cultural context, i.e.:

- How do given person’s feelings/experiences about socialization differ from mine?
- How does his or her concept of self differ from mine?
- To what extent do our attitudes, values, and thinking processes differ?
- To what degree is he or she more or less competitive than me?
- In what ways does his or her use of nonverbal cues differ from mine?

The simple set of such questions can be made a point of departure for discussions and reflections over cross-cultural communication and interpersonal skills in borderland. Seemingly simple insight into these aspects of everyday functioning amongst others can definitely contribute to the process of improving interpersonal skills indispensable in intercultural context, entailing desired features, as expressed by the respondents. Socialisation taking place in the cultural borderlands is shaped by different factors than those dynamising this process in a homogenous societies. Multitude of cultural patterns, customs,
trains and different lifestyles may cause confusion for these members of a cultural borderland that have not consolidated their identity accordingly to the principles of axiological education. Acknowledging the importance of values within the process of cross-cultural communica
toin are crucial for further cooperation and development of culturally heterogeneous societies, emphasizing their openness, flexibility and wide margin of tolerance towards this, what is unknown and unfamiliar. Thus, acknowledging and socializing towards such values is of paramount importance in contemporary cultural borderlands, concurrently ensuring interpersonal aptitude within given social skills. Thereupon, it is recommended to develop opportunities to meet and exchange experiences, commence on new, educational tasks and other enterprises, providing opportunities to cooperate, enhancing, openness and flexibility in dealing with cultural diversity.

References

Tables

Table 1. Dimensions of Bosnian identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bosnian personal identity</th>
<th>Bosnian social identity</th>
<th>Bosnian cultural identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who am I?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How to live?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How to participate?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open individuality</td>
<td>Cognitive, intellectual</td>
<td>Awareness of personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-conceptualization</td>
<td>emotional and behaviour</td>
<td>shaping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based on cultural code</td>
<td>openness</td>
<td>influence of culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of subjectivity</td>
<td>Combination of individual</td>
<td>Creativity and dynamism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity and integrity</td>
<td>and collective existence</td>
<td>of involvement in cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in a cultural borderland</td>
<td>activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Axiological polymorphism</td>
<td>Active participation in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>local community life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>towards values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own study.

Table 2. Universal types of values and their representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moving Beyond own interest</th>
<th>Conservatism</th>
<th>Concentration on own interest</th>
<th>Openness to Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universality</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Self-management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindliness</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Achievements</td>
<td>Stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Conformism</td>
<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>Life joy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>