

## Social cohesion and intercultural studies in the educational community

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### ABSTRACT

The article shows the important role of social cohesion as a social phenomenon, its impact on the development of society and intercultural communication. The social role of trust, in particular, in the development of social cohesion, and, accordingly, social stability of society, is also shown. Social cohesion acquires acute relevance and importance in the current time of social transformations, as cohesion allows communities overcome various fluctuations and changes. The social cohesion as complex social phenomenon has been analyzed in the focus of intercultural studies. The aim of the research was to investigate the important spheres of social cohesion related to intercultural communication in the educational community, in particular, in the university community of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University. The research conducted several times, including the crisis states of society – pandemic and war conflict in Ukraine. This research continues social cohesion studies, which are conducted in the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University since 2016, and demonstrates one of the current stages. The methodological tool is an adaptation of the "Social Cohesion Radar" model at the university community level. The study is based on primary data from the author's questionnaire. The important role of social cohesion, trust and values in intercultural communication is demonstrated.

### KEYWORDS

*education, educational community, social cohesion, trust, university community, values.*

### Introduction

Modern societies are faced with a number of challenges that appear to threaten social cohesion, including globalization and digital transformation; decreasing levels of tolerance, increasing levels of inequality; fast-growing flows of migrants and refugees, and growing cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity; and democracy crises at all. The war in Ukraine sharpened the above problems in our society. Not only the war but also the future recovering period will stress the problem of social cohesion in society, in particular its issues connected with intercultural communication. The flow of Ukrainian refugees as a new large wave of migration cause many intercultural and social cohesion problem over the world. In general, migration and the advent of increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural societies contribute to drastic changes (*Bauman and Portera, 2021*) The growth of diversity and social tension in modern societies leads us to consider the need for intercultural competencies to prevent and solve intercultural conflicts. These competencies have

become a key to our personal and professional life as in our societies we tend to find ourselves dealing with people of different cultural backgrounds and multidimensional identities. Social cohesion, in particular, in educational communities, is currently one of the most relevant areas of research caused by the demand of society (Riniolo, 2013; Jenson, 2010; Berger-Schmitt, 2000). It is social cohesion that determines such an important trend, which manifests itself more strongly in crisis states – unification, belonging to something more. But in this unification process, intercultural competence is a key communication tool. Social cohesion becomes the means that allows people to overcome the challenges of modern social transformations that are taking place in Ukraine as well as around the world. The very process of grouping gives a sense of support and helps to feel part of a certain community and to overpower new challenges. Here we couldn't but mention intercultural communication that becomes vital for individuals to become a member of a socially cohesive community.

The very important task for the modern system of education is not only a theoretical reflection on the nature of the interpretative category of "intercultural competence" but practical steps of its promotion and development, in particular, in the educational communities. There are some investigations in the sphere of intercultural competence development in education (AITaHer, 2019; Portera, Grant 2017; Blum, 2014; Lawrence, 2014; Milani, 2019). Thus, there were proposed interesting actions for schools, which could be applied in other educational communities: student mobility and school internationalization, the establishment of partnerships with organizations and institutions that (at various levels) with intercultural education in the territory, and activities emphasizing multiple perspectives. These actions are focused on, in general, the enhancement of "relationality" (Milani, 2019). The main foundations of social cohesion and, accordingly, effective relations are trust and mutual understanding.

At the same time, a mutual understanding is determined and focused on cultural values and principles of social interaction (Le H. et al, 2015). This value-based approach is obvious because of the value-based nature of social cohesion. Definitely, social cohesion as a complex social phenomenon is based on the set of individual and collective values, which help to integrate modern, diverse societies (Bachtler & Mendez, 2016; Healy, 2018). Again, one of the key values for effective intercultural communication is "connectedness" which also could be considered as one of the social cohesion parameters based on the value of the trust (Nesterova et al., 2020). Trust is a cognitive, evolutionary mechanism of connectedness, and its evidence we can observe exactly in intercultural communications. These communications in various ways actualize the problem of trust in the context of "Own" and "Alien" ("Other"). This connection of trust and cohesion is very important in the focus of intercultural studies. "Otherness" and "Othering of the cultural Other" is integral to identity construction during intercultural encounters but have largely been neglected in Cross-Cultural Management (CCM) research (Guttormsen D. S. A., 2018). The common senses should be based on common and shared values, community, and overall polity-society alignment. Speaking about cohesion as a driver of the culturally and normatively pluralizing world context we have to take into consideration the value-oriented focus of intercultural communications. Values launch the process of normative, ideological, and worldview convergence. It is important to notice that value-oriented convergence keeps the cognitive focus on diversity and inclusion, in particular, in the case of intercultural dialogues (Strandbrink, 2017).

Basic principles of social cohesion were formulated within the framework of the Council of Europe only in 1990, it's quite recently. Despite this, at the moment there are many fundamental and important studies associated with the social cohesion phenomenon: EU Social Cohesion Policy, Social Cohesion Radar, Social Cohesion Model, etc. (Dragolov et al., 2013). These studies allow us to analyze very important social processes because social cohesion highlights the weak points" of social relations. It can be noted that not only Ukraine but also the European Union and other countries of the world are currently undergoing a process of rapid political and demographic change, which actualizes the search for a sustainable platform of values for successful coexistence and social development. (Nesterova, Spulber, 2020). Now, due to the global spread of information about the war in

Ukraine, and its' worldwide economic impact, the above-mentioned trends have only increased. Therefore, fast and unpredictable changes in the sphere of intercultural communication could be investigated by social cohesion research methodology.

### Research methods

Practical studies of social cohesion in the focus of intercultural studies were conducted in the university community of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University in 2019, 2020 (during quarantine), and twice in 2022 (in January, among participants of the SCAES winter school, and during the war) were conducted using the author's questionnaire. This author's questionnaire is the adaptation of the methodology of the Bertelsmann Stiftung company "Social Cohesion Radar" (Nesterova et al., 2019). The original Bertelsmann Stiftung method for measuring social cohesion in society is based on creating an index of social cohesion and comparing its level among different countries. The logical assumption of their approach is the correspondence of a complex social concept of social cohesion, described using a complex system of parameters in the form of a series of separate indicators that are combined into a common index (Dragolov et al., 2013).

It should be stressed, that there are additional advantages of the "Social Cohesion Radar" model, which allow it to be used to analyze complex social phenomena and processes, in particular intercultural communications. The specificity of the model lies in the logical hierarchical structure of indicators that allows for analysis in detail of such a complex concept of social cohesion by important socio-psychological parameters. This is a hierarchical structure of generalized domains, each of which is described by three spheres, and each of these three spheres is described by indicators that can be measured separately. There are three main domains: "**Social Relations**", "**Connectedness**", and "**Focus on the Common Good**", which could be considered macro parameters for society. These domains are related to the following spheres:

The domain "**Social Relations**" contains the following spheres:

- social connections;
- trust in people;
- acceptance of diversity (acceptance of otherness).

The "**Connectedness**" domain contains the following spheres:

- identification;
- trust in institutions;
- perception of fairness.

The third domain, "**Focus on the Common Good**", covers the following spheres:

- solidarity and helpfulness;
- respect for social rules;
- civic participation (Dragolov et al., 2013).

Each sphere is described by at least three indicators. Authors of the adopted methodology find the appropriate indicators by taking into consideration the specifics of the educational community and evidence of the indicators. For intercultural studies, we can presume the key factor is trust, at the personal level, firstly. Trust is not only one of the key values of social cohesion in terms of "cohesion" (often referred to as the social cohesion level parameter). Trust is also a social phenomenon. The ability to trust should be seen as a cognitive evolutionary mechanism of connections and cohesion in different social groups (Nesterova et al., 2020). There are three types of trust:

yourself, other people, to the world. They also distinguish between interpersonal trust (as trust in people) and institutional trust (as trust in abstract systems) (Doktorova, 2014). The Social Cohesion Model by Bertelsmann Stiftung considers trust as the main sphere of social cohesion definition. This approach allows including the concept of trust in the complex and meaningful spheres of social cohesion according to the Model. Also, it confirms our considerations of trust and social cohesion as key parameters of intercultural communication. To investigate this connection, we can focus on two spheres: “Social Relations” and “Connectedness”. Therefore, our intercultural studies continue investigations of the cognitive aspects of trust, which are necessary for monitoring, analytics, and corrective actions for the development of an effective educational environment. It has been shown that the level of trust is directly correlated with the level of social cohesion (in particular, the level of “connectedness”) in university communities. The problem of the development of an effective educational environment based on values (trust, tolerance, understanding, etc.) is quite complex in the era of the annihilation of traditional values and the aggressive nature of the information environment (Nesterova et al., 2020).

**Results and Discussion of the research**

For accessing the level of social cohesion we used a questionnaire that consists of 27 questions, where three questions for each area, and three questions for differentiation - male/female, student/employee of HEIs from the above-described questionnaire (Nesterova et al., 2019). 27 questions of the adapted questionnaire were placed in a mixed order excluding the linearity of answers. Every question of the questionnaire is evaluated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is low, 2 is below average, 3 is average, 4 is above average, and 5 was high. This research was held three times to evaluate the dynamics of social cohesion in the educational community. For a more correct analysis in this article, we compare the results of the researched community of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University (NPDU). Here are the presented results of all three investigations and namely for 2019, 2020, and 2022 years.

In 2019 there were 112 people interviewed, among them 47 employees of HEI and 65 – students. In 2020

total number of participants in the analysis was 94, where employees are 21, and students – 73. And in last research of 2022 took part 156 respondents, where more than 78% are students (123 person) and almost 22% are employees. It is evident that the number of students is bigger since the number of employees in the university is less. That explains the difference between their quantity in research. Besides students more tend to take part in research than lecturers.

For the measurement of intercultural communication, we use another questionnaire. This questionnaire was prepared in accordance with the study of acceptance of multicultural diversity and adapted to the educational establishment.

With this methodology, we are going to identify the specifics of knowledge, and practical and promotional level of intercultural tolerance in an educational environment. The general logic for verifying the results is as follows: the more positive answers and the higher the degree of approval, the higher the level of intercultural competencies of the recipients in terms of knowledge (opinion), practice (activity), and promotion (perspective). A greater level of acceptance in intercultural communication leads to a greater level of social stability, economic growth, and the value of cultural diversity.

18 questions of the questionnaire are evaluated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 disagrees, 2 rather disagree, 3 difficult to answer, 4 rather agree, and 5 agree. The scale of evaluation of the results is divided into three levels: low, average, and high degree of intercultural acceptance. According to the proposed options, the answers 1 “disagree” and 2 “rather disagree” show a low level of intercultural tolerance, answer 3 “difficult to answer” goes to the average level of it, and answers 4 “rather agree” and 5 “agree” show the high level of the respondents' intercultural competences.

There were 230 students and 42 lecturers of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University interviewed. In common 272 people took part in the research, which was held in 2020.

Firstly, we will analyze the level of social cohesion. The obtained results show some changes in it. Results are presented in table 1.

**Table 1.**  
**The resulting table for assessing social cohesion in the NPDU by groups, 2019-2022**

| Domain and dimensions            | Study 2019  |             |             | Study 2020  |             |             | Study 2022  |             |             |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                                  | IG*         | E*          | S*          | IG          | E           | S           | IG          | E           | S           |
| Social networks                  | 3.71        | 3.62        | 3.77        | 3.67        | 3.75        | 3.62        | 3,63        | 4,03        | 3,53        |
| Trust in people                  | 3.81        | 3.70        | 3.89        | 3.90        | 3.46        | 4.00        | 4,01        | 3,89        | 4,04        |
| Acceptance of diversity          | 4.28        | 4.42        | 4.18        | 4.32        | 4.35        | 4.28        | 4,19        | 4,29        | 4,16        |
| <b>Domain “Social relations”</b> | <b>3.93</b> | <b>3.91</b> | <b>3.95</b> | <b>3.96</b> | <b>3.85</b> | <b>3.97</b> | <b>3,94</b> | <b>4,07</b> | <b>3,91</b> |

| Domain and dimensions                    | Study 2019  |             |             | Study 2020  |             |             | Study 2022  |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|  | IG*         | E*          | S*          | IG          | E           | S           | IG          | E           | S           |
| Identification                           | 2.99        | 2.90        | 3.05        | 2.86        | 2.60        | 2.95        | 3,08        | 3,18        | 3,05        |
| Trust in institutions                    | 3.43        | 3.28        | 3.55        | 3.37        | 3.13        | 3.40        | 3,68        | 3,37        | 3,76        |
| Perception of fairness                   | 2.76        | 2.88        | 2.68        | 2.62        | 2.76        | 2.55        | 2,76        | 2,80        | 2,75        |
| <b>Domain "Connectedness"</b>            | <b>3.06</b> | <b>3.02</b> | <b>3.09</b> | <b>2.95</b> | <b>2.83</b> | <b>2.96</b> | <b>3,17</b> | <b>3,12</b> | <b>3,19</b> |
| Solidarity and helpfulness               | 3.67        | 3.65        | 3.69        | 3.62        | 3.51        | 3.60        | 3,84        | 4,01        | 3,79        |
| Respect for social rules                 | 3.64        | 3.66        | 3.63        | 3.81        | 3.98        | 3.74        | 3,96        | 4,10        | 3,92        |
| Civic participation                      | 2.40        | 2.21        | 2.53        | 2.45        | 2.46        | 2.43        | 2,59        | 2,95        | 2,50        |
| <b>Domain "Focus on the common good"</b> | <b>3.24</b> | <b>3.17</b> | <b>3.29</b> | <b>3.29</b> | <b>3.32</b> | <b>3.26</b> | <b>3,46</b> | <b>3,69</b> | <b>3,40</b> |

\* Where IG means "in general", E means "employees", S is "students"

For better understanding of dynamics of social cohesion in education community we present obtained results on the following figures.

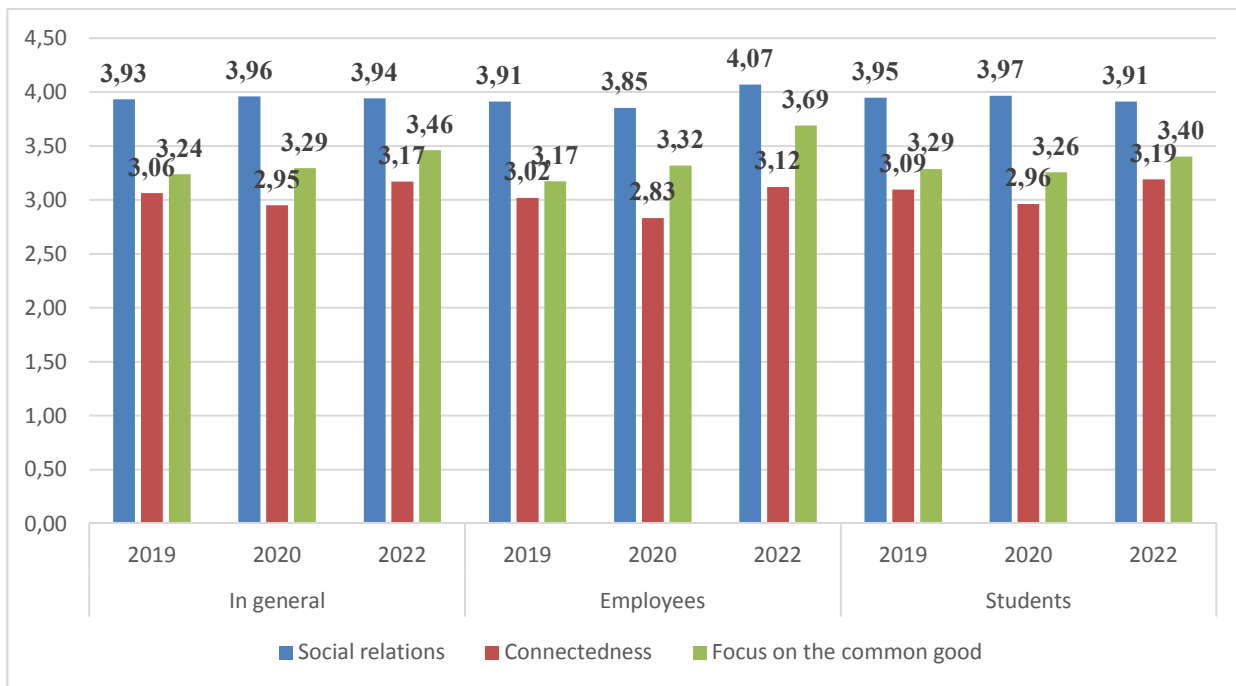


Figure 1. Domain values in 2019-2022 in general and by groups

According to the table and figure 1 we can conclude that in general "Social relations" in 2022 became less important than it was in 2020, but its result is higher than in 2019. It is decent to mention that the difference between years is not valuable. Especially, taking into account next domains "Connectedness" and "Focus on social groups", "Connectedness" notably fluctuates during analyzing period, but in war time it becomes much higher than it was during the pandemic time in 2020 (from 2,95 in 2020 till 3,17 in 2022), and "Focus on the common good" is growing steadily.

Taking a look at groups, we can observe that among employees "Social relations" increased in 2022 in comparison to 2020, but among students, controversy decreased. Domain "Connectedness" has the same tendency by all analyzed groups. It means that employees as well as students perceive connectedness in society in the same way. "Focus on the common good" is marked by growing in every evaluating group.

On the following figures we present changes by domains during period of 2019-2022 and inside analyzed groups.

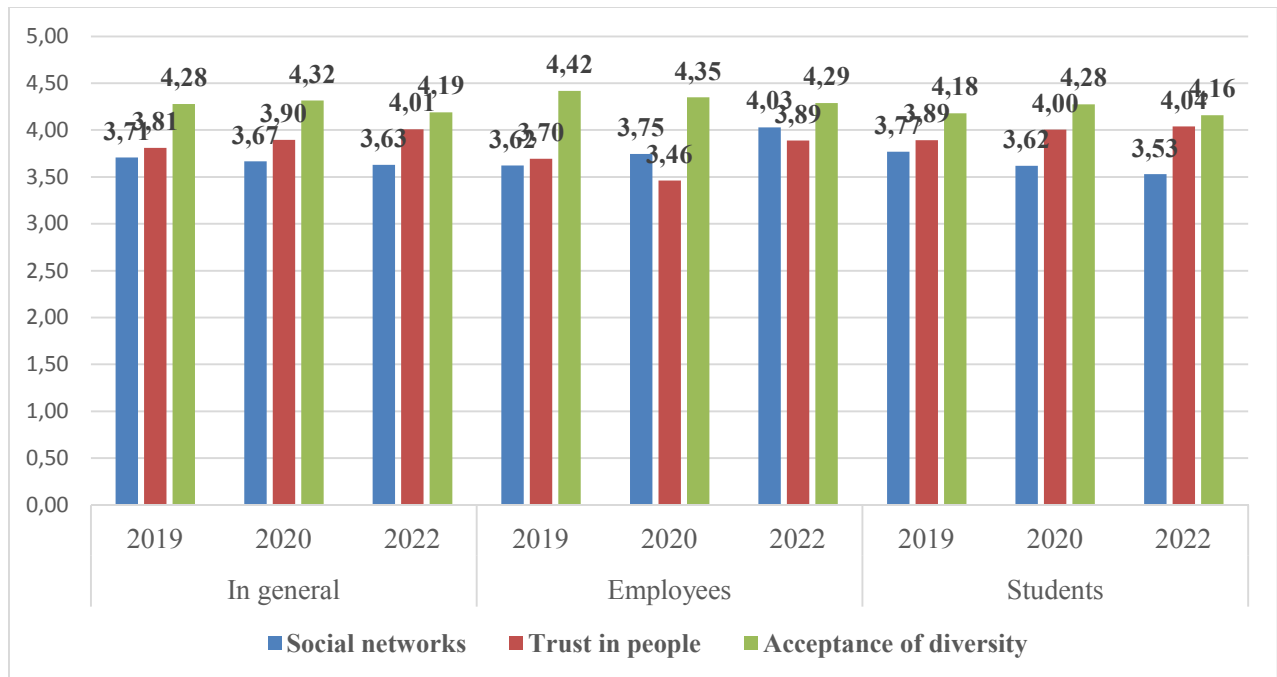


Figure 2. Changes of dimensions by domain "Social relations"

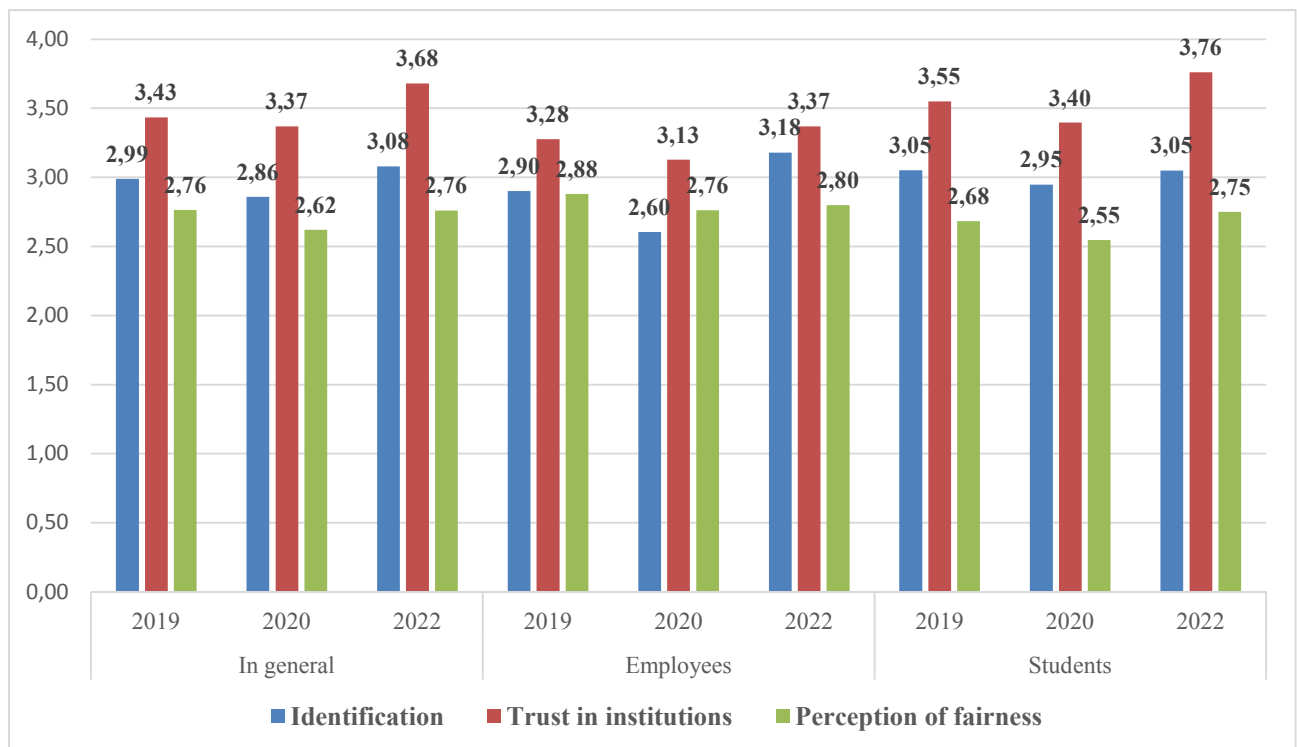


Figure 3. Changes of dimensions by domain "Connectedness"

The analysis of directions by domain shows the following results: The domain "Social relations" consists of three directions, "Social networks", "Trust in people", "Acceptance of diversity". Each of them differs in its dynamics, which have different trends within the analyzed groups. Social networks as a whole had a tendency to decrease during the analyzed period, but in the group of employees of higher education institutions, this indicator increased both in the comparison of 2020 and 2019, as

well as in 2022 and 2020. On the other hand, in the group of students, it decreases in each year of the study, which is reflected in the general dimension's results. For students, social networks play a smaller role every year than before.

"Trust in people" on a whole is increasing, although it decreased among workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased significantly during martial law. Among students, this indicator increased during the analyzed

period, which indicates an improvement in trust in people among young people and has an important positive mark in social cohesion of students.

“The acceptance of diversity” has a different result from the previous dimension – its indicator decreased during the war in Ukraine. Among employees, it decreased throughout the analyzed period, and among students it increased during the pandemic with a further decrease in 2022. Which means that the educational community is less willing than before to accept diversity of the other people.

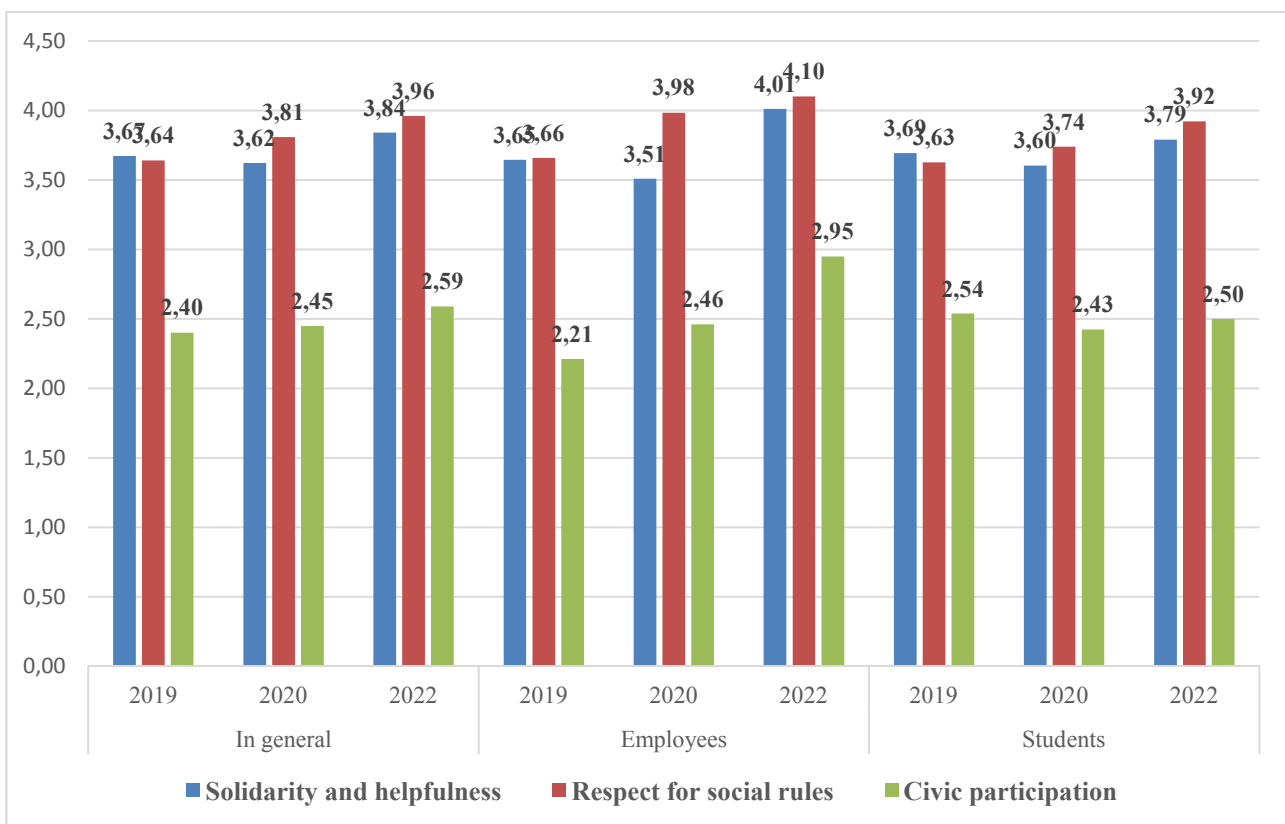
The next domain, “Connectedness”, also has mixed results in its dimensions: “Identification” decreased during the pandemic, but increased significantly during the war. This applies to both groups: employees and students. Which can be interpreted as the fact that they identified less with the institution earlier, but in the current conditions, the level of identification with their community has increased (for employees the difference is significant).

“Trust in institutions” increased in all analyzed groups in 2022, unlike in 2020. The increase of this dimension is quite large, and it is the largest among students (0.36 points). This dynamic indicates an increase of trust during the war in both institutions and people (what has been already discussed in the previous domain).

“Acceptance of fairness” also has a positive trend in 2022 compared to 2020, when it decreased in all analyzed groups.

This domain is characterized by the same changes in all groups and positive dynamics in all dimensions, which means an increase in self-identification with the community, trust in institutions and a positive perception of justice towards oneself.

Finally, based on this methodology, we present Figure 4, which displays the dynamics of directions in the domain “Focus on the common good”.



**Figure 4. Changes of dimensions by domain "Focus on the common good"**

According to this figure, we also observe growth in all dimensions. “Solidarity and helpfulness” has positive dynamics for all groups, although the increase in solidarity among employees of higher education institutions is much greater than among students.

“Respect for social rules” also increased compared to 2020 across all groups.

“Civic participation” deserves special attention, according to which the level of participation has increased both among employees and among students, but among employees the increase is almost 0.5 points, which is 0.47 points more than the increase of students, that is, employees have become more involved in civic life than

before and more than youth. However, it is worth noting that this dimension has the lowest results in this domain, so it is worth further developing and stimulating the participation of all groups in civic life.

Next, we will move on to the analysis of intercultural communications.

We conducted a study, the methodology of which was described above, and the results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
**The result of research of intercultural communication in 2020**

| Categories and blocks | In general | Employees | Students |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------|----------|
| CV*                   | 4,46       | 4,40      | 4,47     |
| CopV*                 | 4,28       | 4,23      | 4,29     |
| Opinion               | 4,37       | 4,32      | 4,38     |
| AM*                   | 3,75       | 4,04      | 3,70     |
| AR*                   | 3,79       | 3,99      | 3,75     |
| Activity              | 3,77       | 4,02      | 3,72     |
| PC*                   | 3,57       | 3,50      | 3,58     |
| CP*                   | 3,96       | 3,82      | 3,98     |
| Perspective           | 3,76       | 3,66      | 3,78     |

\* Where CV is the value of culture, CoIV – the value of collaboration, AM - motivation of activity, AR – realization of activity, PC – plurality of cultures, CP – unity of cultural practices.

In this research we investigated intercultural communication by three blocks: “Opinion”, “Activity”, “Perspective”.

Our analysis of the entire sample without subdivision into subgroups showed that “Opinion” prevails over other categories. This means that it was important for respondents to understand the importance of their culture, its knowledge and respect for the cultures of others, tolerance in the perception of different cultures. Analysis of the blocks within this category showed that the value of cultures is more important than the cooperation value, but the difference is not very significant.

By activity, we mean willingness to collaborate across cultures is an important characteristic of today's globalized world. This category was equal to 3.77, its blocks have almost equal values on average - activity motivation - 3.75 and activity realization - 3.79.

Another category - Perspective - that is, what awaits cultural cooperation in the future according to the opinion and expectations of respondents. Thus, in our survey, this category received the lowest indicators - 3.76, but it was not much less than the previous one. Blocks within the category showed that respondents tend to combine cultural practices (3.96) against cultural pluralism (3.57).

In common, we can say that all indicators were above average, which positively characterized the attitude of students and teachers of the university to other cultures, their perception of other cultures, tolerance, and willingness to cooperate and combine cultural activities. This is important at this time because Ukraine is on the path to European integration, where one of the main values is respect and acceptance of cultural diversity.

If we extrapolate the results of this study to results of social cohesion research, we can see some correlation. But not mathematically calculated due to difference in respondents' groups. Just observation of the results gives us possibility to presume that there is some connection between social cohesion and intercultural communication. But we can compare only results of 2020.

“Social relations” are the most important for the interviewed respondents, among whom “Acceptance of diversity” is prevalent and coincides with the significant results of CV and CoIV in cross-cultural research. The activity

that involves cooperation in the world in the conditions of multiculturalism has average results and they do not differ much from “Social relations” in the study of social cohesion and “Solidarity and helpfulness”, which can also imply an international level of solidarity.

### Conclusions

As a result of research on social cohesion and intercultural communication, we can talk about certain changes in social cohesion during 2019-2022. Almost all indicators of cohesion have positive dynamics in war conditions, which reflects people's understanding of the importance of cohesion. Although there are some differences inside the results of the groups of employees and students, but, in general, they are not striking. Survey participants showed an understanding of the importance of social networks, identification with their community, readiness to accept and tolerate differences, readiness to be helpful and supportive, to have a more active civic position, etc. It is worth noting that in 2020 the study was conducted during the COVID pandemic and some dimensions and domains received lower results than in the previous study and the subsequent one. This can be explained by the fact that during the pandemic people tried to be more secluded, and during martial law they understand that grouping and cohesion has more positive consequences.

The 2020 Social Cohesion Results and the Cross-Cultural Survey showed a certain connection. The level of intercultural communication was at an average level, which correlated with certain indicators of social cohesion (social networks, acceptance of diversity, solidarity and helpfulness, civic participation). This may indicate that social cohesion cannot be separated from intercultural communication either. The willingness of people to group together in one community can also mean the willingness to group together in a larger community within the framework of intercultural communications. This becomes particularly relevant in the current conditions of war in Ukraine and large waves of migration processes between Ukraine and the rest of the world.

The following investigation of the authors will be devoted to the current research on the level of intercultural communication to compare the results of 2022 as well.

### Gratitudes

The authors are grateful to all participants of the research. The above research is part of the project's implementation in the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University of Jean Monnet Chair "Social Cultural Aspects of European Studies" (SCAES) 620635-EPP-1-2020-1-UA-EPPJMO-CHAIR. The above project has been funded with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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## Соціальна згуртованість та міжкультурні дослідження в освітній спільноті

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У статті показано важливу роль соціальної згуртованості як соціального феномену, її вплив на розвиток суспільства та міжкультурну комунікацію. Також показана соціальна роль довіри, зокрема, у розвитку соціальної згуртованості та, відповідно, соціальної стабільності суспільства. Соціальна згуртованість як складне соціальне явище аналізується авторами у фокусі міжкультурних досліджень. Метою дослідження є вивчення важливих сфер соціальної згуртованості, пов'язаних з міжкультурною комунікацією в освітній спільноті, зокрема, в університетській спільноті Національного педагогічного університету імені Драгоманова. Дослідження проводилося у декілька етапів, у тому числі в умовах кризових станів суспільства – пандемії та війни в Україні. Це дослідження продовжує загальний цикл досліджень соціальної згуртованості, які проводяться в Національному педагогічному університеті імені Драгоманова з 2016 року і демонструє один з його поточних етапів. Методологічний інструмент являє собою адаптацію моделі "Радар соціальної згуртованості" на рівні університетської спільноти. Дослідження засноване на первинних даних з авторського опитувальника. Продемонстровано важливу роль соціальної згуртованості, довіри та цінностей у міжкультурній комунікації.

**Ключові слова:** освіта, освітня спільнота, соціальна згуртованість, довіра, університетська спільнота, цінності.

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Received (Надійшла до редакції): 22.06.2022,  
Accepted (Прийнята до друку): 09.08.2022  
Available online (Опубліковано онлайн) 01 .09.2022