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**CURRENT INTERCULTURAL ISSUES IN EUROPE  
AND WAYS HOW TO HANDLE THEM**

Diploma Thesis

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**UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA**  
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**Affirmation**

**I hereby confirm that I have elaborated this work independently and stated all the sources I have used.**

**Date:**

.....

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## ABSTRAKT

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Cieľom predkladanej diplomovej práce je analýza súčasných interkultúrnych problémov na území Slovenskej republiky medzi dvoma národnými kultúrami, konkrétne slovenskou a ukrajinskou. Práca vychádza z predpokladu, že stret týchto dvoch kultúr je na Slovensku veľmi častý kvôli vysokému počtu príslušníkov ukrajinskej národnosti na tomto území. Po identifikácii výskytu interkultúrnych problémov práca taktiež navrhuje možné spôsoby ich riešenia. Okrem primárneho cieľa práce sme sa snažili zistiť vzájomnú percepciu týchto dvoch kultúr, čo bolo zároveň čiastkovým cieľom práce. Usudzujúc, že práve kultúrne rozdielnosti medzi týmito dvoma kultúrami prispievajú k vzniku interkultúrnych konfliktov či nedorozumení v komunikácii, sme v teoretickej časti práce analyzovali kultúrne profily oboch krajín na určenie stupňa podobnosti či rozdielnosti týchto dvoch národných kultúr a to metódou komparatívnej analýzy. Za účelom splnenia cieľov boli v práci kombinované kvalitatívne aj kvantitatívne výskumné metódy. Primárny empirický výskum bol uskutočnený formou online dotazníkov, ktoré boli distribuované slovenskému aj ukrajinskému obyvateľstvu. Výsledky tohto výskumu sú pomocou analýzy odpovedí respondentov zhromaždené a vyhodnotené v tretej kapitole diplomovej práce. Výskum bol do značnej miery ovplyvnený súčasnou situáciou na Ukrajine, kvôli ktorej sme ho na znak solidarity s ukrajinským obyvateľstvom predčasne ukončili. Súčasťou práce sú prílohy, v ktorých sa nachádzajú dotazníky.

**Kľúčové slová:** interkultúrny problém, slovenská kultúra, ukrajinská kultúra, interkultúrny tréning, interkultúrne kompetencie

## **ABSTRACT**

Ružbarská, Viktória: *Current Intercultural Issues in Europe and Ways How to Handle Them* – The University of Economics in Bratislava. Faculty of Applied Languages; Department of Intercultural Communication – Supervisor: Mgr. Michaela Čiefová, PhD. – Bratislava: FAJ, 2022, 76 pages

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the current intercultural issues in the Slovak Republic between two national cultures, namely Slovak and Ukrainian. The thesis assumes that the encounter of these two cultures is very frequent in Slovakia due to the high number of representatives of Ukrainian nationality in this territory. After identifying the occurrence of intercultural problems, the thesis also gives recommendations for their solution. In addition to the primary objective of the thesis, we tried to examine the mutual perception of the two cultures, which constituted a partial objective. Considering that it is the cultural differences between the two cultures that contribute to the emergence of intercultural conflicts or misunderstandings in communication, in the theoretical part of the thesis we analysed the cultural profiles of the two countries to determine the degree of similarity or dissimilarity of the two national cultures using the method of comparative analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to meet the objectives of the thesis. Primary empirical research was conducted in the form of online questionnaires, which were distributed to both the Slovak and Ukrainian populations. The results of the empirical research are collected and evaluated in the third chapter of the thesis by analysing the answers of the respondents. The research was largely influenced by the current situation in Ukraine, because of which we decided to suspend it earlier as a sign of solidarity with the Ukrainian population. The thesis also includes attachments that comprise questionnaires.

**Keywords:** intercultural issue, Slovak culture, Ukrainian culture, intercultural training, intercultural competences

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## **List of abbreviations**

IBM International Business Machines Corporation

IDV Individualism index

IVR Indulgence index

LTO Long term orientation index

MAS Masculinity index

NGO Non-governmental organization

PDI Power distance index

UAI Uncertainty avoidance index

USA The United States of America

V4 The Visegrad Four

## **Introduction**

In the 21st century, due to globalisation and migration flows, the topic of intercultural communication and all aspects related to this matter are increasingly being discussed in society. Not only in Europe, but all over the world, various cultures meet, and precisely for this reason a growing number of researchers and experts are dealing with this issue. These experts are engaged in the study of intercultural issues and the reasons for possible problems that might arise during the process of intercultural exchange of information.

The presented master thesis aims to investigate the current intercultural issues in Europe, and in addition, it also presents methods of solving such challenges. In order to be able to formulate and suggest possible recommendations, it was necessary to first identify the occurrence of events of intercultural misunderstandings.

Given the broad nature of our work, we decided to analyse intercultural problems between two specific cultures in a defined territory, namely between Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures in Slovakia. The reason for selecting to investigate these two cultures was the fact that the number of members of the Ukrainian culture on the territory of Slovakia is highly significant, as evidenced by the International Organization for Migration, which claims that the number of citizens of Ukraine in the total number of foreigners in the Slovak Republic was up to 33.7% in 2021. The current situation, which has had a significant impact on migration flows and caused a significant influx of Ukrainian refugees to the territory of Slovakia, makes this topic of Slovak-Ukrainian intercultural relations even more relevant.

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first part of the thesis is theoretical and provides a theoretical background to the second part of the thesis, which is empirical research on the cultural perception and intercultural issues between the two selected national cultures.

The main part of the thesis is composed of four chapters. The objective of the first chapter is to provide definitions of the terms that are related to this topic. It describes concepts such as intercultural communication, national culture, intercultural competence, or intercultural conflict, which is pivotal in the context of our work. We have defined these concepts mainly based on the findings of Geert Hofstede, Jan Průcha, Nový and Schroll, but also other foreign or Slovak authors.

The second subchapter of the Chapter 1 addresses the actual differences between the two cultures examined since the thesis assumes that the problems between the two national cultures stem from their distinctions. These are explained using Hofstede's description of cultural dimensions since it is Hofstede's insights that form the basis for understanding intercultural topics.

The second chapter explains the methods and objectives of the thesis. The thesis is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The main research of the thesis was conducted in the form of online questionnaires, which were distributed to the Slovak population and members of Ukrainian culture living in Slovakia. The main objective of the thesis is to identify intercultural issues between the two cultures and to suggest possible suggestions to these problems.

The third chapter describes the results of empirical research, the aim of which was to identify events of intercultural misunderstandings between Ukrainian and Slovak cultures in the territory of the Slovak Republic. For a better understanding of such intercultural issues, the mutual perception of the two cultures is also examined, which may reveal a certain degree of stereotypes or prejudices towards the other culture that make the process of intercultural communication more difficult.

The fourth chapter, entitled Discussion and Recommendations, presents the assertions found by our research and clarifies if the research was able to identify cross-cultural misunderstandings between the two cultures. Based on the results of the research, provides possible suggestions for solving the intercultural problems between Ukrainian and Slovak national cultures.

This thesis aims to reveal the occurrence of these intercultural problems, their causes, and possible solutions. The suggested remedies can have a very positive impact on improving relations between representatives of Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures, and thus increase the level of mutual understanding and cooperation.

It is pivotal to mention that the work was greatly influenced by the critical situation in Ukraine and the subsequent refugee crisis, as we decided to stop our research as a sign of solidarity toward the Ukrainian population.

The thesis also includes attachments that comprise questionnaires. Considering the respondents, the first questionnaire is in the Slovak language and the second in the Ukrainian language.

# **1 The current state of the analysed issue**

The theoretical part of the present thesis will address the underlying theoretical perspectives of various authors who have researched topics associated with intercultural communication and differences in national cultures.

The first subchapter explains the concepts that are fundamental for the thesis and that provide the basis for its empirical part. We will explain concepts such as culture, which we will interpret from several perspectives, national culture, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, and last but not least intercultural conflict, which is pivotal for the present thesis. The second subchapter constitutes a comparative analysis of the cultural dimensions of the countries we have chosen to examine in the empirical part of the thesis.

## **1.1 Theoretical background and definitions of basic concepts**

### *1.1.1 The concept of culture from different viewpoints*

In the 21st century, due to the phenomenon of globalization, there are constant encounters of different cultures and sometimes it can lead to various intercultural problems and conflicts. To better understand these intercultural phenomena, it is first crucial to define culture, and thus from various perspectives.

Nowadays, many definitions of culture exist that look at culture from several viewpoints. The name culture comes from the Latin word *cultura* derived from the word *colere*, which means "to cultivate". Sokol explains this relationship between the origin of the word culture and culture itself by the fact that culture requires certain care because it is alive only if a certain community cultivates and improves it. Thomas (1996) supports this theory by claiming that all people live in the specific culture they develop. Thus, each individual is a bearer of culture, and Olejárová (2007) adds that man is not only the creator of culture but also its product, which means that it is a culture that drives people in their behaviour.

Slušná (2015) defines the narrow, broader, and the broadest and the most general meaning of culture. In its narrow sense, she perceives culture as a sector of art, which includes mass and popular art manifestations in addition to music, literature, and theatre. The broader meaning of culture encompasses everyday manifestations of a certain group of people, such as rituals, social practices, or manifestations of the way of life, which differentiate individual cultures. The most general meaning of culture defines as a set of norms, beliefs, or certain values that are typical of a particular community of people. Slušná

(2015) adds that social anthropology perceives culture as a set of ordinary activities such as eating, greeting, or expressing emotions.

One of the best-known psychologists dealing with the definition and the characteristics of culture, Geert Hofstede (2007), uses the term “mental programs”, which he calls the patterns of thinking, feeling, and human behaviour. He justifies this by saying that the resources of these mental programs come from the environment in which people grew up and lived so that such "programming" begins in the family and continues in the environment that shapes man as an individual. Hofstede considers such mental programming to be a collective phenomenon because it is shared with people from the same social environment in which people learned it, and it is this mental programming that differentiates one group of people from another.

All scientists who deal with culture thus prove that culture covers a very wide area, from art objects to the setting of the human mind.

### *1.1.2 National culture*

From culture in general we can move to the definition of national culture, considering that potential intercultural problems which are addressed in the present thesis, may arise due to large cultural differences or lack of intercultural competencies between two national cultures.

There are several definitions of a nation, most of which consider certain common criteria. Hofstede (2006) explains nations as political units to which the world is currently divided and to which each individual should belong. He sees the difference between nations and societies, reasoning that societies unlike nations were formed based on social organizations and not political power. A common culture is not typical of nations but societies, considering the fact that culture does not derive from political power, but is developed in societies. Hofstede adds that there are elements in nations that promote integration such as the national language, the national education system, the national army, and the political system. However, many nations include communities that are not fully integrated with the dominant culture of the nation, and they seek to promote the recognition of their own identity and, in some cases, to gain national independence. These cultural groups could be referred to as national minorities.

Průcha (2004) defines a nation as a special and conscious cultural and political community, whose formation was most influenced by a common history and a common

territory. He also adds cultural criteria which identify every nation. These are common language or common religion, criteria of political existence, and psychological criteria. Nations could share some criteria, especially adjacent nations, for instance, the countries of Central Europe have the same predominant religion, which is Christianity. For members of a particular nation, culture imparts a sense of certain phenomena and to some extent defines their belonging.

These definitions imply that each nation has its specific cultural criteria that define its inhabitants and constitute a national culture. Nový (2015) states that a national culture is a culture that has been developed throughout history by a large number of people who were born or feel like members of a certain nation and defines that culture as the one that determines their existence. He adds that national culture embodies the collective consciousness of the population, traditional values, norms, and the rules of human behaviour.

In the definition of national culture, Dvořáková (2004) also adds factors that influence it, such as attitudes shaped by family upbringing, early educational experiences, religion, language, roles in society, and various institutions. She argues that the national culture encompasses the knowledge, beliefs, morals, and customs that are required of a person as a member of society.

However, this thesis will explore the culture and intercultural differences mainly by referring to Hofstede's research, since it was Hofstede who laid the foundations of research on national cultures, and his cultural models have become the most cited and used in this field.

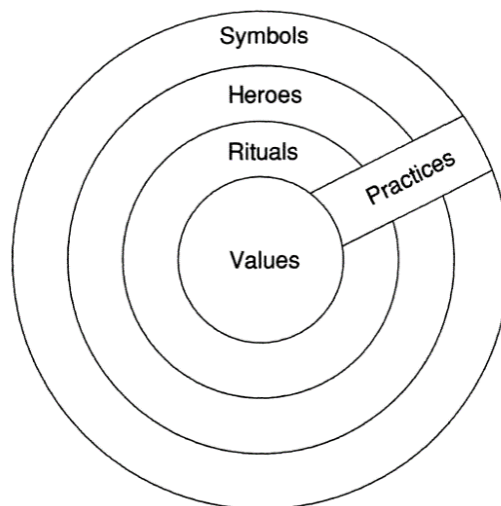
In examining cultural differences, Hofstede (2006) sees nationality as a key element, adding that in most cross-cultural research it is the only aspect that can be used. He states that certain collective characteristics are attributed to members of certain nations. But this does not necessarily mean that these attributes apply to all members of a particular nation, since, as noted above, nations also include minority groups that are, in most cases, culturally distinct from the dominant culture. However, this thesis will focus on intercultural differences between national dominant cultures, not between minority cultures.

Cultural differences can be demonstrated in diverse ways. With Hofstede's research as one of the main theoretical foundations of this thesis, we will explore these cultural differences based on his cultural models.



Hofstede (2005) uses four terms that best describe the manifestations of culture, and these are symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. He explained the accessibility of these manifestations of culture using the onion model, implying that the outer layers consist of elements that are visibly accessible to other cultures. The symbols represent languages, words, flags, clothing, images, and various objects that have a specific meaning for members of a given culture. Over time new symbols emerge, and the old ones disappear. The symbols of one culture are easily visible and accessible to other cultures, which is the reason why other cultures tend to imitate them. Therefore, the symbols are found on the highest layer of the onion model.

**Image61: Hofstede's Cultural Onion Model**



Source: HOFSTEDE, G. (2001): Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations, p.11

Beneath the layer of symbols lie heroes who are becoming increasingly important in the era of television. Such heroes can also include surreal figures portrayed in modern fairy tales, such as Janko Hraško in Slovakia or Batman in the USA. Cultural heroes personify important qualities and values of a certain culture. Rituals are collective practices that society considers fundamental. These include, for example, how representatives of one culture salute each other or conduct different ceremonies. The last stratum consists of values, which means that they are not very approachable to other cultures. Unlike symbols, heroes, and rituals, which are manifestations of practice or so-called practices, values form the core of a culture. Values are characterized as general tendencies to prefer certain states of reality over others.

In addition, Hofstede built on the research of sociologist Axel Inkeles and psychologist Daniel Levinson, who developed social anthropology's view that all societies

solve basic problems, but the solutions to those problems are different. In 1954, these two American scientists published extensive studies in which they described 4 basic issues that every culture deals with. According to Hofstede (2001), these issues involved the relationship to authority, the relationship between the individual and society, individual conceptions of masculinity and femininity; conflict and its resolution, which includes controlling aggression and expressing vs. repressing emotions.

A few years later, Hofstede had access to the results of an employee values survey from the multinational corporation IBM. Employees at this company represented a perfect sample for examining their common problems, as they were similar in certain aspects, except for nationality. The problems they solved were similar, but their approaches and solutions were different. The empirical results of this study were consistent with those predicted by Inkeles and Levinson 20 years earlier. Based on this, Hofstede provided a four-dimensional model that describes the differences between national cultures, namely the power distance, collectivism vs. individualism, masculinity vs femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. In 1980 Hofstede conducted another research, based on which he also defined the fifth dimension, the long term vs. short term orientation.

This thesis will describe these cultural dimensions in more detail using a comparative analysis of the cultural dimensions of Slovakia and Ukraine in the next chapter.

### *1.1.3 Basic aspects of intercultural communication*

Since this thesis deals with the research of intercultural problems, it is necessary to define intercultural communication as the process during which these intercultural problems arise for assorted reasons.

Průcha (2010) explains that people from different nations and cultures have been interacting since the beginning of civilization. However, at present, intercultural communication is much more frequent than in the past. This fact confirms Olejárová (2007) who states that the phenomenon of intercultural communication is expanding at present, as under the influence of globalization and internationalization in economic life, organizations with international representation are emerging, employing people with distinct cultural backgrounds.

Hasil (2011) holds a similar view but adds that the phenomenon of intercultural communication in Europe is increasing due to the unification of Europe and Europe becoming a destination country for international migration. An increased number of people

are coming to Europe, seeking refuge from the unfavourable situation at home. Therefore, intercultural communication is inevitable nowadays.

Dolinská (2004) defines intercultural communication as communication between members of different cultures when they are aware of the cultural differences of their partners, provided they have a thorough knowledge of their own culture.

Průcha (2010) provides three meanings of the term intercultural communication. In the first definition, he considers intercultural communication to be the process of verbal and nonverbal exchange of information in various social situations. In the second definition, he considers intercultural communication as a scientific theory and research that deals with the processes of intercultural communication. In his third definition, intercultural communication includes practical educational and support activities that are based on intercultural communication as a scientific theory.

This thesis will consider the first meaning of the term intercultural communication, thus *“the intercultural communication as a term used to describe processes of interaction and communication that takes place in various types of situations in which the communicating partners are members of linguistically and/or culturally different ethnicities, nations, racial or religious communities. This communication is determined by the specifics of the communicating partners' languages, cultures, mentalities, and value systems.”* (Průcha, 2010, p.16)

According to this definition, intercultural communication is strongly influenced by various linguistic and cultural factors. Průcha (2010) adds that in communication where participants come from linguistically similar cultures, cultural difference is the main determinant whereas, in intercultural communication whose participants' cultural differences are relatively insignificant linguistic differences may be more significant. And, of course, there are nations whose cultural and linguistic differences are so strong that both factors are determinants of such communication.

Nový (2005) also takes into consideration cultural differences when defining intercultural communication. He states that it is the process of communication when representatives of distinct cultures meet, and in which the cultural differences of the partners decisively influence the processes as well as the outcome of the communication event.

However, Nový (2005) focuses on the issue of such communication, arguing that when two cultures come together and people from unfamiliar cultures become more important to each other, communicating, and interacting together, misunderstandings in communication and interaction are much more likely to occur than in monocultural settings.

Delgadová (2013) also emphasizes the problems of intercultural communication. She claims that it is a complex process in which a large number of misunderstandings can arise as a result of both a lack of knowledge of the language of the culture concerned and other circumstances arising from cultural differences and their misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

As already mentioned, in intercultural communication, language plays a vital role, as it is a basic precondition for such communication to occur. Nový (2005) confirms that by claiming that in the context of intercultural communication, the focus is often on the importance of the interlocutor's language in the host country because only perfect knowledge of a foreign language enables intercultural understanding and creates the prerequisite for successful intercultural contact. However, intercultural communication often takes place in a third language, such as English. Nový (2005) argues that this type of high-level intercultural communication is not possible because even if both participants are proficient in the third language, the information that one communicator wants to share with the other based on his or her specific cultural understanding may be lost in the exchange of information in the third language and the associated decoding and encoding. He also demonstrates the importance of foreign language proficiency in intercultural communication in situations where, for example, both communicants have various levels of language proficiency. In such a case, it is quite common that the communicant who has the better language skills is in a superior situation, while his interlocutor is in a subordinate situation. This asymmetrical relationship can make the communication process exceedingly difficult and have a significant impact on its outcome.

Intercultural communication is therefore an overly complex process in which many problems can arise due to distinct cultural backgrounds. However, if the people involved in such communication have certain skills or characteristics, intercultural problems are less likely to occur. This type of characteristic will be analysed in the next subchapter.

#### *1.1.4 Intercultural competences*

As already mentioned, intercultural communication is influenced by several factors. In addition to language competencies, which are fundamental for such communication to occur, other competencies are needed, which directly affect the course but also the result of such intercultural contact.

Delgadová (2013) states that good intercultural competence is crucial in facilitating mutual understanding between cultures and fostering attitudes of tolerance and respect for other cultures.

According to Seresová and Helmová (2021), intercultural communication is a process influenced by personality and situational factors. The openness and communication of both partners are necessary for the success of communication. If one partner notices these traits in their partner, he or she will adjust their behaviour accordingly.

Olejárová (2007) also emphasizes the importance of communicative skills in intercultural communication, adding that international organizations require not only linguistic competencies but also a higher degree of communication skills, the ability to assess the needs of the partner and to be aware of cultural differences that can affect the entire process of communication and subsequent cooperation. She adds that managers working in such companies are required not only to master a foreign language but also to create a way of communicating that is understood by all people involved.

Nový (2005) also argues that globalization, mobility, and technology in recent decades have required new skills from people. This applies not only to professional departments, to the mentioned managers, but also to students who regularly attend studies abroad. The importance of intercultural competencies, and thus the ability to communicate effectively with people of other nationalities and cultures, is currently being talked about in terms of accepting new job applicants in an intercultural environment. Helmová and Seresová (2021) confirm that intercultural competence is one of the most important competencies required in many occupations, regardless of professional background. Many companies offer intercultural training aimed at educating employees to work in such a non-monocultural environment. Stier (2003) also recognizes the importance of intercultural competence on which the success of intercultural communication depends in today's internationalized society and defines two types, namely content competencies, which include, for example, knowledge of history, language, values, habits, customs, taboos,

symbols, and process competencies associated with situational conditions and the actors involved.

Nový (2005) defines an interculturally competent person as a person who has learned to perceive peculiarities of the host culture, understand them, and behave adequately, without giving up his or her own cultural identity. He refers to terms such as intercultural sensitivity or intercultural efficiency.

Hasil (2011) agrees with this definition and uses the term socio-cultural competencies, which he understands as the ability to communicate appropriately in diverse cultural and social situations. He argues that the integration into society, the full adaptation to the pristine environment, and the full social integration of foreigners living in a country with a different culture are fully conditioned by the handling of socio-cultural competence. Hasil (2011) also uses the term linguistic area studies, which form the necessary knowledge base to acquire socio-cultural competence.

Delgadová (2013) identifies the phases one must go through to communicate effectively in an intercultural environment. She emphasizes that it is necessary to be aware of one's own culture first, and only then can one realize the differences between cultures. It is also necessary to constantly gain new knowledge about other cultures and to gain one's own experience through active communication with individuals from other cultures.

Zelenková (2014) defines intercultural competence as a combination of several competencies that are important for the ability to communicate and act in intercultural situations in a way that the participants in the interaction can understand each other without compromising their integrity. She introduces three types of competencies that are needed to create a favourable environment for successful intercultural communication, namely the cognitive competencies, which means that the communicator must possess certain knowledge of other cultures; affective competencies, which affect how the communicator understands other cultural patterns, and behavioural competencies, which are manifested in actual actions and behaviours that respect the cultural differences.

Nový and Schroll-Machl (2005) examined how certain factors influence the formation of intercultural competencies. They define 3 approaches that guided their research on intercultural competence, which are the personalistic, situational, and interactive approaches. In addition to examining certain personality factors that promote the development of intercultural competence, they also took into account certain situational

factors that promote intercultural behaviour. The interactive relationships between personality and situational factors that influence the formation of intercultural competence were then examined in their studies.

The personalistic approach states that personality factors influence the formation of intercultural competence although certain personality factors develop positively only in the corresponding situational context, for example, in extroversion. At the same time, however, Nový and Schroll-Machl (2005) argue that in restrained cultures, extroverted actions might not be considered inter-culturally competent. Thus, we cannot say that intercultural competence is determined only by personality factors, but some of these factors have been shown to have an impact on the formation of intercultural competence, such as the ability to network easily, optimism, openness, and absence of ethnocentrism, tolerance, perspective-taking, empathy, patience, willingness to change, the ability to learn, frustration tolerance, tolerance of ambiguity, and problem-solving skills. Nový (2005) particularly emphasizes the tolerance of ambiguity, explaining this as the ability to cope with new and incomprehensible information or unpredictable actions of communicating partners. People with a high tolerance for ambiguity tend to remain in control and can communicate even in ambiguous and uncontrollable situations, they are not easily intimidated and have no difficulty accepting deviations from norms or unexpected reactions. On the contrary, people with a low tolerance for ambiguity experience new and ambiguous situations as unpleasant, during which they feel stress and discomfort when they perceive persons or work environments as unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Nový and Schroll-Machl (2005) argue that intercultural competence is not just a learned cultural standard but is the ability to perceive situations and react flexibly. It is important to be responsive not only to the reactions of the interlocutor but also to all the psychological processes that take place in a particular situation. Related to this is behavioural flexibility, which is the ability to adapt one's actions to fit the situation.

The second situational approach defines the situational factors that influence how intercultural competence will be formed. Breslin (1981) includes among the situational factors of intercultural communication, for example, climatic conditions, the number of people present in the situation, the status and behaviour of the interlocutor, confidentiality vs. anonymity, degree of familiarity, power relations, etc. Situational factors that one cannot control have a significant impact on the success of intercultural communication.

**Table 1: Personalistic and situational factors of intercultural competence formation**

Personalistic factors	Situational factors
Ability to network easily	Climatic conditions
Optimism	Power relations
Openness	Status of the interlocutor
Absence of ethnocentrism	Degree of familiarity
Tolerance of ambiguity	Behaviour of the interlocutor
Empathy	Confidentiality vs. anonymity
Patience	Number of interlocutors

Source: Author's own elaboration based on: Nový and Schroll-Machl (2005): Spolupráce přes hranice kultur

The third interactive approach, defined by Nový and Schroll-Machl (2005), explains intercultural communication as a process in which personal and situational factors interact. Thomas (1995) emphasizes that intercultural competence is also the ability to ask the right questions by exploring a new situation, and by this, they suggest that intercultural competence is not a skill that people learn once and from that point on they can use it effectively, but it is a skill that is continuously developing.

Hofstede (2005) claims that intercultural competence is not an isolated skill that is learned from the ground up, and that everyone can learn intercultural competence to some extent, regardless of whether he or she exhibits the necessary personality dispositions. He specifically mentions 3 phases that this learning involves: awareness, knowledge acquisition, and skill acquisition. The awareness phase is the most important because it consists of the realization that a person is equipped with a particular mental software that differs from the one that the representative of another culture has. In the knowledge stage follows, Hofstede suggests that knowledge is needed to make people aware of how one culture's values differ from another. The final stage is the skills stage which is determined by the two previous phases and by the practice. It is the ability to learn to recognize and use the symbols of the other culture, acknowledge the heroes, perform the rituals of other cultures, and even live in the other culture. If people master all 3 of these phases, we can say that their intercultural competence would be developed to such a level that they could live effectively in a foreign environment.



In conclusion, intercultural competencies play a vital role in successful intercultural communication. As already mentioned, their importance is nowadays increasing due to the trend of globalization and even if people do not possess such abilities, they can easily learn them through various intercultural training courses which have become immensely popular nowadays.

#### *1.1.5 Intercultural conflict*

In the previous chapter, we already mentioned intercultural communication and the basic aspects that it includes. We have also discussed the intercultural competencies that are necessary for successful communication between members of two cultures. However, if such competencies are not present or not developed to a sufficient level by the participants in intercultural communication, the intercultural conflict between members of the two cultures may occur. Closely related to the intercultural conflict are the barriers that directly contribute to the emergence of such conflict.

Průcha (2011) argues that these barriers influence the success of intercultural communication with different intensities depending on two factors. The first factor is the differences in the cultures of the communication partners, arguing that the greater the differences, the more likely it is that barriers will occur in such communication. The second factor is the language used in communication between representatives of the two cultures. Průcha describes a situation in which the use of a particular language can create barriers in communication, particularly in situations where one communicant has a negative attitude towards the language of the other.

So, if we look at the intercultural communication considering this definition, the greater the differences between values, customs, rituals, or as Hofstede explains, between different mental software, the more likely it is that the intercultural conflict between the representatives of such cultures will arise. Communication between two such cultures would be problematic because the interpretation of verbal and non-verbal messages in such a situation is much more difficult than communication between representatives of similar cultures, say Czech and Slovak.

If such an interpretation fails for assorted reasons, intercultural conflict may occur. Ralbovská (2013) agrees, arguing that intercultural conflict arises in the process of finding and creating shared meanings, because if people from diverse cultures want to understand each other, they must create a common communication code, i.e., to give the same meaning

to cultural phenomena, gestures, and symbols. However, while this happens, several misunderstandings may occur. She claims that one of the causes of intercultural conflict is the fear of the unknown, which she considers to be an instinct of human behaviour when the person is in an unknown environment surrounded by unknown people. However, she adds that this instinct is very often accompanied by prejudices related to past experiences or various negative attitudes and judgments that promote intercultural diversity and hinder successful intercultural communication.

This thesis defines intercultural conflict as a clash between at least two cultures, under the assumption that there exist certain barriers in intercultural communication creating predispositions for the emergence of such a conflict.

The first such predisposition that contributes to the emergence of intercultural conflict is ethnocentrism. Delgadová (2013) considers ethnocentrism to be the assumption that a certain culture is the best and other cultures are subordinate to this culture. Supporters of ethnocentrism tend to judge other cultures according to their own, and if they do not identify with the cultural elements of a foreign culture, such as customs, methods of thinking, behaviour, or opinions, they immediately condemn them. Ethnocentrism leads to a feeling of superiority and promotion of the individual and his entire culture over members of other cultures. Průcha (2004) also evaluates ethnocentrism as a tendency to get to know and interpret other cultures from the perspective of one's own culture. He also gives the example that such tendencies are manifested in large countries, where, for example, students learn from textbooks that are content focused only on their own culture and other countries sometimes evaluate in a degrading way.

Such ethnocentric learning can cause the representatives of a given culture will have negative attitudes towards other cultures and they will lack intercultural competencies for successful communication with representatives of other cultures.

Průcha (2004) considers ethnocentrism to be the opposite of cultural relativism, which, according to Soukup (2000), approaches the study of cultural phenomena on the assumption that individual cultures represent unique sociocultural systems that can only be understood in the context of their values and norms. Therefore, cultural relativism rejects any superiority of one culture over another, so all cultures are equal.

However, ethnocentrism is more common in the world, which Hofstede (2005) considers as one of the psychological reactions that people have when facing representatives

of other cultures. He states that the phase of ethnocentrism comes after the phase of curiosity when a person is enthusiastic about an encounter with another culture, and if the person spends more time in a different host culture, the phase of ethnocentrism will surely come, which Hofstede describes similarly as the authors mentioned above. He is comparing the ethnocentrism of a nation to the egocentrism of the individual, arguing that ethnocentric individuals consider their culture to be the most important, the centre of the universe, and other cultures are judged by the standards of that culture.

Delgadová (2013) also mentions a particular form of ethnocentrism, called Eurocentrism, which judges and looks at other cultures from the perspective and experience of Western European cultures. According to Eurocentrism, science and art develop only in Europe, which it sees as the centre of the civilized world, thus elevating European culture above other cultures. She adds that in diplomatic and international economic relations it is especially important to avoid ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism because it is in these areas that major misunderstandings and intercultural conflicts then arise.

Other negative attitudes and beliefs that form barriers to intercultural communication and lead to intercultural conflict are stereotypes and prejudices. Průcha (2010) says that stereotypes and prejudice have the same psychological nature.

*"Stereotypes and prejudices are the ideas, opinions, and attitudes that certain individuals or groups of persons hold towards other groups or themselves (autostereotypes). These views and attitudes are relatively stable, are transmitted between generations, and are difficult to change. Stereotypes and prejudices have a strong emotional charge, while their rational content can be suppressed". (Průcha, 2010, p.67)*

Hofstede (2005) also examines stereotypes, which he considers to be the reason why contact between culturally different groups does not often bring mutual understanding. He justifies this by the fact that members of the other culture are not perceived as individuals but are judged based on stereotypes.

According to Delgadová (2013), cultural stereotypes are very often erroneous and shared ideas, which are formed in people's consciousness based on their short-term encounters with other cultures or unverified information about other cultures. Such cultural stereotypes are a common part of life, and we adopt them from older generations, friends, or the media. Delgadová also states that these existing ideas about members of a particular culture are particularly important because they influence the social perception of the

members of the culture against whom the stereotypes are directed and also influence the judgment of their actions, resulting in prejudice and also discrimination against that culture, which can lead to xenophobia or racism.

Thus, according to Delgadová, stereotypes result in prejudice against a given culture. However, Průcha argues that stereotypes are the cognitive component of prejudice. Other components of prejudices are the attitudes, which reflect the evaluation of groups, and discrimination in dealing with groups. This means that the bearer of prejudice evaluates all members of a particular nation or ethnic group equally, without judging individuals according to their real characteristics. Nakonečný (1997) states that family upbringing is a basic factor in the emergence of prejudice, but they are also influenced by religious or political ideology and very often even highly educated persons also hold them. Therefore, by this statement, we could reject the possibility that intelligence influences the formation of prejudices.

According to Zelenková (2014), stereotypes and prejudices exist about almost every culture, but it is incorrect to generalize culture based on short-term experiences with individuals or unverified received information. Particularly in the 21st century, in the era of globalization, cultures are constantly changing and evolving, but stereotypes are so entrenched that it is difficult to change them.

Průcha (2010) agrees to claim that stereotypes and prejudices are commonly disseminated in mass communication, they are part of school textbooks and serve to manipulate public opinion in politics. Similarly, like Delgadová, he argues that ethnic and national stereotypes are found in all cultures and very often occur especially concerning undesirable immigrant groups or ethnic minorities. Changes in stereotypes and prejudices happen very rarely and only under certain conditions, which are exceedingly difficult to achieve in society.

All these analysed barriers contribute to the emergence of intercultural conflict, which according to Nina-Estrella (2013), is an inevitable phenomenon in every community. She adds that intercultural conflict is the result of coexistence between people with distinct cultural codes who share the same geographical space, and who have not learned to deal with diversity. After examining cultural barriers, we can say that they are a particularly principal factor that contributes to the rejection of intercultural diversity. Therefore, most intercultural conflicts are based on cultural ignorance of diverse cultural groups.

Although intercultural conflicts are very often perceived negatively, some authors see them as an opportunity for development. Zeug (2020), for example, states that people who learn to resolve such intercultural conflicts are better at coming up with new ideas and tackling new challenges because when one can understand differences, his or her perspectives can be broadened. Therefore, we can state that the resolution of intercultural conflict contributes to the development of certain competencies that can prevent the recurrence of such intercultural conflict in the future.

However, resolving such intercultural conflict can be exceedingly difficult. Holá (2003) says, that the goal of such conflict resolution is to change a conflict situation into a non-conflict situation. Also, a properly handled conflict can lead to change and re-evaluation of relationships. But this requires the above-mentioned intercultural competencies, which create the conditions for the communicator to perceive the situation in such a way that he/she does not draw different conclusions that do not contribute to the resolution of such a conflict. At the same time, there must also be an absence of the above-mentioned barriers, due to which the communicant will never be able to judge the situation objectively but based on the judgments that have been implanted in his or her mind.

Shonk (2002) provides guidance on how to resolve and even prevent such conflict. The main goal is to first begin to build a relationship with a member of the other culture and thus identify cultural differences, but also to look beyond the boundaries of culture and appreciate each other as individuals, not just as members of a foreign culture.

Thus, we can conclude that the intercultural conflict arises during the communication between two cultures, and the greater the differences between cultures, the more likely such intercultural conflict is to occur. The various other factors and beliefs discussed above, which have existed in every society for centuries, also contribute to its occurrence and are difficult to change or even eliminate.

## **1.2 Hofstede's cultural dimensions of Slovakia and Ukraine**

As this thesis deals with current intercultural issues in Europe and thus covers a very broad field, we decided to focus on a specific area where such cross-cultural issues may be encountered daily, namely the research on intercultural relations between Ukrainian and Slovak cultures in the territory of the Slovak Republic. The number of representatives of Ukrainian culture in Slovakia is remarkably high, thereby increasing the possibility of developing intercultural misunderstandings.

Since we have specified an intercultural problem as a kind of intercultural conflict that arises when two cultures clash during the process of intercultural communication and under certain conditions, such as the barriers mentioned above or the lack of intercultural competence, it is crucial to provide an insight into both such cultures to determine the degree of dissimilarity of such two cultures, which might directly contribute to the emergence of intercultural problems.

As mentioned earlier, this thesis is based on Hofstede's research on intercultural differences and for this reason, we specify these two cultures based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Using these dimensions, we can predict certain behaviours of Slovaks and Ukrainians, such as attitudes towards authority and respect for equality in society, gender equality and gender stereotypes, preserving traditions or changing them, the role of the individual and the group, ways of resolving conflicts, as well as the ability to tolerate and accept foreigners.

### *1.2.1 Power distance*

Power distance is one of the dimensions of national cultures, which Hofstede defines as the extent to which the less influential members of a country's society anticipate and tolerate the unequal balance of power across the population. A high-power distance index hereafter referred to as PDI, is characteristic of cultures where unequal distribution of power in society is accepted and respected. Recognition of status is typical, i.e., whoever is in power is also right. In such cultures, older people are respected much more than in cultures with low PDI. Subordinates expect orders and are less initiative-taking. Therefore, in such societies, we find an autocratic leadership style, centralization, and high wage differentials between employees and supervisors. On the contrary, in cultures with low PDI, subordinates' dependence on the leader is limited and a consultative style, i.e., interdependence between leader and subordinates, is preferred. In such cultures, employees are not afraid of their supervisor and find it extremely easy to approach him or her and contradict them. A low power distance index indicates that equality is preferred in society and manifestations of power are undesirable. Therefore, such societies are characterized by a democratic style of leadership, decentralization, small wage differentials between managers and employees, and a low level of respect for authority.

The PDI of Slovakia is 104, and since this is a remarkably high score, we can say that unequal distribution of power is present and accepted in Slovak society. Kolman (2003)

explains the reason for Slovakia's high score in this dimension based on a historical perspective, namely that in past Slovakia was dominated by strong patriarchal families in which the position of the father was especially important.

Ukraine scored very similarly to Slovakia on this dimension, although slightly lower, at 92. From this high score, we can conclude that people expect dominance from their superiors and respect his or her authoritative approach in the workplace. Ukrainian citizens accept unequal distribution of power. The similar scores in this assessment may also be the result of the fact that until recently both countries had communist authoritarian regimes in which respect for authority was required and the unequal distribution of power had to be accepted by the citizens in the society.

This statement can be supported by the fact that Hofstede's dimensions were also examined by Ludek Kolman, who has dealt with cultural differences in Central Europe where he tried to identify cultural dimensions in the V4 countries in 2003. According to his research, Slovakia scored 79 on the PDI, which is somewhat lower than the score defined by Hofstede. Kolman's sample, however, consisted of approximately 100 university students. This may confirm the fact that the distance of power in Slovakia was directly influenced by the past autocratic regime. Because the students had much lower scores as many of them had not experienced the regime and gradually, also due to globalization, such attitudes are changing in society. On the other hand, Kolman's sample of students may not yet have experienced jobs where such power distance may be best judged, which is why we find his research lacking.

### *1.2.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism*

Another dimension that characterizes national cultures is collectivism vs. individualism. Hofstede explains that in an individualistic society, bonds between individuals are looser because it is assumed that each person takes care of themselves and their immediate family. Emphasis is placed on the individual's autonomy and on his or her own opinion, which is not influenced by the opinion of the group. When meeting or gathering, people feel the need to talk because silence is considered abnormal in such a culture. Even if the social conversation is banal, it is obligatory. In collectivist societies, however, it is different; collectivism is characterized by people being integrated into larger groups that protect them throughout their lives in exchange for their loyalty and devotion to that group. That is why in such cultures it is not obligatory to speak, the fact of being together

is sufficient. In these cultures, the interest of the group is prioritized over the interest of the individual, who must identify with the views of the group to which he or she is highly committed. Equality is more important than individual freedom. The quality of relationships and the harmonious living of the group is crucial, which is why it is necessary to avoid conflict situations, which, together with the misconduct of the individual, are considered not only a personal embarrassment but a disgrace to the family. Hofstede (2001) also explains that in collectivist societies, the integration of foreign cultures is much more difficult than in individualistic cultures.

Slovakia's individualism score is 52, which means that equal emphasis is placed on individuals and the group. However, the situation is completely different in Ukrainian society, where the score of individualism is 25. This value says that the society in Ukraine is strongly collectivistic, so the interests of the group are much more important than the interests of individuals. The group is an extremely essential element in such a society, which is why family ties and harmonious relationships are the most crucial qualities in Ukrainian culture. This fact could also be rooted in the history of Ukrainian society, as collectivism was one of the main elements of the former authoritarian regime. This is confirmed by Jensen Arnett (2007), who argues that during the totalitarian regime in Ukraine collectivism became a form of conformity and the individual became important only for his or her contribution to the group, but after Ukraine became an independent nation, the ideas of individualism began to spread especially among young people, as education itself leads towards this direction. On the other hand, however, Arnett argues that even in the 21st century the processes of moral education are based on collectivist orientation which enables adolescents to adopt behavioural norms and social values.

### *1.2.3 Femininity vs. Masculinity*

The cultural dimension of masculinity vs. femininity shows to what extent typical female and male roles are divided in society and determines whether masculine or feminine traits prevail in a society. Typical masculine traits are assumed to be assertiveness, competitiveness, and toughness, whereas women are expected to be more concerned with taking care of the home, and thus the most important feminine traits are more subtle traits such as good human relations or environmental awareness. The masculinity index is referred to as MAS. If it is higher than 50, it means that it is a masculine culture in which such masculine qualities mentioned above are prevalent and emotional displays in men are more likely to be unaccepted by society. In the opposite cultures, i.e., feminist cultures, the



concern for family and harmonious interpersonal relationships are more prevalent, gender roles in such a society are not strictly defined and that is why emotionality or vulnerability in men is also accepted.

Hofstede also observes a correlation between this dimension and the need for integration or cultural assimilation of foreigners. According to Alba and Foner (2015), integration is understood as a series of processes that increase immigrants' chances of gaining social acceptance in the receiving society. These authors claim that the opposite of integration is cultural assimilation, defined by Holohan (2012) as the process in which the incomers are encouraged through social and political processes to adopt the culture, values, and behaviour of the host country in order to be accepted. Through this process, the differences between the two cultures are diminished but migrants tend to experience a loss of their own cultural identity.

Hofstede claims that masculine society is not so tolerant towards foreigners and immigrants must assimilate into the dominant culture, while feminine society is characterized by tolerance and compassion for the weak. Foreigners are not required to assimilate but to integrate.

Slovakia has an extremely high score in this dimension, reaching 104, which means that it is a strong masculine culture where gender roles in society are precisely defined and specified. According to this assessment, we can conclude that women are the ones who take care of the family and the household, and men must be the strong and competitive individuals who provide financially for the family. This high score may also indicate that Slovak society is not as tolerant of foreigners, whom Slovaks may require to culturally assimilate to their national culture. Kolman (2003) argues that the main factor that leads to this high score of Slovakia in this dimension is that a good relationship between colleagues is not the most important thing for Slovaks in the workplace. Such features are characteristic of a feminist society, as we have mentioned above. Looking at another component of this dimension, namely the roles between men and women in this society, in 2018 the Slovak Academy of Sciences corroborated the relevance of such a high masculine score in this dimension by conducting research that confirmed that in Slovakia, gender roles are still traditionally viewed.

Ukraine differs significantly from Slovakia in this score, as the masculinity index is only 25. This means that it is a strongly feminist society in which male and female roles are

not precisely defined so men's and women's occupations are not strictly specified. This is confirmed by Jensen Arnet (2007) arguing that the strong position of women in Ukrainian society has its roots in the past when women held male positions and had unlimited access to education like men. *“The phenomenon of a strong, responsible, and clever woman predetermines not only the Ukrainians’ specific way of life but also social-cultural ideals of the society “.* (Jensen Arnet, 2007, p. 1027).

Hofstede (2001) also describes the relationships between this dimension and the resolution of conflicts. In masculinist cultures, conflicts are resolved in a way that demonstrates strength, while in feminist cultures it is based on consensus and compromise. Given Slovakia's high score on the masculinity dimension and Ukraine's exceptionally low score, it is possible that resolving potential conflicts between representatives of these two cultures would be more difficult.

#### *1.2.4 Uncertainty avoidance*

Uncertainty avoidance is defined by Hofstede as the degree to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertainty or unfamiliar situations. This degree is reflected in the need to anticipate and the need to establish rules to guide members of society. The uncertainty avoidance index is referred to as the UAI. In countries with low UAI, uncertainty is a normal part of life and that is why members of such a culture are more relaxed, they do not experience as much stress as even uncertain situations and unknown risks are accepted calmly. These countries are characterized by fewer laws and regulations. Whereas in cultures with a high UAI, many laws and regulations are needed to reduce risk, as they set the pattern of behaviour and thus reduce the stress that members of such a culture find when dealing with common uncertainties. Even the smallest unknown uncertainty in society is taken as a threat to be avoided. Hofstede also describes the relationship between this dimension and tolerance of other cultural groups. In countries with a low UAI, citizens tend to have a more cheerful outlook toward foreigners, are more open and tolerant, and therefore there is less risk of group conflict in such societies. Conversely, in cultures with a high UAI, anything foreign is seen as a threat that is unacceptable and must be avoided. Hofstede describes that such cultures are breeding grounds for national prejudice, which we have described as barriers to intercultural communication. This aggressive nationalism rejects other cultural groups, which is why there is a considerable risk of violent group conflict in such cultures.

Slovakia, with its UAI score of 51, is in the middle of this ranking, from which we cannot accurately determine how Slovaks accept unknown threats in society.

On the other hand, Ukraine shows an extremely high UAI score, up to 95. This suggests that Ukrainians perceive unknown threats as unacceptable and need to be avoided by introducing many norms and rules in society. Also, this score could indicate that the Ukrainians do not have a very tolerant approach towards other cultures as indicated above. When communicating with foreigners, they keep their distance and prefer a formal style of communication. Hofstede (2001) states that high uncertainty avoidance also contributes to the emergence of racism and xenophobia. Yudina (2020) explains the high scores on this dimension by pointing out that stability is especially important to the people of Ukraine, which has been exceedingly difficult to achieve throughout historical events. Ukraine's conflicts with the Russian Federation and the unstable economic situation foster this concern for the unknown and a preference for stability.

#### *1.2.5 Long term orientation vs short term orientation*

This dimension assesses the orientation of cultures towards the future, the present, or the past. Cultures that have a high LTO index tend to focus more on the future, which is why the most important virtues are perseverance and thrift, which produce results. In such cultures, there is little emphasis on traditions, which change and adapt to circumstances. Short-term-oriented societies focus primarily on the present and the past. Respecting traditions, saving face, and fulfilling social obligations are fundamental.

Slovakia has an LTO index of 77, which suggests that it is primarily a future-oriented country with a high capacity to adapt to traditions. Shame is accepted in such societies and saving face is not necessary. There is also a strong emphasis on saving and investing. Ukraine scores very similarly to Slovakia on this dimension, even higher, up to 86, which makes it a country primarily oriented towards the future, and Ukrainians are convinced that truth is a matter of situation and context.

#### *1.2.6 Indulgence vs. restraint*

In 2010, Hofstede added a final sixth dimension, which addressed characteristics of cultures that had not yet been addressed in any other dimension. This sixth dimension is based on the findings of the World Values Survey, which was conducted under the guidance of sociologist Ronald Inglehart. Restrained cultures refer to societies in which no emphasis is placed on the pursuit of human gratification, and this is controlled by the implementation

of social rules. Indulgence cultures are typified by placing human pleasure at the forefront, with the enjoyment of life and the fulfilment of human needs and desires being of paramount importance. Other characteristics can be seen in the table below.

**Table 1: The differences between indulgent and restrained cultures**

<b>Indulgence</b>	<b>Restrained</b>
Higher percentage of people declaring themselves very happy	Fewer very happy people
A perception of personal life control	A perception of helplessness: what happens to me is not my own doing
Freedom of speech seen as important	Freedom of speech is not a primary concern
Higher importance of leisure	Lower importance of leisure
More likely to remember positive emotions	Less likely to remember positive emotions
In countries with educated populations, higher birthrates	In countries with educated populations, lower birthrates

Source: HOFSTEDE, G. (2011): Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context, p.16, (online)

Slovakia's score in Indulgence is 28, whereas Ukraine has an even lower score of 14 in this dimension, therefore we can conclude that both cultures are characterized as restrained cultures. As we can see in the table above, such cultures are typical of lower numbers of happy people and leisure activities are not as important as in indulgent cultures. Hofstede (2010) also states that pessimism and cynicism are common in such cultures and human pleasure is taken as something neither acceptable.

### *1.2.7 Summary of the Chapter*

Based on the scores of Slovak and Ukrainian cultures in Hofstede's dimensions, we can observe certain differences between these two cultures, even though they are neighbouring countries. As we mentioned above, these cultural characteristics of both cultures are influenced by historical development. Slovakia is a noticeably young country that has been part of larger entities in the past and this has had a profound impact on its cultural characteristics. The same applies to Ukraine, which has been under the rule of an authoritarian regime for more than half a century.

The former authoritarian regimes in both countries demonstrate a very high-power distance score; the unequal distribution of power is present in these countries and accepted in society. However, according to Hofstede (2001), this score decreases as the number of educated people increases and with the growing number of organizations that promote emancipation and liberalism. As the proportion of educated people increases in both cultures

and the number of institutions that promote equality steadily grows, both countries' scores on this dimension are expected to decrease significantly in the future.

In the dimension of individualism and collectivism, these countries differ greatly, as Slovakia stands at the borderline - being part of a group is as important as the needs of an individual. Ukraine's score indicates that it is a very strongly collectivist society, which was also largely influenced by the former authoritarian regime. In this society, harmonious relationships that lead to good group coexistence are most important. The biggest difference between the two cultures is highly noticeable in the dimension of femininity versus masculinity. The scores indicate that Slovakia is an extraordinarily strong masculine society that is not as tolerant of other cultures, while Ukraine's scores rate it as a feminist society. We also see a substantial difference when comparing the cultural dimensions in the uncertainty avoidance index. Ukraine's high score shows that threats are unacceptable in this society and should be avoided. Such threats are also related to foreigners, and precisely due to this fact, a high score indicates that members of this culture are less tolerant. In the next dimension, which deals with an orientation toward the future, present or past, both cultures show remarkably similar scores, which suggest that they are oriented towards the future and respecting traditions. In the last dimension, we specified both countries as restraint cultures, where society is governed by norms to control the fulfilment of human gratification and desires.

We can conclude that these two cultures are similar in some of these dimensions, while they are significantly diverse in others as indicated in the table below.

**Table 2: Scores in individual cultural dimensions of Slovakia and Ukraine**

INDEX	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTOWVS	IVR
Slovakia	104	52	110	51	77	28
Ukraine	92	25	27	95	86	14

Source: HOFSTEDE, G. (2015): Dimension data matrix (online)

Given the significant differences that these countries achieve along certain dimensions, suggesting that these countries are quite different in some fundamental characteristics, despite being neighbouring and Slavic countries, these quite different characteristics may contribute to the emergence of intercultural conflicts in the course of intercultural communication between the two cultures. It is also particularly important to

note that some of the cultural dimensions are closely related to or influence the ability to tolerate foreigners or the formation of barriers in intercultural communication, as we have noted in our description of cultural dimensions.

However, cultures today are highly dynamic, constantly evolving and being affected by societal changes, and this is reflected in the different cultural dimensions, which also continue to develop.

## 2 Methods and objectives of the diploma thesis

As stated in the introduction when explaining the structure of the thesis, this thesis is divided into two parts. The first part provides a theoretical background to the second part of the thesis, which is empirical research on the cultural perception and intercultural issues between the two selected national cultures.

Due to the broad character and interdisciplinarity of the researched issue, we have decided to focus on the specific geographical area in which we have conducted our research within the empirical part of the thesis. Namely, we focused on the intercultural problems between two national cultures - Slovak and Ukrainian in the territory of Slovakia.

The main objective of this thesis is:

*"The identification of current intercultural issues between Slovak and Ukrainian national culture in the territory of the Slovak Republic and proposing methods for their possible solution."*

In addition to this main objective, we also set two partial objectives, that are aimed to help fulfil the main goal of our final thesis. These are as follows:

1. *"The examination of the perception of the Slovak culture by Ukrainians who live and work in Slovakia and the perception of the Ukrainian national culture by the Slovak population"*.

2. *"The analysis of the cultural profiles of Ukrainian and Slovak national cultures to determine the degree of dissimilarity between the two cultures"*.

The partial objectives were defined to lead to the fulfilment of the main objective, as perceptions of culture may indicate certain barriers to intercultural communication that may cause intercultural problems, which can stem from the large differences between two cultures as well.

Furthermore, whilst our research disregards the fact that both countries are not completely heterogeneous concerning the presence of minority cultures, our research focuses on the national majority cultures.

Following the objectives, we also formulated one hypothesis: *"There are no intercultural problems between Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures in the territory of*

*the Slovak Republic*”. Using established research methods, we will confirm or refute this hypothesis in the final part of the thesis.

Given the stated objectives, the thesis was a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

In the theoretical part of the thesis, all the terms relevant for the purpose of the thesis elaboration are outlined and clarified using analysis and synthesis. Therefore, in this part of the thesis, a literature review of many Slovak and foreign authors addressing intercultural issues is presented. The method of comparative analysis was used to provide a comparison between the two selected national cultures to determine to what extent the two cultures differ.

The empirical research was conducted using a quantitative method - online questionnaires distributed to the Slovak population and the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia. We prepared two online questionnaires, which consisted of three parts. In the first part, we tried to gain information concerning the demographic structure of the population, such as age, gender, and education. The second part contained questions aimed to determine the perception of the respective national culture, and the third part consisted of questions that analysed the interaction of the population with members of the other culture to discover whether intercultural conflicts occur between the two cultures and at what frequency. We decided to have the second questionnaire, which was addressed to the Ukrainian population, translated into Ukrainian so that the other language would not be a limitation for the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia.

The research was conducted from 8 - 23 February 2022. During this period, questionnaires were distributed to the Slovak population and the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia through social networks. The questionnaire for the Slovak population contained 27 questions, 5 of which were open questions, 9 closed ones and 13 statements with which the Slovak respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement using an evaluation scale. The questionnaire for members of the Ukrainian nationality was very similar. It comprised 26 questions, of which 5 were open questions, 12 closed ones and 9 statements with which the respondents were asked to either agree or disagree by means of a rating scale.

In the empirical part of the thesis, we evaluate the results of both questionnaires by using synthesis and analysis of individual answers and based on the results we provide ways of solving possible intercultural problems between the two cultures on the territory of the



Slovak Republic. In this part of the thesis, we also present graphs to better visualize the research results. We provide a comment on the research results in the discussion section.

### **3 Empirical research and its results**

The empirical research of this master thesis consists of two parts. The first part of the study was aimed at the perception of Ukrainian culture by the Slovak population and also at possible intercultural conflicts between Slovak and Ukrainian culture during intercultural communication processes. In the second part, we investigated the perception of Slovak culture from the perspective of Ukrainians living in Slovakia and the possible intercultural misunderstandings during communication with the Slovak population. The research was conducted in the form of two questionnaires, which were distributed to the Slovak population and the Ukrainian minority residing in Slovakia by means of social media.

#### **3.1 Results of the research on the perception of Ukrainian culture and intercultural problems between Slovak and Ukrainian culture in Slovakia**

The following subchapter presents the results of the research, which was conducted using an online questionnaire on 8-13 February 2022. The questionnaire was distributed to the Slovak population; therefore, it was elaborated in the Slovak language. We attempted to distribute the questionnaire to Slovak residents who have experiences with members of Ukrainian culture to make their answers as relevant as possible. For this reason, we also distributed the questionnaire to the members of the Ukrainian-Slovak border group Ublya/Malyi Bereznyi. Our research sample consisted of 121 respondents.

The questionnaire included three parts. In addition to the demographic structure of the respondents, we attempted to ascertain the perception of the Ukrainian culture, to identify possible prejudices against Ukrainian culture. In the last part of the questionnaire, we asked the respondents about their own experiences of communication with members of the Ukrainian culture and possible intercultural misunderstandings that arose between the two cultures. The questionnaire consisted of open and closed questions but also statements where the respondents were asked to express how much they agree or disagree with the presented statements using a rating scale.

**Table 4: The types and the number of questions in the questionnaire**

Types of questions	The number of questions
Open questions	5
Closed questions	9
Evaluation scale	13

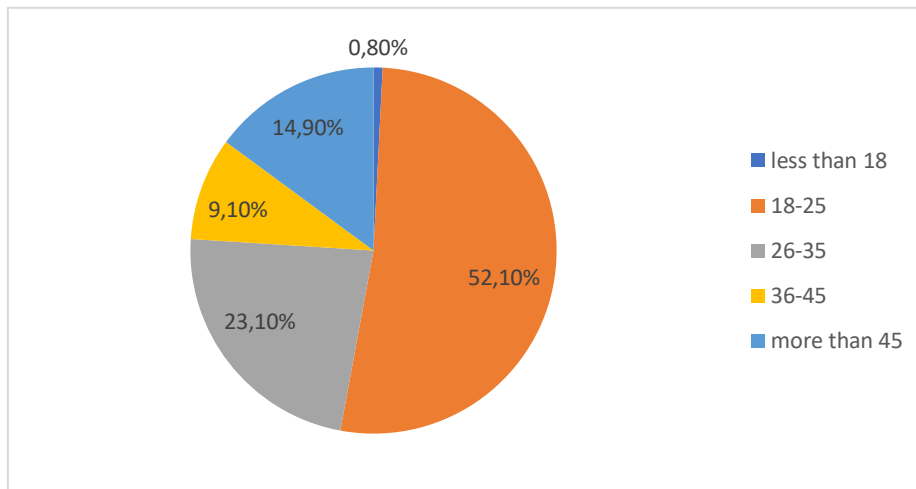
Source: Author's own elaboration

A slight limitation of our research is the fact that the majority of respondents to the online questionnaire were university students or graduates aged 18-25 or 26-35, which could have had a significant impact on their answers and therefore on the results of our research. Thus, the results of the online questionnaire are limited by the research sample, which is not fully representative.

### *3.1.1 Analysis and the interpretation of the results*

This questionnaire was completed by 121 Slovak citizens. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions to determine the demographic structure of the population. Looking at the answers of our respondents, we found that the majority of them were women, up to 73 percent, while only 27 percent were men. Based on the author's observation, this can be attributed to the tendency to participate in such research, which is usually much higher among women than men. The age group of 18-25 years constituted more than 52% of our research sample, followed by the age group of 26-35 years (23.1%), 36-45 years (9.1%), more than 45 years (14.9%), and 1 of our respondents was less than 18 years old, from which we can deduce that all age groups were represented in the questionnaire. Graphical visualisation of the age of the respondents can be seen below.

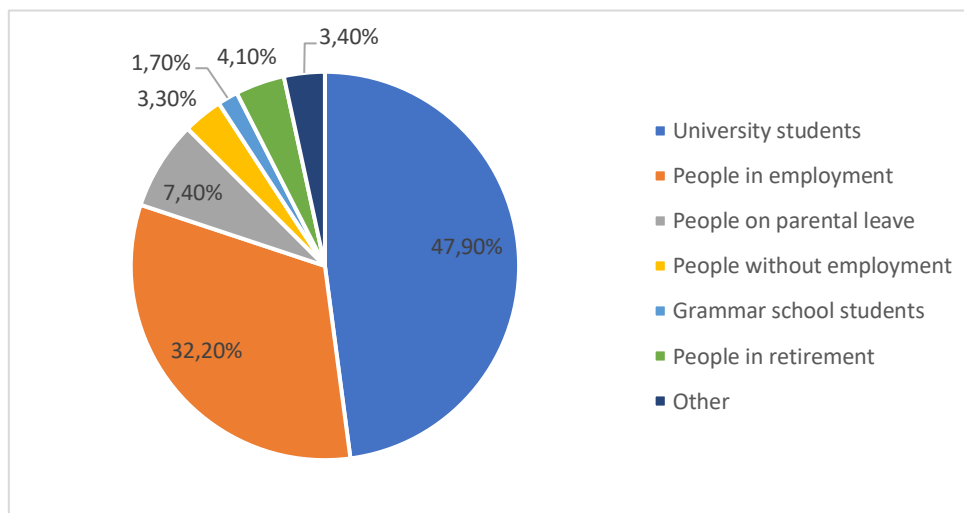
**Chart 1: The age representation of the online questionnaire respondents**



Source: Author's own elaboration

Regarding the professional background of the respondents, 47.9% are university students, 32.2% are employed, and to a lesser extent people on parental leave (7.4%), retired (4.1%), unemployed (3.3%) and grammar school students (1.7%) also completed our questionnaire. In addition, some respondents chose the option “*other*” (3.4%), without specifying further their current profession. A graphical representation of the current working status of the respondents can be seen below.

**Chart 2: The graphical representation of the profession of respondents**



Source: Author's own elaboration

The first section of questions, which aimed to find out the social structure of our respondents, ended with a question about the respondents' highest educational qualification. From their answers, we identified that the majority had completed university education,

either first degree (31.4%), second degree (26.4%), or third degree (3.3%), but there was also a significant representation of respondents who had completed secondary education with a school-leaving certificate (30.6%). In a very small amount, the questionnaire also accounted for Slovak citizens who have completed secondary education without a leaving exam (5%) and 4 respondents with only primary education, which represents 3.3% of the surveyed sample.

This part of the questions, in which the demographic structure of the respondents was investigated, was followed by the second section of the questions, which focused on the perception of Ukrainians and their national culture among the inhabitants of Slovakia. The perception of Ukrainian culture through the eyes of Slovaks was set as a partial goal, as possible negative perceptions of culture and prejudices or stereotypes towards the other culture directly contribute to intercultural conflicts. Therefore, we tried to identify the occurrence of such barriers in intercultural communication among Slovak citizens.

Using the set questions, the aim was to investigate what associations the Slovak population has with Ukraine and especially with Ukrainians living in Slovakia. This section consisted of open and closed questions but also statements, where respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a given statement using a rating scale.

The first question in this section was open-ended: *What do you like or dislike about Ukraine*. From the answers of our respondents, we can conclude that most of them had rather positive associations with Ukraine. The predominant answer was that Slovaks like Ukrainian nature and culture, their customs and traditions, and other manifestations of culture, which according to our respondents are very much appreciated by Ukrainians. Respondents also stated that they like the Ukrainian language and the kindness or hospitality of the people. A very large number of Slovaks interviewed in this questionnaire associate Ukraine with shopping in Ukraine because of the very cheap prices of goods. An interesting finding was that some respondents said that they like Ukraine because it brings up people who are not afraid to express their opinion. Anyway, apart from the positive associations, there were also some negative associations with Ukraine, mainly related to the current political and economic situation of the country. Respondents very often stated that they do not like the level of corruption in Ukrainian society or the standard of living of its inhabitants. A surprising finding was that a few respondents stated that they did not like the inadaptability of Ukrainian citizens, which a few respondents mentioned as a key factor in living in

Slovakia. Given the nature of our thesis and the issues we are addressing here, this response is very important because it suggests that some Slovak residents believe that any other culture living in Slovakia must adapt to the Slovak national culture and assimilate culturally otherwise it could lead to intercultural problems.

The following question was similar to the previous one. We aimed to identify the characteristics that the Slovak population most often attributes to Ukrainians. Similarly, to the previous question, we found from the answers that Slovaks ascribe more positive qualities to Ukrainians, as only about 13% of our respondents' answers assigned negative characteristics to this population. The positive qualities that were repeated most often were that Ukrainians are *friendly, kind, hardworking, good-hearted, and modest*. Some respondents stated that Ukrainians are culturally very similar to Slovaks, as indicated by this statement: *“They are normal people who are trying to integrate into our society. If the EU wants to accept immigrants, it could consider Ukrainians rather than people from Africa and countries with completely different cultures and customs. Ukrainians are much closer to us culturally and in terms of values”*. With this statement, we can conclude that some respondents evaluate the presence of this minority in Slovakia very positively.

As for some negative characteristics, rather exaggerated ones prevailed, such as Ukrainians being rude and arrogant, and the term *cheap labour* was repeated very often. Some respondents even claimed that the Ukrainian minority benefits from the Slovak system. However, since in this part of the questionnaire we tried to ascertain only the perception of a certain culture, we cannot assess to what extent these answers of the respondents are based on their experience with members of Ukrainian culture or whether they are just prejudices against a given culture. The experiences of Slovaks from the interaction with the Ukrainian minority are discussed in the last part of the questionnaire, and these will be analysed later.

In the next question, we tried to investigate how the Slovak population evaluates the presence of the Ukrainian minority in Slovakia using a rating scale. Respondents were given a scale ranging from 1-5, with number 1 representing a very positive attitude towards the presence of the Ukrainian minority in Slovakia and number 5 a very negative one. The answers of our respondents discussed above indicate that Slovaks attribute positive qualities to Ukrainians and that is why they will evaluate their presence in Slovakia rather positively. However, most respondents chose option number 3, which represented a neutral attitude

towards the presence of the Ukrainian community in Slovakia. 26 respondents stated that they evaluated the presence of the Ukrainian community very positively and 31 respondents indicated that they perceived this presence positively. Only 10 respondents (8.2%) have a negative attitude toward the Ukrainian presence in Slovakia, and in the previous question, we presented some respondents' arguments explaining possible reasons for evaluating the presence of the Ukrainian community in Slovakia negatively, for instance, the ability to "not adapt" or benefiting from the Slovak social system. However, for this question, it is very relevant to point out that the questionnaire was completed before the refugee crisis and therefore the answers of the respondents may vary considerably at present.

The following question on the survey was a closed one: *Do you speak Ukrainian or Russian language*. In addition to Ukrainian, which is the official language of Ukraine, the Russian language is widely spoken. Heilman (2022) even claims that up to 30% of Ukraine's population considers Russian as the primary language of communication. We consider this question crucial, as language is an essential factor in intercultural communication. The lack of knowledge of the language and language barriers contribute to the emergence of various intercultural misunderstandings and that is why they lead to intercultural conflicts. A surprising finding was that as many as 39 respondents (32.2%) stated that they speak at least one of these two languages, but we explain this by the fact that a large number of people who completed the questionnaire live in the Slovak-Ukrainian border area and regularly come into contact with the Ukrainian language and the Ukrainian population. 82 respondents (67,8%) stated that they do not speak either of these two languages, which does not necessarily mean a problem in communication between the representatives of these two cultures, assuming certain similarities between these two Slavic languages or if in the case of knowledge of a third language, communication can also take place in such a language, e.g., in English.

A series of questions then followed in which we posed a pair of statements to the respondents, and using a rating scale, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the given statement. The statements were written in a way that allowed us to identify possible prejudices towards Ukrainian culture or the occurrence of ethnocentrism in the Slovak population. We also strove to find out the way the Slovak population evaluates the need for integration of Ukrainians into Slovak society and the need for cultural assimilation of Ukrainians living in Slovakia. Respondents were given a choice

of numbers from 1 to 5, with number one representing the answer *strongly agree* and the number 5 *strongly disagree*.

The first such statement is: "*Ukrainian culture is similar to Slovak culture.*" With this sentence, we aimed to assess the extent to which the respondents perceived the differences between Slovak and Ukrainian culture. Almost half (49.6%) of our respondents answered positively to this question, thus indicating that they identify some elements of similarity between the two countries. Only 26.5%, or 25 respondents, perceive a great deal of difference between these cultures. The rest of the respondents (29.8%) maintained a neutral attitude towards this statement, so we can say that they do not observe major distinctions between these cultures but neither do they see significant similarities. The fact that some respondents held a neutral opinion on this statement can be justified by not having enough experience with representatives of Ukrainian culture to identify or disagree with this statement to some extent.

By the second statement, we attempted to examine how Slovaks perceive the need for cultural assimilation of the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia. We provided respondents with a statement formulated as "*Ukrainians living in Slovakia should adapt to Slovak culture.*" The attitude adopted by the respondents to this statement was very diverse. 43 respondents stated that they agreed with this statement to some extent meaning they consider it to be relevant. However, this opinion cannot be taken as the majority opinion, as only a slightly smaller number of our respondents (39) disagreed with the above statement, concluding that Ukrainians living in Slovakia should preserve their own culture. The same number of respondents, which made up 32.2% of the total, expressed neutral opinions regarding this statement.

The following statement is intended to ascertain how the Slovak population perceives the need for greater integration of the Ukrainian minority into Slovak society. Only 32 respondents agreed with the identified statement "*There is a need for greater integration of Ukrainians in Slovak society*", which is not even 1/3 of the total number of respondents. 38% of respondents held no distinct opinion on this statement and 43 respondents did not agree with it at all. At this point, we would like to remark that the answers of our respondents indicate that they do not feel the need for greater integration of Ukrainians into Slovak society.



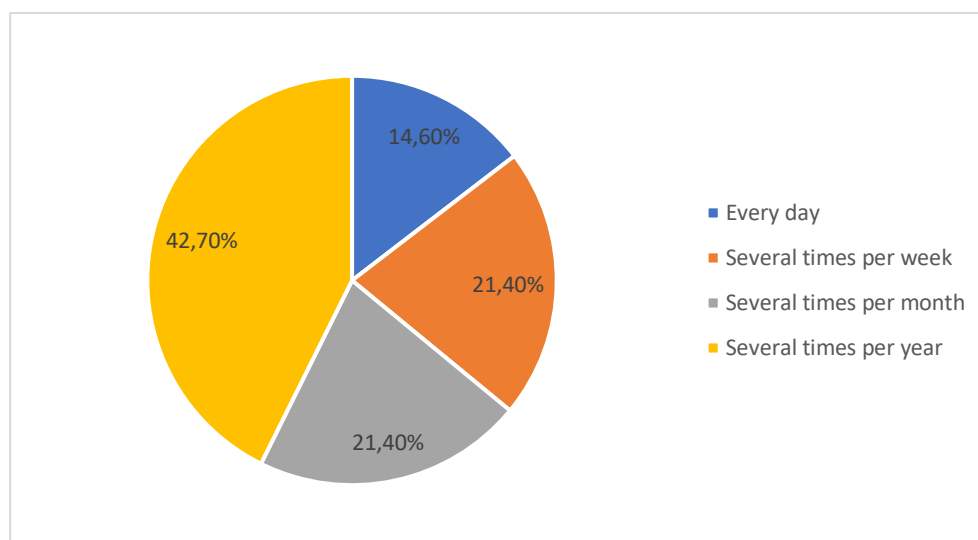
In the next statement, we strove to identify the occurrence of ethnocentrism in the Slovak population, noting that in the theoretical part of the thesis we defined ethnocentrism as the assumption that one's own culture is better and superior to other cultures. We presented respondents with the statement “*Slovak culture is better than Ukrainian culture.*” Only 23.9% of the respondents agreed with this statement, and since the rest of the respondents either took a neutral attitude towards this statement (31.4%) or completely rejected it (44.7%), we can conclude that there were no significant manifestations of ethnocentrism among the surveyed sample of the Slovak population.

The last statement was similar. The aim was to find out whether Slovaks are open to communication with representatives of other cultures or prefer to communicate exclusively with members of their own culture. As many as 72% of the respondents' answers indicated that the Slovak population is not averse to communicating with members of other cultures and is therefore open to such communication.

The final section of our questionnaire dealt with the experience of the Slovak population's interaction with members of the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia to identify whether there were any intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts during the communication. Right at the beginning of this section, we had to sort the respondents based on whether they had ever encountered members of the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia. Respondents who answered negatively to this question ended up completing this questionnaire. However, based on the answers of our respondents, we found that up to 103 respondents (85.1%) had already had such an experience and were thus able to answer the questions in this section.

Another very important task was to ascertain how often our respondents encounter members of the Ukrainian minority so that we could determine how relevant their answers to the other questions posed to them were. For 44 respondents, contact with this minority is not that frequent, as they chose the option of *several times a year*. 21.4% of our respondents are in contact with the Ukrainian community living in Slovakia *several times a week*, and the same number of respondents interact with members of this culture *several times a month*. 15 respondents stated that they come into close contact with Ukrainians *every day*. We assume that these are respondents living in the Slovak-Ukrainian border area, to whom this questionnaire was also distributed. Below we present a graph showing the frequency of contact of our respondents with Ukrainians living in Slovakia.

**Chart 3: Frequency of communication of the respondents with the Ukrainian minority**



Source: Author's own elaboration

The following question in the present section was an open question aimed to identify the characteristics that Slovaks observed about Ukrainians based on their interaction with them. This question is similar to the previously presented question *What do you think Ukrainians are like?* However, here we assumed that the answers of the respondents would be more relevant, as Ukrainians were supposed to be evaluated based on the experience of contact with this culture and not based on stereotypes or possible prejudices. It is interesting to note that, compared to respondents' answers to the previous question, there were far fewer responses that attributed negative qualities to Ukrainians when answering this question. This finding may be caused by the presence of certain prejudices or stereotypes about Ukrainian culture. The answers repeatedly showed that, based on the communication, Slovaks consider Ukrainians to be *hard-working, good-hearted, good-natured, and kind*. It is important to point out that while in the previous section on the perception of Ukrainian culture, respondents frequently ascribed Ukrainians the inability to adapt, in this question, where respondents answer based on their interaction with the culture, they indicate that they are a very adaptable people. This is demonstrated by this response: *Ukrainians are adaptable, they try to learn the language of the host country, to get to know its culture*. Many responses also indicate that they are very similar to the Slovak population.

The fact that some respondents attributed the inability to adapt to Ukrainians in the previous section is a possible example of prejudice or stereotyping against Ukrainian culture, whereas, in the question where Slovaks evaluate Ukrainians based on their experience with this culture, this characteristic does not appear at all.

In another open question, we attempted to detect whether Slovaks have had any negative experiences when interacting with members of the Ukrainian minority in Slovakia. 68% of the respondents stated that no such misunderstanding had occurred, 9 respondents did not know how to answer this question, and 23.3% responded positively, i.e., they have had some unpleasant experience with members of the Ukrainian community in the territory of Slovak republic. This was followed by an additional question, which aimed to find out what exactly the negative experience was. In this answer, the respondents very often mentioned corrupt behaviour of the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia, disrespect for superiors at the workplace, or inappropriate behaviour and harassment by Ukrainians. Interesting was the fact that in this question again a few respondents mentioned the inability to adapt to Slovak culture as a possible source of intercultural conflict. This is also reflected in the answer: *"They came to Slovakia for a better life, but they expect Slovaks to adapt to them and take into account the fact that they are from Ukraine"*. Very interesting was also the answer in which the respondent claimed that Ukrainian residents in Slovakia use the language barrier to their benefit, although it is minimal in this case. However, all these presented sources of conflicts in interaction with a given culture are based on the subjective experiences of the respondents and that is why it is very difficult to generalize these facts as possible sources of conflicts between Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures.

This question was again followed by a series of statements to which Slovaks were asked to either agree or disagree to a certain extent with the given statement. The first such statement was *When communicating with members of the Ukrainian culture, I feel significant cultural differences*. The slight majority of respondents (59.2%) who regularly or irregularly encounter representatives of Ukrainian culture expressed disagreement with this statement, from which we can conclude that they did not experience any significant cultural differences when interacting with members of the Ukrainian minority that could lead to certain intercultural conflicts. 30 respondents took a neutral stance on this statement and 12 respondents stated that they felt significant cultural differences when interacting with the Ukrainian minority.

In the next statement, we tried to identify whether in communication with the Ukrainian minority Slovaks encounter prejudices against Slovak culture. In the theoretical part, we defined prejudice as barriers in intercultural communication that hinder its success and directly lead to intercultural conflicts. In this question, almost 72.9% of the respondents stated that they had never encountered such prejudices when communicating with the

Ukrainians. 23 Slovaks took an impartial opinion on this statement and only 5 respondents had encountered such prejudices. Since the answers of Slovaks were mostly homogeneous on this question, we can evaluate that Slovaks do not encounter prejudice against their culture when communicating with the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia.

Another question posed to our respondents addressed whether some intercultural misunderstandings between Slovak and Ukrainian cultures had occurred when communicating with the representatives of the Ukrainian culture. The answers of our respondents to the previous questions showed that the Ukrainian culture appeared to Slovaks quite similar to their own culture and there were no distinct cultural differences between the two national cultures when communicating. It is the absence of such differences and therefore the similarity of the two cultures that mitigate the emergence of intercultural misunderstandings during intercultural communication. This was also proved by the answers of the respondents, as up to 64.1% of our respondents stated that such intercultural misunderstandings do not occur during communication with representatives of the Ukrainian culture. 23 respondents took a neutral attitude to this question, and 14 respondents think that intercultural misunderstandings occur during communication between the two cultures.

In another statement *Possible intercultural misunderstandings in communication with members of Ukrainian culture are easy to resolve*, we aimed to identify whether, in case of possible cultural misunderstandings, Slovaks have to some extent certain intercultural competencies or skills that are necessary to resolve intercultural misunderstandings or conflicts in communication with another culture. The majority of respondents (67%) took a positive attitude to this statement, which allows us to assess that in case of certain cultural conflicts between Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures, such intercultural conflict or problems can be easily solved.

The next statement was similar to the previous one, as the aim was to find out the level of solidarity and tolerance towards the Ukrainian community living in Slovakia. As many as 86.4% of Slovaks agreed with the statement: *If members of the Ukrainian community approach me asking for help, I will be happy to help them*. We evaluate this attitude very positively, as it shows a great degree of solidarity of Slovaks towards the Ukrainian community living in Slovakia. This solidarity is very evident, especially during the refugee crisis when the Slovak population is helping Ukrainian refugees extensively.

The second to last question followed, this time open-ended, where Slovaks were asked to express their opinion and give reasons for possible misunderstandings between members of the Ukrainian and Slovak cultures. Answers such as ignorance of Ukrainian culture, prejudice against the other culture, language barriers, xenophobia, or stereotypical thinking of Slovaks were repeated. All these answers are an example of the barriers in intercultural communication that contribute to the emergence of intercultural problems as we have characterized them in the theoretical part of the thesis, and the answers of our respondents indicate that the Slovak population is aware of these barriers in communication between the two cultures.

The last question of this questionnaire aimed to find out how Slovaks in general evaluate Ukrainian culture. As many as 68.9% of the questionnaire respondents stated that they find Ukrainian culture interesting and inspiring, 17.5% could not express their attitude to this question and 14 respondents (13.6%) expressed a rather negative attitude towards Ukrainian culture. From this, we conclude that Slovaks have a predominantly positive attitude towards Ukrainian culture.

Thanks to the analysis of the results of the questionnaire, we can generally conclude that the Slovak population evaluates Ukrainian culture rather positively.

Most of the answers of the respondents indicated that Slovaks see similarities between Slovak and Ukrainian culture and the differences between the two national cultures are not so noticeable and therefore do not lead to intercultural misunderstandings. Slovaks also evaluate the presence of the Ukrainian community in Slovakia rather positively although respondents indicated that the Ukrainian minority should culturally assimilate into Slovak national culture. However, it is again essential to note that the research was conducted prior to the refugee crisis, and it is for this reason that the current situation could influence the respondents' answers to this question.

Considering possible barriers in intercultural communication that make the course of intercultural communication difficult, such as ethnocentrism or prejudice against the other culture, we can generally confirm that ethnocentrism or prejudice against the Ukrainian culture is not widespread among Slovaks, although a few responses indicated that some people are biased against this culture, but we cannot consider this to be the majority opinion of this research sample. Respondents' answers also indicated that Slovaks are aware of

barriers in intercultural communication that could be a disadvantage in such communication not only with Ukrainian but also with other cultures.

As far as intercultural conflicts between the two cultures are concerned, we can state that such conflicts rather do not occur, which may be caused by not so noticeable differences between Slovak and Ukrainian cultures.

The Slovak population feels solidarity with the representatives of the Ukrainian nationality, which is evidenced not only by their answers in this questionnaire but also by the actions taken by Slovaks since the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. This demonstrates a high degree of solidarity and the fact that the Ukrainian nationality is very close to the country's inhabitants. During the refugee crisis, which was triggered by the military conflict in Ukraine, Ukrainian nationality has been assisted by various Slovak institutions, organizations, as well as by individuals themselves. Slovak citizens are selflessly helping Ukrainian refugees, contributing materially, and financially, and providing them with shelters. Thanks to these actions and this altruistic help, we can therefore conclude that Slovaks have a strong affinity for the Ukrainian population.

### **3.2 Results of the questionnaire on the perception of Slovak culture by the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia**

In the second part of our research, we investigated the perception of Slovak culture by Ukrainians living in Slovakia and the possible occurrence of intercultural conflicts between the two cultures on the territory of Slovakia. The questionnaire was distributed to the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia from 11-23 February 2022. In order not to make the questionnaire in any way limiting for Ukrainian citizens, we had it translated into the Ukrainian language. Ukrainian citizens answered the questionnaire in the Ukrainian or Russian language. Translations were carried out using online translation platforms. This fact implied a limitation of our research, as a certain alteration of meaning may have occurred during the translation.

A total of 30 respondents completed the online questionnaire. The initial plan was to gather as many respondents as possible, but due to the current political and refugee crisis, we decided to stop the survey on 23 February as a sign of solidarity toward the Ukrainian nationality.

Similarly, to the first questionnaire, this one consisted of three parts. In the first part, we tried to find out the demographic structure of the population, the second part of the questionnaire comprised questions to determine the perception of Slovak culture through the optic of the Ukrainian minority, and in the last part, we asked about possible intercultural misunderstandings between the two cultures on the territory of Slovakia. The questions were similar to the previous questionnaire, i.e., open, closed, but we also presented the respondents with statements which they had to express their agreement or disagreement with, using a rating scale.

### *3.2.1 Analysis and the interpretation of the results*

The first section consisted of questions on age, sex, education, profession, as well as the reason for staying in Slovakia and the length of this stay. From the answers of our respondents, we found that their gender structure was balanced, as 52% of the respondents were women and 48% were men.

Considering the age distribution, we can conclude that almost the same number of respondents were aged 18-25 years (32%), 26-35 years (28%), 36-45 years (36%), and a smaller proportion of Ukrainians aged, and 45 years (4%) also filled in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was completed mostly by working people (68%), and university students (24%), but also by people who are currently unemployed (8%). People on pension or parental leave were absent, as we conclude that the majority of Ukrainians living in Slovakia came here to study or work.

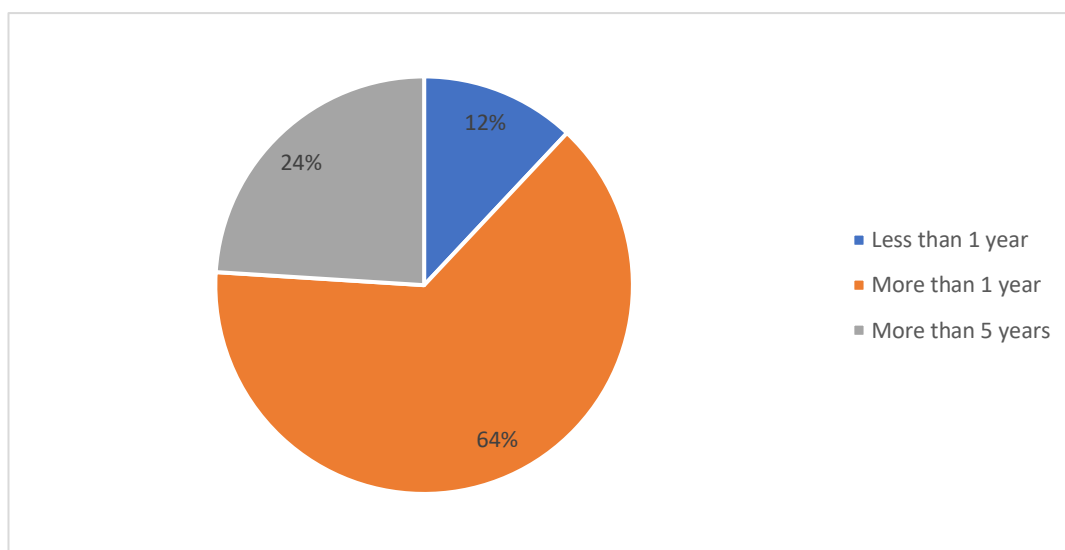
However, we would like to point out that a much larger number of Ukrainians are currently in the Slovak republic due to the current political situation, but the research was conducted before the refugee crisis.

On the issue of education, a large majority (80%) of our respondents indicated that they were university graduates, and then the remaining were respondents with a completed secondary education.

This was followed by questions about the reasons for staying in Slovakia and the duration of this stay. From the responses, we concluded that the majority of respondents came here for employment (60%), education (20%), or due to family reunion (12%). The rest of the respondents stated that their reason for staying in Slovakia was not included in the above-mentioned options, but they did not specify it further.

The length of stay of our respondents in the Slovak Republic varied. However, the majority stated that they had been in Slovakia for more than a year (64%), followed by a group of respondents who had been in Slovakia for more than 5 years (24%), and the smallest percentage of the surveyed sample of respondents indicated that the duration of such a stay was less than 1 year (12%). The graphical structure of the respondents' length of stay can be seen below.

**Chart 4: Graphical structure of the respondents' duration of stay in Slovakia**



Source: Author's own elaboration

The second section of questions followed in which we strove to ascertain the perception of Slovak culture through the eyes of Ukrainians. In the first open question, *what do you like or dislike about Slovakia?* the aim was to identify the associations of the Ukrainian minority with Slovakia. In the answers of our respondents mostly positive associations prevailed over negative ones. The Ukrainian minority likes the nature in Slovakia, the friendliness and good heartedness of the Slovak people, and also the working conditions. Some respondents even claimed that they very much like the similarity between Ukrainian and Slovak culture.

However, a few of our respondents have rather negative associations with Slovakia, such as very high prices or conservative citizens. An interesting finding was that some respondents had mentioned a very positive attitude towards Russia in Slovakia, which they evaluated very negatively. Despite such negative associations, we can conclude that the majority of the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia associate rather positive qualities with Slovakia.



The second question in this section was very similar to the previous one, however, we openly asked respondents what qualities, in their opinion, best characterize the Slovak inhabitants. These answers were also dominated by positive qualities such as friendliness, goodwill, willingness to help, openness, responsibility, and respect for others. However, some respondents also mentioned negative qualities, such as the following: *“Slovaks are lazy, cold, want to teach people their culture, sometimes prejudiced against Ukraine and apathetic towards foreigners”*. An answer that such characteristics are individual and cannot be generalized to the whole Slovak population was also mentioned.

The next question was very similar to the previous one, except this one directly asked about the largest differences between Slovak and Ukrainian culture. Respondents' answers to this question were very interesting and diversified. Participants stated, for instance, that Slovakia is a more Western-oriented country than Ukraine, Ukrainians are more open-minded, temperamental, more hospitable, more hardworking, and children have more respect for their parents. Other respondents also mentioned that a big difference between the two cultures lies in religious traditions. However, there were also responses claiming that the differences are not so noticeable because the cultures are very similar.

In the next question, we asked the Ukrainian minority whether they speak the Slovak language fluently. We assume that in the case of knowledge of the Slovak language, communicational or intercultural misunderstandings are less likely to arise. A surprising finding was that as many as 88% of our respondents reported that they speak the Slovak language proficiently. We consider this finding very positive, as it means that in this manner the Ukrainian minority is also able to better understand Slovak culture.

Following this question, the third section continued, in which we attempted to explore the experiences of the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia with the Slovak population. We assumed that all the respondents had already encountered Slovaks, as they have been in Slovakia for a long time and such contact is inevitable.

The first question we asked Ukrainians residing in Slovakia was whether they had had any unpleasant experiences with the Slovak population during their stay in this country. Out of a total of 30 respondents, more than half of them (16) answered this question affirmatively, which means that they have experienced some negative situation with the people of Slovakia while living in the country. 8 respondents stated that they never had such an experience, and the rest of the respondents had no opinion on this question.

This was followed by an open question aimed at clarifying the nature of the unpleasant experience. Repeated answers such as inadequate attitude towards immigrants, Ukrainophobia, or respondents reported that Slovaks refused to help them when asked for it. Also, one respondent stated that when communicating with a representative of the Slovak population, he condemned him for taking jobs away from Slovaks and advised him to stay in Ukraine. Despite such negative comments, a couple of respondents reacted to this question by saying that they have only had pleasant experiences with Slovaks and in general the Slovaks are very nice people.

In the following question, we asked Ukrainians what in their opinion the reasons for possible misunderstandings when communicating with the Slovak population are. Respondents' answers to this question were remarkably interesting and varied. Most of the answers pointed out that Ukrainians see a certain difference between the two cultures that could contribute to the emergence of intercultural conflict. Ukrainians consider the different mentality of the Slovak population, distinct perceptions of the world, prejudices of Slovaks, or previous negative experiences of Slovaks with Ukrainians living in Slovakia as possible reasons for misunderstandings between the two cultures. Another interesting answer was the one where the Ukrainian respondent pointed to the poor awareness of the Slovak population as the reason for possible misunderstandings between the two cultures: *“The level of knowledge and understanding of the political situation in the world remained at the level of the USSR. Ignorance of other languages prevents Slovaks from learning truthful news from various sources; everything they know comes from TV or Facebook groups”*. Respondents also said that they condemn Slovaks for their great love for Russia and consider Ukrainians as people of a lower class. There was also a repeated response that Slovaks judge Ukrainians for their large-scale migration to other countries. Such as this answer: *“Sometimes it seems that some people try to avoid Ukrainians, as if they condemn us for migrating en masse to European countries, including Slovakia. Some people sometimes don't understand how hard it is for us”*. From the answers of the respondents, we can conclude that many of them condemn certain characteristics of the Slovak population that could contribute to the emergence of intercultural conflict between representatives of Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures.

The next question formulated as *Do you feel welcome in Slovakia?* was to investigate whether Ukrainians living in Slovakia like the way they are treated by the Slovak people and whether they are generally satisfied with the treatment they have received in Slovak society.

Respondents' answers to this question were not as unambiguous, as more than 50% of the respondents replied *I don't know*. One-third of the respondents answered positively, i.e., they feel welcome among Slovak citizens, and 5 respondents think that Slovak society has received them rather negatively. The reason for their answers, however, may not be the way Slovak citizens treat them, but also other factors, such as the general conditions for foreigners in Slovakia.

However, an interesting finding was that in another question, in which we set out to examine whether Ukrainians living in Slovakia establish friendly relations with Slovak citizens, as many as 92% of Ukrainians answered that they do establish such relations. This means that although Ukrainians may not feel completely welcome in Slovak society, we can conclude from the answers that they generally have rather positive relations with the Slovak population.

Again, it is important to point out that the research was carried out before the humanitarian crisis and the solidarity shown by the Slovak population to the Ukrainian people is immense. This is also reflected in the activities that Slovak national institutions are undertaking toward supporting the Ukrainian population.

Subsequently in the questionnaire, Ukrainians were requested to express their agreement or disagreement with given statements using a rating scale. The first such statement was “*Based on communication with Slovaks, I found out that Ukrainian culture is similar to the Slovak culture.*” The purpose of this statement was to find out how Ukrainians evaluate the difference between the two cultures, considering the fact that the greater the difference between the two cultures, the more likely it is that intercultural conflict could occur in the process of intercultural communication. However, the majority of the respondents (14) took a neutral attitude towards this statement, from which we can conclude that they do not see many similarities between the two cultures but neither do they see many dissimilarities.

This was followed by the statement formulated “*I have encountered prejudice against Ukrainian culture when communicating with Slovaks*”. In the theoretical part of the thesis, we have characterized prejudices as barriers in intercultural communication, so we consider this question very important. A very positive finding was that a large majority of our respondents answered this question negatively, i.e., they had not encountered such

prejudice before. Only 5 respondents claimed that they had encountered prejudice against Ukrainian culture during their stay in the Slovak Republic.

Another question followed - the linguistic one since we inquired our respondents whether they had experienced significant language barriers in their communication with members of the Slovak culture that could contribute to the emergence of intercultural conflict. From the answers, we found that Ukrainians do not feel significant language barriers when communicating with Slovaks, as the majority of respondents took a negative attitude towards this statement. However, this may also be influenced by the fact that most of our respondents in the previous linguistic question claimed that they speak Slovak fluently and that is why language is not a problem in interaction with the Slovak population.

In the next statement included, we aimed to identify the occurrence of intercultural conflicts during the communication between the two cultures as such. We presented the respondents with the statement *Intercultural misunderstandings occur during communication with Slovaks*. According to the answers of our respondents, we gathered that such misunderstandings do not occur at all, as more than half of our respondents took a dismissive attitude towards this question. Only 7 respondents declared that some intercultural misunderstandings occur when communicating with Slovaks.

Additionally, we sought to discover what attitude Ukrainians have towards solving possible intercultural misunderstandings. Via the statement *Possible intercultural misunderstandings in communication with Slovaks are easy to solve*, we also aimed to investigate the level of certain necessary intercultural competencies, which are crucial for the success of intercultural communication itself and facilitate the resolution of possible intercultural conflicts as well. As many as 18 respondents out of a total of 30 stated that such misunderstandings are easy to resolve, and the rest of the respondents took a neutral stance on this statement. The fact that none of the respondents took a negative attitude to this statement means that it is not difficult for the Ukrainian minority to resolve possible intercultural misunderstandings when communicating with members of the Slovak culture.

With the second to last statement, *I prefer to avoid communication with Slovaks*, we attempted to measure the openness of the Ukrainian minority to communicate with the Slovak population. 22 respondents did not identify with this statement, which means that they are open to such communication.

The last statement in which Ukrainians were asked to express their agreement or disagreement using a rating scale was the statement *"If I ask Slovaks for help, they are glad to help me"*. By using this statement, we aimed to explore how the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia assesses the level of solidarity of the Slovak population and the support provided by the Slovak society. A very positive finding was that up to 22 respondents out of a total of 30 said that they agreed with the statement, which means that Slovaks are very accessible and willing to help the Ukrainian minority living in Slovakia.

### **3.3 Conclusion of the chapter**

Based on the answers of Ukrainians, we can conclude that the perception of Slovak culture is also rather positive, which is also proved by the associations of Ukrainians with Slovakia that we have mentioned above. However, Ukrainians' opinions about Slovaks differed to some extent, as several responses attributed negative characteristics to Slovaks. Most of them were related to the excessive sympathy of Slovaks towards Russia, which Ukrainians evaluate very negatively.

Nonetheless, more than half of the Ukrainians noted that they had had some unpleasant experiences with Slovaks. However, such experiences are very individual and do not stem from intercultural differences, which was also mentioned by the respondents themselves. Ukrainians also stated that language barriers are also minimal and are not a reason for possible intercultural problems between the two cultures.

Several Ukrainians, however, assess very negatively the perception of their minority in the Slovak Republic, especially the condemnation of Ukrainians for mass migration. It can be stated that Ukrainians see a certain degree of stereotyping or prejudice against their national culture in the Slovak Republic, although Ukrainians themselves reported that they have not encountered such prejudice in their communication with the Slovak population.

Despite these answers, we can generally conclude that Ukrainians establish friendly relations with Slovaks and perceive the solidarity of Slovaks, which proves the mutual sympathy between the two national cultures and nowadays it is also evident in the aid provided to Ukrainians in Slovakia.

## 4 Discussion and recommendations

Despite the fact that we have described in the theoretical part using Hofstede's dimensions that in some aspects these national cultures show significant differences, such distinctions do not contribute to the emergence of intercultural problems between the two cultures. Although a portion of the research sample reported having had unpleasant experiences with the other culture, these were evaluated more subjectively and were not the result of cross-cultural differences.

The mutual perception of Ukrainian and Slovak culture was assessed rather positively. Nevertheless, a few respondents showed a degree of stereotyping or prejudice, and the difficulty was to determine the extent to which such characteristics attributed to the Slovak or Ukrainian population were based on actual experiences with the culture. Since such prejudices or stereotypes represent barriers in intercultural communication and directly lead to intercultural problems, it is important to slowly eliminate them by better information about the other culture or by building intercultural competencies, on which the success of intercultural communication directly depends. One of the ways to improve such intercultural competencies and thus reduce the occurrence of possible intercultural problems is intercultural education and intercultural training.

Regarding intercultural training, Hofstede (2005) specifically mentions 2 types of such training, the more traditional one which focuses on knowledge of the other culture, also called "expatriate briefings", which consist of providing information to people who are to have contact with the foreign culture so that these people can behave in the best possible way in the foreign environment and comply with all the rules of conduct that apply in the foreign society. The second type of training that Hofstede mentions focuses on general knowledge of cultural differences. It concentrates on knowing one's mental software so that people can evaluate how their mental softer may differ from the other.

Seresová and Helmová (2021) also explain intercultural training as a method of acquiring intercultural competence and they give several types of intercultural training, for instance, informative oriented training, culturally oriented training, and interactive oriented training.

During the informative training, as much information as possible about the given culture is conveyed, and the participants get acquainted with the situation of the host country

using various methods. The second type is cultural-oriented training, which aims to get to know a foreign culture and at the same time reflect on one's own culture to better understand individual patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. This type is very similar to the above-mentioned Hofstede intercultural training, the aim of which was to get to know one's mental software so that people could better understand how their mental software differs from another's.

The third type mentioned by Seresová and Helmová (2021) is interactive training, in which training situations are created through direct contact with people from a foreign culture, or real situations are induced within a real intercultural environment. Such training leads to motivation and communication with representatives of foreign cultures and at the same time participants will learn how to meet the requirements that will be expected of them in foreign cultures. Intercultural training has become an essential part of the in-house activities of multinational companies that want to operate successfully in the international market, but also international institutions engaged in the process of migration and integration of foreigners.

Intercultural education is another way of acquiring intercultural competencies. We would recommend such education to Ukrainians who migrate to Slovakia to study or work, but during the refugee crisis, which has had an impact on migration flows, such education is beneficial not only for all Ukrainian refugees but also for Slovaks who come into constant contact with them, such as employers who employ people of Ukrainian nationality or employees who work in institutions that are directly involved in the whole process of their integration into Slovak society.

Amid globalisation and the inevitable contact with other cultures, it would be beneficial if intercultural education and, in this process, the building of intercultural competencies, became part of the school education so that children could develop the skills to communicate effectively with other cultures from an early age. Such education is lacking in Slovakia because, as Čiefová (2020) says, intercultural education is still not a separate subject in Slovak schools, although some classes do cover topics related to intercultural issues.

This type of learning is even more useful in times of refugee crisis as children of migrants are admitted to pre-schools and schools in Slovakia. As a result of this situation,

the need for intercultural education and an approach to multiculturalism seems even more beneficial.

As a final point in the discussion, it is essential to underline the fact that this thesis has been affected heavily by the refugee crisis, because of which we decided to interrupt our research before the originally intended date of its closure. This refugee crisis, however, evoked a great deal of solidarity among Slovaks toward the Ukrainian nationality. Not only national institutions or NGOs but also citizens themselves are involved in this assistance. We cannot assess to what extent cultural affinity or geographical proximity has played a role in this aid as there is no published research yet. Nevertheless, this is exactly the reason why we recommend this topic for further research.

The current situation, which has accelerated migration flows and caused thousands of Ukrainian refugees to arrive in Slovakia, may cause this issue of Ukrainian-Slovak intercultural problems to become even more relevant in the future, which is why it is also worth suggesting additional investigation.

We also recommend replicating the research in the future, in order to find out how the migration crisis has influenced the mutual perception of the cultures and whether it has contributed to the occurrence of intercultural problems between the Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures.



## 5 Conclusion

Nowadays, in the course of globalisation, there are constant encounters with other cultures. The process of this intercultural communication is at times so complex that the very differences between national cultures can result in intercultural misunderstandings, which are the subject of this thesis. Due to the broad character of the thesis, we were concerned with the investigation of intercultural issues between Ukrainian and Slovak cultures in the territory of the Slovak Republic. At the time of the refugee crisis, this topic seems to be even more relevant, because the harmonious coexistence of these two cultures in Slovakia is particularly important. Therefore, it was also necessary to identify the mutual perception of these two national cultures in order to reveal the occurrence of certain stereotypes or prejudices that could directly contribute to the emergence of an intercultural conflict.

It is pivotal to mention that the thesis was largely influenced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent refugee crisis, as we decided to stop our research out of solidarity with the Ukrainian population after the outbreak of the refugee crisis.

The main objective of our thesis was to identify intercultural problems between representatives of Slovak national and Ukrainian national cultures on the territory of Slovakia and also to present certain ways of solving such possible intercultural misunderstandings. In addition to the main objective, we also set several partial objectives, which contributed to fulfilling the main objective, namely the mutual perception of Slovak and Ukrainian national culture through the eyes of Slovaks and Ukrainians living in Slovakia. We managed to fulfil both objectives by using the established research methods.

With these research methods, we also confirmed the formulated hypothesis: *"There are no intercultural problems between Slovak and Ukrainian national cultures in the Slovak Republic"*.

Quantitative research methods helped us to reveal that there are no serious intercultural issues between the two national cultures. The responses of Slovaks from the online questionnaire identified that the perception of the Ukrainian population is rather positive, as Slovaks attributed to Ukrainians qualities such as generosity, good-heartedness, and friendliness. Slovaks like Ukrainian nature and culture, their customs, and traditions. Respondents also rate Ukrainian culture as very similar to Slovak culture, which may directly affect the process of intercultural communication. The analysis of the answers of

our research sample also pointed to the fact that the process of interaction with the Ukrainian population is almost without any difficulties, which might be a consequence of the cultural affinity between the two cultures. The degree of solidarity of Slovaks towards the Ukrainian population is immense, which was proved not only by the answers of the respondents in the questionnaire but also by the help offered by the Slovak population to Ukrainian refugees. It is not clear to what extent this help is caused by cultural kinship or geographical proximity, which is why we believe the topic deserves further investigation, as also mentioned in the discussion part.

The Ukrainian population rated Slovak national culture similarly. Ukrainians like the good-heartedness or generosity of the people, but also the very favourable working conditions or the willingness to help, which is very visible, especially during the refugee crisis. However, the analysis of their answers indicated that they identified a certain degree of stereotypes or prejudices that Slovaks have towards Ukrainian nationality, especially because of their mass migration to neighbouring countries.

Despite these responses, we can assess from our research that there are no intercultural misunderstandings between the representatives of these two national cultures, as the analysed responses revealed the fact that negative experiences with the members of the other culture were evaluated rather subjectively and cannot be considered as the true reason for the emergence of intercultural conflicts.

We also assume that if the research had been conducted after the refugee crisis, the responses of Ukrainians would have been greatly influenced by the solidarity currently shown to them by the Slovak population.

For mutual understanding and successful coexistence of the two cultures in Slovakia, especially given the accelerated migration flows, intercultural training and intercultural education are essential because they contribute to the acquisition of intercultural competencies, which are fundamental for successful intercultural communication and are crucial for better cooperation between two national cultures.

During the refugee crisis, such intercultural education becomes more important as the process of communication between the two national cultures is currently inevitable in the territory of the Slovak Republic. It would also help to remove stereotypes and prejudices against other cultures and promote a better understanding of other cultures and mutual respect.

This type of intercultural learning would be helpful to facilitate the process of intercultural communication not only between Slovak and Ukrainian nationalities but also in interaction with members of other cultures, which is becoming very frequent due to the process of globalization and migration flows.

## 6 Resumé

21. storočie a súčasná globalizovaná spoločnosť spôsobuje, že neustále dochádza k stretu rôznych kultúr. Práve preto je problematika interkultúrnej komunikácie a jej úspešnosti diskutovaná a analyzovaná rôznymi autormi. Predpokladá sa, že značné rozdiely v kultúrnych profiloch krajín sú faktorom, ktorý prispieva k vzniku interkultúrnych problémov medzi dvoma národnými kultúrami. Cieľom tejto diplomovej práce je skúmanie súčasných interkultúrnych problémov medzi dvoma národnými kultúrami na určitom území. Okrem toho taktiež predkladá návrhy na ich možné riešenie. Vzhľadom na široký charakter skúmanej problematiky a interdisciplinaritu témy sme sa rozhodli analyzovať vzájomné interkultúrne ukrajinsko-slovenské vzťahy na území Slovenskej republiky. Dôvodom pre výber danej oblasti a kultúr bolo značné zastúpenie ukrajinskej národnosti na Slovensku.

Prvá kapitola práce objasňuje pojmy, ktoré sú kľúčové pre výskum danej problematiky. Analyzované sú pojmy ako kultúra, národná kultúra, interkultúrne kompetencie ale aj interkultúrny konflikt či problém. V práci sa odvolávame na slovenských aj zahraničných autorov, ktorých diela sú uznávané a citované v publikáciách pojednávajúcich o interkultúrnych témach.

Práca opisuje pojem kultúra z viacerých hľadísk a predkladá určité definície tohto pojmu, ktoré existujú v 21. storočí. Od pojmu kultúra prechádza k analýze národnej kultúry, keďže práve komparácia dvoch národných kultúr bola v danej práci kľúčová. Neskôr sú rozoberané pojmy ako interkultúrna komunikácia a jej základné aspekty. Práca interkultúrnú komunikáciu vníma ako proces výmeny informácií medzi predstaviteľmi najmenej dvoch rôznych kultúr. Veľmi dôležité sú kultúrne a jazykové aspekty, ktoré majú vplyv na úspešnosť priebehu interkultúrnej komunikácie. Práca hodnotí jazykový aspekt ako veľmi dôležitý, keďže nedostatočná znalosť cudzieho jazyka, v ktorom by bola interkultúrna komunikácia možná, tvorí predpoklad neúspešnosti tejto medzikultúrnej výmeny informácií.

Od opisu interkultúrnej komunikácie a aspektov spojených s týmto procesom práca pokračuje analýzou interkultúrnych kompetencií, ktorých znalosť je podstatná pre úspešnosť interkultúrnej komunikácie. Hodnotíme prístupy rôznych autorov, ktorí sa zaoberajú najpodstatnejšími takýmito kompetenciami. Okrem osobnostných predpokladov spomíname aj situačné faktory. Práca poukazuje na skutočnosť, že akvizícia interkultúrnych kompetencií sa vyžaduje v povolaniach, ktoré pôsobia v interkultúrnom prostredí. Medzi takéto

interkultúrne kompetencie by sme mohli zaradiť tolerantnosť, empatiu, otvorenosť, absenciu etnocentrizmu, či trpezlivosť. Vymenované kompetencie sú súčasťou osobnostných predpokladov, avšak ako sme už spomenuli vyššie, proces interkultúrnej komunikácie výrazne ovplyvňujú aj situačné faktory, medzi ktoré patria napríklad klimatické podmienky, počet komunikačných partnerov, ich status či vzájomné vzťahy medzi nimi. V prípade absencie osobnostných predpokladov poukazujeme na fakt, že ich akvizícia je možná prostredníctvom interkultúrnych tréningov.

Práca sa ďalej zaoberá interkultúrnym konfliktom, ktorého vysvetlenie je v danej problematike kľúčové. Interkultúrny konflikt, ktorý opisujeme ako konflikt minimálne dvoch kultúr, veľmi úzko súvisí s interkultúrnymi kompetenciami, pretože práve ich nedostatok má priamy vplyv na vznik takéhoto konfliktu. Okrem toho však na interkultúrny konflikt značne vplývajú aj bariéry v interkultúrnej komunikácii, ktoré sú v práci podrobne analyzované. Za takéto bariéry považujeme etnocentrizmus, stereotypy či predsudky, ktoré práca opisuje ako mylné predpoklady o druhej kultúre. Takéto domnienky sú väčšinou zdieľané určitou skupinou ľudí a práve preto je proces ich eliminácie komplikovaný.

Neskôr v práci analyzujeme kultúrne profily dvoch vybraných krajín, konkrétne Slovenska a Ukrajiny. Ich komparatívna analýza je pre prácu kľúčová, keďže predpokladáme, že práve značná rozdielnosť v kultúrach je predispozíciou vzniku interkultúrnych problémov medzi nimi. Dané kultúry sme opísali prostredníctvom Hofstedeho kultúrnych dimenzií, a to z dôvodu, že jeho diela sú v danej problematike najviac diskutované. Pri ich opise práca poukázala na fakt, že ukrajinská a slovenská národná kultúra sú v niektorých dimenziách veľmi podobné, zatiaľ čo v iných vykazujú signifikantné rozdiely, hlavne v dimenzii maskulinity, individualizmu verzus kolektivismu a taktiež vyhýbaniu sa neistote. Skóre týchto krajín implikuje, že ukrajinská kultúra je silne kolektivistická a presadzuje vlastnosti ako starostlivosť o iných či dobrá kvalita života, zatiaľ čo v slovenskej spoločnosti sa dôraz kladie na úspech a súťaživosť jednotlivca. Tieto pomerne odlišné charakteristiky môžu prispieť k vzniku interkultúrnych konfliktov v priebehu interkultúrnej komunikácie medzi týmito dvoma kultúrami.

Druhá kapitola vysvetľuje metódy a ciele práce. Práca je kombináciou kvalitatívnych a kvantitatívnych výskumných metód. Hlavný výskum práce bol realizovaný formou online dotazníkov, ktoré boli distribuované slovenskému obyvateľstvu a príslušníkom ukrajinskej národnej kultúry žijúcim na Slovensku. Hlavným cieľom práce bolo identifikovať

interkultúrne nedorozumenia medzi oboma kultúrami a navrhnúť ich možné riešenia. Za účelom naplnenia hlavného cieľa sme si stanovili aj parciálne ciele a to skúmanie vzájomnej percepcie oboch kultúr, keďže práve vnímanie kultúry môže poukázať na určitý stupeň stereotypov či predsudkov, ktoré tvoria bariéry v interkultúrnej komunikácii a prispievajú tak k vzniku interkultúrnych konfliktov. Druhým parciálnym cieľom práce bola analýza kultúrnych profilov Slovenska a Ukrajiny.

Tretia kapitola práce predkladá výsledky empirického výskumu, ktorý bol realizovaný prostredníctvom dvoch online dotazníkov a uskutočnil sa od 8. do 23. februára 2022. V tomto období boli prostredníctvom sociálnych sietí distribuované dotazníky slovenskému obyvateľstvu a ukrajinskej menšine žijúcej na Slovensku. Súčasťou príloh práce sú oba dotazníky.

Dotazníky obsahovali otvorené, zatvorené otázky, ale taktiež výroky, s ktorými sa mali respondenti pomocou hodnotiacej stupnice buď stotožniť alebo vyjadriť s nimi nesúhlas.

Dotazník určený pre slovenské obyvateľstvo vyplnilo 121 Slovákov. Z ich odpovedí môžeme skonštatovať, že percepcia ukrajinskej kultúry je skôr pozitívna, keďže Ukrajincom pripisovali väčšinou pozitívne vlastnosti ako napríklad dobrosrdečnosť, priateľskosť, či štedrosť. Ich asociácia s Ukrajinou bola vnímaná taktiež v pozitívnom zmysle. U Slovákov sa opakovali odpovede, ktoré naznačovali, že obľubujú ukrajinskú kultúru či prírodu.

Slováci identifikujú určité prvky podobnosti medzi slovenskou a ukrajinskou kultúrou, čo môže mať značný dopad na úspešnosť interkultúrnej komunikácie. Z otázok, v ktorých sme sa snažili zistiť vnímanie prezencie Ukrajincov na slovenskom území a potrebu ich väčšej integrácie do slovenskej spoločnosti, sme sa dozvedeli, že Slováci necítia potrebu väčšej integrácie Ukrajincov do ich spoločnosti, avšak istá časť výskumnej vzorky zastáva názor, že ich kultúrna asimilácia na území Slovenskej republiky je vítaná.

Otázky súvisiace s výskytom bariér v interkultúrnej komunikácii poukázali na fakt, že u Slovákov nie je prítomný značný výskyt etnocentrizmu či predsudkov voči ukrajinskej kultúre. Komunikácii s touto kultúrou a pomoci jej príslušníkom sú do veľkej miery otvorení, o čom svedčí aj solidarita, ktorú príslušníkom ukrajinskej národnosti prejavujú počas utečeneckej krízy.

Výsledky výskumu taktiež poukazujú na to, že samotný priebeh komunikácie medzi týmito dvoma kultúrami je takmer bezproblémový. Slováci pri interakcii s členmi ukrajinskej kultúry nevnímajú značné rozdiely medzi ich a ukrajinskou kultúrou, čo do určitej miery vplýva na úspešnosť ich komunikácie. Neprijemné skúsenosti s predstaviteľmi ukrajinskej národnosti vychádzali skôr zo subjektívnych skúseností a nemôžeme ich považovať za možný zdroj interkultúrnych konfliktov. Slováci taktiež nevnímajú žiadne predsudky zo strany Ukrajincov voči slovenskej kultúre.

Neskôr práca predkladá výsledky dotazníka o percepcii slovenskej kultúry a identifikácii problémov medzi slovenskou a ukrajinskou kultúrou. Dotazník vyplnilo 30 príslušníkov ukrajinskej národnosti žijúcej na území Slovenska. Na základe ich odpovedí môžeme usúdiť, že ich vnímanie slovenskej kultúry je skôr pozitívne, čo dokazujú aj ich asociácie so Slovenskom. Názory Ukrajincov na Slovákov sa však do istej miery líšili, keďže viaceré odpovede im pripisovali negatívne vlastnosti. Väčšina z nich súvisela s prílišnými sympatiami Slovákov k Rusku, ktoré Ukrajinci hodnotia veľmi negatívne.

Viac ako polovica Ukrajincov uviedla, že má so Slovákami neprijemné skúsenosti. Takéto skúsenosti sú však veľmi individuálne a nevyplývajú z kultúrnych rozdielov, čo uviedli aj samotní respondenti. Ukrajinci tiež uviedli, že jazykové bariéry sú tiež minimálne a nie sú dôvodom možných interkultúrnych problémov medzi oboma kultúrami.

Viacerí Ukrajinci však veľmi negatívne hodnotia vnímanie svojej menšiny v SR, najmä odsudzovanie Ukrajincov za masovú migráciu. Možno konštatovať, že Ukrajinci žijúci v Slovenskej republike identifikujú určitú mieru stereotypov či predsudkov voči svojej národnej kultúre, hoci samotní Ukrajinci uvádzajú, že sa s takýmito predsudkami v komunikácii so slovenským obyvateľstvom nestretli.

Napriek týmto odpovediam môžeme vo všeobecnosti konštatovať, že Ukrajinci nadväzujú so Slovákami priateľské vzťahy a sú vďační za solidaritu Slovákov, čo poukazuje na vzájomné sympatie medzi oboma národnými kultúrami. V súčasnosti sa to prejavuje aj v pomoci poskytovanej Ukrajincom na Slovensku.

Aj napriek určitým rozdielom medzi týmito dvoma kultúrami, ktoré charakterizujeme pri komparatívnej analýze kultúrnych dimenzií týchto dvoch krajín, sme prostredníctvom výskumu neidentifikovali interkultúrne problémy medzi týmito krajinami, ktoré by vyplývali z týchto rozdielov.

Štvrtá kapitola s názvom diskusia a odporúčania na základe výsledkov výskumu poskytuje možné návrhy na riešenie interkultúrnych problémov medzi ukrajinskou a slovenskou národnou kultúrou.

Vzhľadom na fakt, že vo výskumnej časti práce nedošlo k zisteniu interkultúrnych nedorozumení medzi ukrajinskou a slovenskou národnou kultúrou, avšak do istej miery boli identifikované určité bariéry, ktoré komplikujú priebeh interkultúrnej komunikácie, na odstránenie takýchto stereotypov či predsudkov a zabezpečenie relatívne pozitívneho status quo odporúčame interkultúrny tréning či interkultúrne vzdelávanie, ktorých cieľom je akvizícia interkultúrnych kompetencií pozitívne vplyvujúcich na úspešnosť priebehu interkultúrnej komunikácie. Takéto vzdelávanie je v dnešnej dobe súčasťou medzinárodných korporácií, avšak je prínosné hlavne aj pre migrantov, ktorí prichádzajú na Slovensko pracovať či študovať. Mohlo by byť prínosné v rámci procesu ich integrácie. Taktiež ho odporúčame zakomponovať do učebných osnov slovenských škôl, aby boli slovenské deti už od útleho veku vedené k nadobudnutiu interkultúrnych kompetencií a tým pádom schopnosti efektívne komunikovať s inými kultúrami.

V čase utečeneckej krízy je takýto tréning prínosný pre všetkých utečencov, a osôb, ktoré s nimi prichádzajú do styku.

Harmonické nažívanie ukrajinskej a slovenskej kultúry je v súčasnosti kľúčové, keďže je potrebná vzájomná tolerancia a rešpekt týchto dvoch kultúr na území Slovenska. Interkultúrny tréning by taktiež mohol viesť k lepšej informovanosti a pochopeniu rozdielov medzi predstaviteľmi týchto dvoch kultúr a tak k efektívnejšiemu spolunažívaniu a lepšej spolupráci týchto dvoch kultúr.

Kľúčové je spomenúť, že výskum bol uskutočnený pred ruskou inváziou na Ukrajinu, ktorá výrazne urýchlila migračné toky a spôsobila značný príliv Ukrajincov na územie Slovenskej republiky. Táto utečenecká kríza by mohla mať značný dopad na odpovede respondentov v oboch dotazníkoch, práve preto v budúcnosti, keď bude situácia oveľa stabilnejšia, odporúčame výskum replikovať s cieľom zistiť, ako utečenecká kríza ovplyvnila vzájomnú percepciu slovenskej a ukrajinskej národnej kultúry a taktiež či mala určitý dopad na výskyt interkultúrnych nedorozumení medzi predstaviteľmi týchto dvoch kultúr.



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## **8 Attachments**

The empirical research of the thesis was conducted using quantitative research methods, namely two online questionnaires with representatives of the two national cultures analysed. On the following pages we present samples of the questionnaires, one was addressed to the Slovak population and the other to the members of the Ukrainian nationality living in Slovakia.