

The Family as a Site of Consocial Learning: the Cultural Socialisation of Young People in the Process of Intergenerational Exchange

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This article explores the family as an educational environment and space for the intergenerational exchange of knowledge. Focusing on the process of cultural socialization as viewed against the currently popular “culture wars” it employs the concept of consociality, which is aimed at grasping the diversity and unpredictability of human interactions, and has been recently rejuvenated by Ulf Hannerz. Investigating the consocial character of learning and intergenerational exchange within the family educational environment, the article takes examples from Slovakia and Latvia and problematizes the relationship between formal and informal learning to demonstrate how it changes knowledge infused with cultural meanings and references. The article argues that this process depends on the consocial conditions in which it is created. It also suggests that viewing the family environment in consocial terms provides us with an opportunity to rethink the role of experiences shared within the family and thereby mitigate ethnic-cum-cultural essentialism.

Keywords: intergenerational transmission, socialization, consociality, heritage, belonging, memory, identity, young people

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, the notions of cultural exclusivity, heritage, and ethnic roots seem to be gaining a new vigour and are discursively, as well as in practice, manifest in what may be loosely termed culture wars. Political defenders of ‘cultures’ have popped up all over the world

to offer, along with a stimulating dose of emotional appeal, easy solutions to the changing societal landscape in their own countries.¹ Young people are often the target and participants of this process. Linking their socialization to the formation of cultural identities and intergenerational transmission, this article aims to discuss how the family educational environment shapes and informs young people's socialization while infusing it with the idea of culture irrespective of the polysemy that gives it its idiosyncratic opaqueness.²

Learning about who we are and where we come from is a complex process given the numerous learning environments. These may be divided into the formal environments accessed through school and informal ones accessed outside school.³ Within the formal domain of education the increasing interconnectedness of the world is manifest in the educational approaches adopted – often stimulated by a postcolonial revision of social categories (cf. Gupta, Ferguson, 1997; Bhabha, 1994; Anderson, 1983). These reconsider the nation-state and ethnic-culture narratives and replace them with a careful sensitivity towards the construction of cultural meanings across social spaces that defy nation-state boundaries and strive to meet the future challenges presented by global issues.⁴ In contrast, the currently popular defence of cultural essentialism and normativity embodied in culture wars brings back the old questions regarding the societal consensus on what should be learned and practiced in and regarding society, and the nature of the public and socially representative discourse that sets the learning standards and leads to social cohesion and to functional societal bodies. Questioning authority when learning about the life of society, past or present, entails the use of the categories of cultural identity, belonging, memory, and heritage, in efforts to rekindle the debate on the dynamic between collective and individual agency. As is the case in the formal learning environment, these questions are reflected and addressed in the informal one.

One of the more obvious formative educational environments that shapes young people's knowledge of cultural and ethnic belonging, identity and heritage is the family. Irrespective of its form, it is a social body possessing all kinds of capital that acts as a structuring social structure providing dispositions for understanding the particulars of culture and practical role models, while its important characteristics are reproduced in the broadest sense (Bourdieu, 1998: 99). As a site of learning, it both draws on formal learning and creates the conditions under which it can be changed. The family then acts as the first gateway into the individual's socialization, transmission and internalization of ethnic issues, values, beliefs, customs, behaviours, and norms, which is referred to as cultural socialization (cf. Lee, 2003). This raises complex questions that this paper will attempt to address. What is it that is transmitted across the generations in the familial site of learning, insofar as the cultural identity and socialization taking place in the

1 Think, for instance of the wall on the American-Mexican border, government support for indigenous science based on Vedic knowledge in India, the unprecedented annexation of Crimea by Russia, or Brexit.

2 A useful overview of the different concepts of culture, the topic of numerous social science studies, can be found, for instance, in Sewell 2005.

3 For more on these, see the editorial of this special issue.

4 For instance, this can be seen in the debates on educational approaches to culture that implement global education. For a stern critique of the circumstances where 'a careful sensitivity' becomes a newly espoused ideological strategy that avoids the threat of diversity see Figueira (2008).

family is concerned? What social stances are taught as part of the learning within the family? How does the family assist in providing the future generation with the ideal socio-cultural inclusivity, help prevent “culture wars”, and achieve the positively connoted social change? To be clear, the aim is not to provide a definitive answer to these questions but rather to sketch out the direction in which these answers can be found and to generate more questions. At the very least because experience tells us that definitive answers jeopardize our chances of enhancing inclusivity. The intergenerational exchange and the learning occurring therein works through a *modus operandi* that problematizes the relationship between formal and informal learning. Below we shall discuss its main features and highlight the consocial character of the family learning environment. That then not only allows us to reconsider formal and informal learning vis-à-vis the cultural knowledge offered, but also provides us with an opportunity to reconsider the role played by experiences shared within the family.

SITUATING INTERGENERATIONAL EXCHANGE AND CULTURAL SOCIALIZATION

The family can be seen through multiple conceptual frames. For almost a century, social scientists have considered the problem of intergenerational dynamics in relation to generational differences and social change (Mannheim, 1952) and the processes of the social and cultural reproduction of inequalities (e.g. in the context of class and gender; France, Roberts, 2015; Woodman, Wyn, 2015; or social structure and status Katrňák, 2003). They have identified the role social, historical and political settings play in shaping young people’s cultural orientations, as well as the forms of transmission and the emergence of generational gaps and their limits (Vollebergh, Iedema, Raaijmakers, 2001: 1187–1188). The debates have drawn particular attention to the fact that using the generation as an analytical category within the context of social change does not merely provide evidence of generational differences, but also of the continuation of the transmitted values and standpoints (De Martini, 1985; Vollebergh et al., 2001). In general, and following the linguistic turn in social sciences, ‘a generational lens offers a reflexive lens on what “stable” over time means’ (Woodman, Wyn, 2015: 1406).

Furthermore, the family, which is embedded in the wider social and interhuman relationships, spatially clustered by locality, region, and country, is not only a site where such relationships are recognized, remembered and thought about, but also one where people’s ‘beliefs and ideas materialize in action’ (Verdery, 1999: 34), directly or indirectly, i.e. it is where the cultural is lived and created. The filial relationship (the direct bond between child and parent) and the familial relationship (broader family bond) interact, both with one another and with wider social relationships, to produce the specific content of the collective representations that are infused with ideas on culture and that highlight the way in which the culturally argued inequalities and exclusive collectivities are created. Issues relating to dialogue and difference, as well as the reproduction of social structures and ideas on culture, can be seen within the context of the intergenerational exchange of meanings and social stances. This then conditions the way in which the family educational environment plays a role in the individual’s appropriation of exclusive (and particularly ethnic) identities.

However, the family, as a peculiar social network, is also an environment that materializes through action and, in Durkheimian parlance, not only represents that which is socially shared, but also modifies it through the experiences that the family – in terms of culture, as the ways, morals, tastes, or practices of family-living attempts – interprets, remembers, narrates, teaches and makes the subject of learning. This peculiar agency of the family, which is captured through its corporeal ties among other things, resembles the nature-culture hybridity proposed by Bruno Latour (1993) in his discussion of the never truly moderns. Therefore, what one learns from experience and shares within the family has the potential to be recalcitrant to formally learned knowledge. It is as if the family within its capacity as a social unit, and through the experiences it cherishes, is forever ready to strike back and re-produce the social representations, in a somewhat unpredictable way, and supply them with meanings (cf. Latour, 2000).⁵ Somewhat similarly, when discussing cultural identity, Nikolas Rose emphasizes that ‘the ways in which humans “give meaning to experience” have their own history’ and that history ‘is more practical, more technical and less unified’ (Rose, 1996: 130–131).⁶ In other words, intergenerational transmission and learning within the family involve not just a series of discursively, and to some extent extraneously, learned representations that are passed on, as is clearly the case, but also the passing on of experiences that are informed by the invasiveness of the unforeseen and unpredictable. And this, in turn, then carves out a space for interpretation and representation when learning about one’s culture and identity.⁷

As an interpersonal network and site of learning, the family occupies and relates to spaces and places that are semantically digested and symbolically adored through formal and informal learning. This creates conditions for the construction and transmission of placial and spatial identities (cf. Rico, Jennings, 2012). As insightfully captured in Phillip Ethington’s pun, made when arguing his spatial theory of history, ‘experiential, memorial time... (literally) takes place’ (2007: 466). Both this and cloaking the experiential and memorial in cultural terms helps us to understand the occasional conflation of the natural with the cultural in our respondents’ responses. In fact, the sharing of experiences and the opinions based on them within the family is always emplaced. Not only does it enable the natural to frame the narrative, but it also renders it socio-placial. Hence it makes learning within the family an event, which can be “felt” and cognized through natural settings, such as spaces and places. It also provides us with an opportunity to explain why the natural can be seen as the cultural and vice versa (cf. Casey, 1996: 31–38). Finally, this socio-spatial and hybrid aspect of the human

5 To be clear, Latour’s complex and much more ambitious project serves more as inspiration for a better exposition of the consociality discussed below than as the substantial categorical basis of this paper.

6 In this context consider also Rose’s take on the modern individual. ‘Against those who suggest that a single model of the person comes to prominence in any specific culture, it is important to stress the heterogeneity and specificity of the ideals or models of personhood deployed in different practices, and the ways in which they are articulated in relation to specific problems and solutions concerning human conduct. It is only from this perspective, I think, that one can identify the peculiarity of those programmatic attempts to install a single model of the individual as the ethical ideal across a range of different sites and practices’ (Rose, 1996: 133).

7 In this context consider also Bourdieu’s discussion of ‘doxa’ – that which goes undiscussed is self-evident and appears separated from the ‘field of opinion’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 159–171).

condition extends the meaning of Arjun Appadurai's 'ethnoscape' (1990: 297), by showing the 'ethno' not only as moving across the imaginably unending landscape, but also as very much located through places embedded in spaces and yet moving, interacting, remembering, creating, and transmitting the meanings of culture, as well as infusing practice with what is learned.

A useful conceptual tool for the analysis of the above noted dynamics of cultural socialization within the framework of intergenerational transmission has been recently re-introduced by Ulf Hannerz.⁸ Analysing the world scenarios that are a response to the "culture wars", Hannerz discusses and criticizes the 'culture-speak' manifest in the 'contemporary habitat of meaning' (2016: 135–160). By pointing to the shared character of social life that involves 'a fair amount of versatile improvisation' (cf. unpredictability above) he locates the notion of culture, as an 'organization of diversity' (cf. Sewell, 2005: 91–93) within three semantic frames: state, market and movements, and adds a fourth – 'consociality' (2016: 148–149). The latter basically refers to everydayness realized through social interactions and its unpredictable turns that shape the meanings attached to them. It is precisely these turns and the often changing conditions (e.g. with respect to time, place, social position or, for that matter, what has been learned) under which the production of meanings becomes infused with cultural references that, to a great extent, constitute consociality and problematize the social interaction. Similarly to Hannerz's critique, Dorothy Figueira speaks of the 'easiness of multiculturalism', in which the proponent does not need to engage deeply with the complexities posed by interaction with different people (such as learning a language, knowing the customs, habits, or reasons behind the social rules and practices, history etc.). It is this 'nonthreatening element of diversity' (Figueira, 2008: 25) that consocial interaction and learning defy.

The family, when taking part in the consocial (i.e. socially actual and interactional at any given moment)⁹ mode of life, enables the observation of social stands that may at times be articulated collectively and/or generationally coded and argued through the employment of collective representations grounded in learned (history) and remembered (memory) past, and at other times, as individual choices based on experience. Both can lead to the reproduction of inequalities and thereby essentialize (e.g. ethnic, social) exclusivity. Importantly, Hannerz's observation that 'it is within this (consocial) frame we begin our lives as learners' (2016: 148) and people although 'open to learning (...) do not necessarily learn the same things' (2016: 142, cf. Woodman, Wyn, 2015: 1403) relates to distinctive family-cum-generational subjectivities which this paper seeks to highlight. Employing the concept of consociality, then, allows us to obtain a subtler understanding of the representations found in the process of intergenerational transmission, in which the meanings emanating from formal educational environments are altered, inversed or completely modified, as demonstrated below.

8 Hannerz develops the concept of 'consociates' applied by Austrian philosopher and sociologist Alfred Schütz.

9 One also has to take into consideration the fact that the things that are shared are not necessarily shared with the agreement of the parties concerned (Hannerz, 2016: 147).

COUNTRIES OF TRANSITION AND FIELDS OF EXPLORATION

The paper focuses on intergenerational transmission and the cultural socialization of young people in two countries that transitioned from a communist regime to a liberal democracy – Slovakia and Latvia. These countries were selected as the goal was to explore young people's educational environments in countries that comparatively recently became part of the European Union (see more in the Editorial to this volume). The two countries share many similarities and this is reflected in the data. Our research is thus not a comparative effort. Rather it is an attempt to interpret data that capture the ideas about ethnicity, regional and local identity, and historical memory shared among generations in Latvia and Slovakia. The data comes from observations and interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 with pupils mainly from secondary schools,¹⁰ their parents, grandparents and teachers,¹¹ all of whom were asked to provide insights into the intergenerational exchange. Access to the respondents was obtained via the snow-ball method and through the secondary schools. The selection also reflected the ethnic history of the region.

The issue of cultural inclusiveness, exclusiveness and the essentialisation of cultural identities directly relates to the transition period in the two countries after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989. With the rejuvenation of ethnic identity policies in post-communist countries, formal education proved unable to fully resist the much criticized ethnic primordialism. The rise of national aspirations during the early 1990s was accompanied by social changes that led to a rise in identarian negotiations, often argued in cultural terms. These took place in the disputes over the concept of culture and cultural tradition, largely in the context of Europe and often displaying what Sharon Macdonald termed as 'the memory-heritage-identity complex' (2013: 5). These internal, country-based 'culture wars' are far from being over and this is felt in education policy¹² and shows a broader extra-European context (publicly articulated during the global refugee crisis in 2015). This contest over who we are, where we belong and where we come from manifests itself in the transmission of cultural knowledge between generations. It also articulates the part of the long-term political transition and the visions of Europe's future that it espouses.

The Slovak data were collected in the town of Martin, which is an ethnically homogenous region of Slovakia.¹³ Martin has long been the political, economic and cultural centre of the Turiec region in Slovakia and is famous for its role in the formation

10 The Slovak respondents were from secondary schools in an ethnically homogenous region. In Latvia most but not all the interviewees came from secondary schools. All but one were Latvian citizens from diverse ethnic backgrounds: the families belonged to (or were related to) various ethno-religious groups (Latvians, Russians, Poles, Jews, Belarusians; Catholic, Lutheran, Old Believer, Orthodox). In mixed families, where life in-between cultures takes place, the double, hybrid or multiple identities reflect the post-ethnic and transnational orientation.

11 In total there were 33 Slovak and 54 Latvian respondents.

12 E.g. in Slovakia the debates on the implementation of global education initiated by the Ministry of Education during the educational reforms of 2008 and the emphasis on ethnic exclusivity by the Ministry of Culture; in Latvia, since the 1990s education policy and multiple reforms have been aimed at the gradual transition in ethnic minority schools to instruction in Latvian, the official language, by 2022 to ensure all learners' are proficient in Latvian.

13 On this see <http://statdat.statistics.sk> [accessed 3 May 2021].

of modern Slovak political life. The town was the site of many events and home to the leaders of the Slovak national movement from the second half of the nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth century. In 1861, Slovak political representatives gathered in Martin, which led to the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation. *Matica slovenská* – the second oldest and historically most important Slovak national cultural organization, was founded in the town in 1863. The Slovak National Museum was established in Martin in 1893 and the Martin Declaration – a document declaring the political will of Slovak representatives to join Czechoslovakia, was signed in Martin on 30 October 1918. Besides *Matica slovenská* and the Slovak National Museum (ethnographic division), Martin is also where the Slovak National Library was founded in 1941 (its institutional beginnings are linked to *Matica slovenská*).¹⁴ Furthermore, the people of Turiec were actively involved in the resistance against the Nazis, both German and Slovak ones.¹⁵ However, the history of modern Martin has been overshadowed by a discourse that has repeatedly highlighted the years of national fame, effectively distracting attention from the internal problems of the town during this period (the disputes between *Matica slovenská* and the Slovak National Museum, the emigration of Martin's scientists, artists and literati to better destinations, the social and economic problems of the town, etc). This was especially true in the years after the creation of Czechoslovakia meant Martin became a provincial town with an important, but clearly idealized past (cf. Kučma, 2005).¹⁶

The ethnographic research in Latvia was conducted in the historical and cultural region of Latgale, which is a peripheral area on the border with Belarus and Russia and a severely deprived area of the EU. Latgale is a cross-cultural border zone that has historically had considerable ethnic (Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews etc.) and denominational minorities¹⁷. Consequently it is a space of cultural fusion and the merging of traditions. After a series of political and military events (the proclamation of independent Latvia in 1918, the Latvian War of Independence in 1918–1920), as well as decisions made between 1917 and 1920, Latgale became part of Latvia.¹⁸ The field research was predominantly carried out in Daugavpils (a state city) and Augšdaugava Municipality (the surrounding rural municipality) – which has one of the smallest proportions of ethnic Latvians. Additional data was obtained in Preiļi, a semi-urban town that is the centre of Preiļi Municipality. In contrast to Daugavpils, which is ethnically 'fractionalized', Preiļi is more homogeneous. The ethnic Latvians in

14 For more on Martin and its history see e.g. Kapišinská and Szerdová-Velasová, *Eds.* (2012: 64–228).

15 Germany's meddling in Central European affairs led to the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1939 and the creation of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945) under the political patronage of Germany. During WWII Slovakia joined the Axis Powers, which resulted in civic opposition to the pro-German government and led to the Slovak National Uprising (in late August 1944) and the overthrowing of the Slovak supporters of Nazism and the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia.

16 A recent case of provincialism among the people of Martin is the protests against the erection of a Mahatma Gandhi statue near the National Library. Available at: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/regiony/clanok/586420-v-martine-maju-gandhiho-sochu-nie-vsetkym-sa-to-paci/> [accessed 3 May 2021].

17 See more at <https://www.onlatvia.com/topics/culture-of-latvia/religions-in-latvia> and https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START_IJG_KU_KUR/KUR010.

18 Latvijas Republikas Satversme (1922) [online] Available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/57980-latvijas-republikas-satversme> [accessed 27 April 2021] See: <https://www.lsm.lv/latgales-atbrivosana> [accessed 6 May 2021].

Daugavpils constitute 21% of the population, and 35% in Augšdaugava Municipality, whereas in Preiļi they account for 64% of the population and in Preiļi Municipality 66% (2020).¹⁹ Three families were chosen on the grounds that members of the younger generation were students at higher education institutions in the Latvian capital or cities in other regions, excluding south-eastern Latvia. ‘Latvianness’ and ‘Latvian Russianness’, irrespective of place, are complex multi-layered phenomena based on the dynamics of people negotiating the local and regional identities. The interviews were mainly done in Latvia’s official language (Latvian); however, in isolated cases, when engaging with Russian speaking families, especially older members, the minority language (Russian) was the chosen language of communication.

CONSOCIALITY AND ITS ALTERING REPRESENTATIONS

The recorded materials presented below, including the framing of meanings about cultural belonging, identity and heritage within the family, document the consocial part of the learning process. To illustrate how the familial space, and particularly its consocial character, affects the cultural socialization of young people and the transmission of cultural knowledge between the old and the young, we have chosen two examples of learning out of the numerous possible examples, bearing in mind that what is shared is often unpredictable. The intention is to reveal how formal and informal learnings overlap and to problematize the production of shared meanings infused with cultural references. These shape and inform young people’s socialization within the social discourse that essentializes the formation of cultural identities and heritage. In addition, it should be noted that consocial learning does not only take place within the family environment. Nonetheless, the family is a site of learning where the meanings acquired through consocial (informal) interaction and familial experiences are fostered through trust, enhanced by the corporeal ties through sharing common space and filled with high degree of emotion. In a way, family learning can thereby become an authority itself.

As suggested earlier, within the family environment the formally gained knowledge may be altered, or even inverted, and the exchange of meanings and practices regarding culture, belonging, identity and heritage may be conceived of, most broadly understood, as peculiarly bidirectional and multitemporal. Moreover, Hannerz reminds us that ‘learning goes on even when nobody is intentionally teaching’ (2016: 149). References to the notions of culture, tradition, greatness, suffering, or the commonness and everydayness of individual or collective actors – whether through individual or collective memories, and experiences, or through formally learned and informally shared histories – embody both past and present (cf. Birth, 2006; Macdonald, 2013). Such ‘past-presentism’ acts as different living learnings and problematizes questions about the historical truth suppressed by the regimes (Verdery, 1999: 38). Simultaneously, the process of sharing the learned, the remembered and the experienced enables further learning and conditions both the future and future learning. Therefore, one has to

¹⁹ Centrālā statistikas pārvalde [online] Available at: <https://www.csb.gov.lv/lv/statistika/db> [accessed 30 April 2021].

recognize the discursive overlap in the results illustrating the processes of transmission and exchange.

I. Between culture, nature, experience and belonging

Many of the informants connected nature with culture in their answers pertaining to the formation of the local and regional identity.²⁰ This renders locality, or rather the locale (on occasion extended to the region or country the people live and act in) as semi-layered; this is similar to Edward Casey's interpretation that places have two primary qualities – those embodying people's engagement with them, i.e. cultural or tame (organized), and those of their own, i.e. whether they are natural or wild (or in Bourdieu's terms self-evident, coming on their own; Casey 1996: 33–36). Latour's hybrid social self that cannot be separated from the workings of nature is another way of looking at it. Thus, besides what one learns in history, civics or literature classes about the meanings attached to a place and couched in cultural terms, such spatial/placial references, that connect nature and culture, render the locale a way of identifying with what is experienced and passed on. In the context of the family, the locale and its wider regions appear as the interconnected spaces and places of the family's activities (cf. Casey's 'place as an event', 1996: 36–38), as well as mutually shared understandings of these activities, i.e. as static, dynamic and cognitive engagement with the spaces, places and their hybrid content. This may be observed in both the Slovak and Latvian playful connection between the natural and cultural, seen in numerous responses, from which we chose the two below:

Well, concerning Matica,²¹ we lived below it for a long time, so I have sleighed all down it (i.e. the slope there), walked there (...) we saw everything (the local heritage) with our children, but I can't say that we study, or know well the local Turiec customs. It occurs to me that one perceives those roots somewhat differently. (Zdenka, 48, Martin)

The most important thing seems to be what we leave after us – events, or something we have done. For example, how well our land has been kept, our fields and buildings maintained. When my dad's father was still alive, they planted an oak.²² (...) It's something like a tradition to remember all that after some time and talk about it again – look, my grandad planted it, it's growing, and we also take care of it. It stands exactly in the middle of the field on our land – a small oak. (...) It relates to the male line. My cousin together with my dad and grandad planted it. All three of them. (Raičuks, 19, Ambeļi, Augšdaugava Municipality)

20 With regard to the formation of identity, this article follows the approach proposed by Brubaker and Cooper (1999) that focuses on the processes of identification rather than essentialistically imagined identities. Hence, attention has been paid to how the informants construct and reveal the meanings that pertain to the localities and wider regions where their social life takes place.

21 Slovak cultural institution, see above.

22 The oak tree stands for strength, endurance and power; it is one of Latvia's national symbols and is widely used during the summer solstice (*Līgo*) celebrations. The branches of an oak tree are depicted in the national coat-of-arms and an oak wreath features in the Emblem of the Latvian National Armed Forces. The semantic meaning of the oak as a sacred tree, from Latvian folklore, is associated with the family and the fatherland as spiritual values in human life.

Hence the respondents (through the surrounding locale, home region and country) constructed, construed and narrated where the family belongs, locates itself, what it identifies with and what it consocially shares. According to Taylor, nature, and landscape in particular, may be interpreted as ‘the repository of intangible values and human meanings that nurture our very existence. Landscape and memory are inseparable because landscape is the nerve center of our personal and collective memories’ (Taylor, 2008: 4). The given references reveal both the informants’ individual experiences and the formally (through school) or consocially obtained ideas about where they live and how it affects their lives. Such hybrid references clearly shape the respondents’ approach to culture: they interpret it through experiencing and cognizing places and it informs their ideas on culture in terms of belonging to a certain culturally coded area, identifying themselves either individually or collectively as part of an ethnic group (as Zdenka suggests), or through the active involvement of their ancestors, i.e. as part of the family viewed through continuity (as suggested by Raičuks).

The Slovak and Latvian respondents’ experiences of nature contribute to their sense of belonging to their kin and region, and to their conception of culture both in the context of continuity and its actualization through activities. Another good example can be seen in the references to natural domains that symbolize belonging and, in a way, defy the formal division of heritage into natural and cultural heritage. For instance, the lakes²³ in Latgale and *viensēta* – an idealised patriarchal complex of dispersed buildings serving different purposes often located close to a body of water or forest, where one feels one is ‘in paradise’ (Pelnušķīte, 14, Ambeļi, Augšdaugava Municipality) – is not only an integral part of traditional rural Latvian landscape (Schwartz, 2006; Plakans, 1995), but also a referent through which the ways of living are materialized in experience. Similarly, the High Tatras,²⁴ or particularly for the people of Martin, the Turiec region, where one can ‘touch not just the historical, but also natural beauty’ (Tatiana, 62, Martin), in a way invert and complement the learned, the traditional and the social, and cross the modern nature/culture divide through experience. Allowing nature to frame local identities, then, articulates the consocial negotiation of what is seen and transmitted as a frame of belonging. The hybrid involvement of the natural is articulated through cultural and vice versa, where interconnectedness with the surrounding environment is at the core of experience, its cognition, retelling and sharing, in a way also inviting the mitigation of ethnic essentialism. This is because belonging to a place, as well as to a social and ethnic group that is represented in cultural terms is both universal and local. Indeed, many of our respondents applied such a hybrid narrative when asked how they would explain their own culture and heritage to foreigners (respondents in Martin: Roman, 16, Pavol, 20, František, 54, Andrej, 14; respondents in Latvia: Juris, 25 [Riga], Agnese, 53, Raičuks, 19, Ārzemnieks 18, Ludviga, 42 [Augšdaugava Municipality]).

In sum, discursive and practical engagement with the surrounding environment, which is perceived as a ‘space of living’, informs the way in which respondents’ approach culture, belonging and identity, which may then serve as fluid categories of praxis, related not only to ideas learned in school or from different forms of textual, visual and audio-visual information (museums, books, films), and therefore to discursively

23 Latgale is also known as the Land of Blue Lakes.

24 The Slovak respondents thought this mountain range represented something that was truly Slovak.

organized learning experiences. This becomes a consocially disorganized learning experience through family activities during major (usually cultural-cum-religious) festivals (e.g. Christmas, Easter), or family gatherings and by communicating values, passing on different and useful skills (e.g. cooking festive dishes, or handiwork), or memories (e.g. instructing younger members on the important things to remember from the past).²⁵

II. Sharing the experience and altering the past

Consocial interaction between formal and informal learning in intergenerational settings is manifest in the discourse on and learning about ‘difficult pasts’ as well. ‘Seeing the past as “difficult” or “problematic” recognizes the experiences and interpretations of those who do not primarily, let alone professionally, engage in the production of historical discourse’ and ‘allows a more bottom-up re-evaluation of historical legacies’ (Popov, Deák, 2015: 37). It is also part of the formation of the local and regional identity and, by bringing in the specific family ‘memory work’ (cf. Hamilakis, Labanyi, 2008: 12), it can be contrasted with formally obtained knowledge. Human catastrophes, such as wars, invade everydayness to such an extent that they do not return simply as recollections that pop up within the so-called normality of the everyday. They are consciously passed on and shared, and are thereby used to interrogate the formalizing pull of the dominant narratives that too easily divide the past up into victors and losers. The ethnicized memories²⁶ involved in the processes of ethnic identification are a good example.

The shared past impacted by the Soviet domination (1940–1941; 1944/5–1991) both highlights and problematizes the ethnic-cum-national belonging of Latvians. The responses reveal some differences in the way othering and collective distancing is displayed by the ethnic Latvians and Russians who have lived in Latgale for centuries. The majority of the older respondents described WW2 as a horrible experience irrespective of their ethnicity. Nostalgia for the USSR was manifest in some of the Russian-speaking interviewees’ complaints about for example the Soviet victory in WW2 being overlooked:

If you look at the history which is taught now [...] I don't know in general what they want to teach them. (...) Now history has been completely rewritten. Now there is no such thing as it was before that the Victory was the Victory, but now what is the Victory? And why are these old people not respected now, there are very few of them left, there is a handful. Well why don't you respect them? (Krstojnaja, Daugavpils, 67)

Often it is Russian-speaking young people, in this particular case the grand-niece of the previous interviewee, who possess critical attitudes towards members of their own ethnic group who use past events to show their superiority:

²⁵ The information in this sentence comes from the interviews.

²⁶ By ethnicized memories we mean those social representations that clothe different actors in ethnic terms, hence attributing them collective identities. The attribution of ethnicity might not be always the case when spoken on the difficult pasts, as is seen below, but the collective attribution is prevalent.

It is the reluctance of some people to accept the Latvian people. There are a lot of Russians here, and they have a completely negative attitude towards [Latvians], (...) because I am Russian (...) then accept me as I am. (Veronika, Daugavpils, 18)

The past events most important to the families of ethnic Latvians – loss of national independence and the decades spent attempting to restore it, mass deportations to Siberia in 1941, 1949 and exile, resulting in split families, and attempts to (re)construct ‘normality’ in Post-Communist era (Stukuls Eglitis, 2002) by focusing on the European future rather than the Soviet past – differ from the ones mentioned by ethnic Russians who arrived in Latvia during the Soviet period.

On the other hand, young people, although siding at times with the more divisive stance of the elders, may learn that otherness constructed via memories of the difficult past may enable them to negotiate the processes of identifying with those pasts. Many of the youngsters influenced by the multi-lingual environment and cross-cultural experience see ‘adjusting to other people’ (Andrejs, Daugavpils, 20) as a means of adapting to Latgale’s diversity and this idea is often the subject of intergenerational exchange. For intergenerational sharing and learning do indeed bring about unpredictable and consocially produced turns, which suggest that interstices of the past may modify the strict opposition and become a family commemorative practice, although this may be a rare instance in Latvia today. For example, a youngster from a large Russian-speaking family with an ethnically-diverse background who is in a Latvian folk-dance group is trying to convince his mother and brothers to learn Latvian, the official language, presents himself as Latvian outside the country and simultaneously perceives himself to be a world citizen who honours the traditions of his family:

We have a frame with some photos of our grandfather inserted in it [...]. We always put it [on the table] on May 9 when the Russians celebrate Victory Day because our grandma was a nurse during World War II. (Ārzemnieks, Špoģi, Augšdaugava Municipality, 18)

The very process of meaningfully working-out what has been learned, experienced, remembered, passed on or received appears to be in a constant flux, where the time and the generations are referents that help construct provisional meanings rather than solid, unchangeable representations. The alteration and reconceptualization of the learned via the process of re-learning – where the action and impact of variously configured others, whether expected, assumed or unsettling and unasked, create the frame for assembling the habitat of meaning (Hannerz, 2016) – seems to have conditioned the responses of our informants when talking about their putative ethnic opponents. Similarly to what Georg Simmel wrote more than a hundred years ago, it seems that the distance from a person considered to be other manifests itself as soon as the real social relationships, experiences and memories (as illustrated in our case by the discussion of current Latvian-Russian relationships) materialize (discursively, or practically). By contrast, the closeness manifests itself when the human universalia become (in our case consocially) real (cf. Simmel, 2006).

Yet another example of employing ethnicized memories, in this case with regard to difficult pasts, was documented in the Slovak material. Magdaléna’s (81) uncle used to

help the partisans (fighting against the regime of president of the Slovak War state Jozef Tiso)²⁷ and was consequently wanted by members of the state paramilitary organization (Hlinka Guards). When Magdaléna's house was searched and her and her mother's lives were endangered by the guards shooting madly inside the house, they were saved by a Gestapo officer. Meanwhile her father was caught elsewhere and deported to a concentration camp in Germany. After returning home he publicly complained that some of the former Hlinka Guards had become members of the emerging Communist village administration. However, he was told to keep quiet otherwise they would ensure he went back to where he had come from (a euphemism for the concentration camp).²⁸

Another of Magdaléna's tales relates to the Warsaw Pact occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. This time, under strict austerity measures, it was a Russian officer who helped the family, by bringing food every day for the children. Both narratives switch the past winners and losers that students learn about in school. However, seeing Magdaléna's testimonies merely as narratives of the past, or memories deploying ethnically coded figures of enemies and friends, would be to do an injustice to her experiences of the unpredictability of such incidences. These in turn disrupt the linear, clear-cut past, bringing in the interaction 'where we begin our lives as learners.' Magdaléna therefore insists on sharing her experiences with her children and grandchildren. Moreover, she sees these events as being very much related to the current 'culture wars' (as is evident in the quote from Roman, who comes from another Martin family)²⁹ about the ethnic Slovak identity and Christian heritage subscribed to by radical conservative advocates who often publicly defend the Slovak War State.

I pass it on mainly to my grandchildren (...) [w]hen the Guards from Martin came here and rampaged. But I simply can't help myself when I see Kotleba³⁰ and his scumbags, how they greet each other the way the Guards used to. I would say it anywhere and always say it to my children and grandchildren. ... I hate it when the Russians are abused. But I am not a Communist. (Magdaléna 81, Martin)

The events of the difficult past appear to influence the formation of the family memory, and by extension the local identity and family members' stance in the current 'culture wars'. However, on the one hand one can certainly question how far they affect the lives of young people, who face different challenges (including in formal and informal learning) in their lives. In contrast to Magdaléna's son, her grandson Marek was not one to narrate his grandmother's stories in any detail and did not think the role reversal of the difficult

27 See more on the period, particular events and their current interpretations in Teich, Kováč, Brown, Deich, *Eds.* (2011).

28 Interview, Martin, May 2019.

29 'Granny defends the Catholic ways [of seeing things]. For instance, like Kotleba, she says that everybody should work and such things' (Roman, 16, Martin). Note that in this quote Roman identifies the 'Catholic ways' with neo-Nazi Kotleba's interpretation of the 'national culture' (see the footnote on him below), which is best expressed by the slogan used during the Slovak War State as well as today by Kotleba's voters: For God, for Nation!

30 Marián Kotleba is a member of the Slovak parliament and leader of the far-right People's Party Our Slovakia who, before entering into politics, used to hold public meetings dressed in a uniform almost identical to that of the Hlinka Guards.

past (the help from the Gestapo and Russian Army officers) worth mentioning (Marek, 16, Martin). His learning how to cope with the present, and the past for that matter, seems to have been formed and informed by different needs from those of his grandmother. This is where the consocial unpredictability again comes into the frame and strikes back. On the other hand, personal distaste for a preoccupation with difficult pasts does not necessarily mean neglecting them and nor does it prevent consocial learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Reflecting on the popularity of the “culture wars” that are dividing societies and exert a cultural-cum-ethnic exclusivity over a deeper, nonessentialist and engaged understanding of cultural production and representation, this article discussed young people’s socialisation within the intergenerational exchange of meanings relating to an opaque concept of culture. The discussion was informed by the two main frameworks – the universal character of intergenerational consocial learning, as suggested by Hannerz, and the regional variants found in Latvia and Slovakia. The former served to explain the modus operandi of the transmission of cultural meanings and references, whereas the latter illustrated how such modus operandi may work within the family learning environment. Focusing on the family and its rather informal mode of education, in turn, allowed us to explore how the problematic themes widely resonating in both countries affect young people’s cultural socialization, as well as to problematize the dynamic relationship between the formal and informal learning.

In summary, consociality, owing to its inadvertent, unpredictable character, conditions not only what we experience and share, but also what we learn, from whom, and how we can meaningfully participate in social life. Through a combination of the accidental, unpredictable, but also determined, or self-evident, its character approximates the consocial to the natural rendering of one’s sociality as a Latourian hybrid and is prone to alteration. That explains why in combining formal learning, experience and memory, consociality alters and complements those socializing frameworks that make the surrounding living environment of families meaningful, as well as socially productive. The interhuman interactions experienced at a familial site of learning are emplaced in the given locale, formed both by social interactions and natural conditions. They are also continuously affected by socio-political changes (irrespective of the political regime), embedded in experiences, and dilute the rigid timeframes through the act of gaining knowledge in any consocial present.

All this has profound implications for the way in which individuals are posited within the society as well as for the demarcation of one’s living environment through differing and constituting that which is seen as socially other. Thus, as the second set of our examples illustrates, people are seen as other not only because of the ethnically or culturally coded representations learnt in the formal educational environment and the socially ingrained dispositions (*habitus* in Bourdieu’s terminology), but because their otherness is constituted by what has happened to them (or by what they have learned about, or even experienced) along their life’s consocial trajectories. Such constitution of the other consequently broadens the possibilities of learning from others, be that in the commonly shared space within the family, or within broader social

interactions. This is seen in the calls for ‘hands on educational methods’ that provide both experiences with the others and their life trajectories and opportunities to discuss these while criticizing the frontal education on diverse cultures (cf. Chudžíková, 2015: 12).³¹ Turning the consocial space into a tool of learning may then provide opportunities to remake the essentialized sociality so that the take on what should be learned and shared includes the very unpredictability of the experienced and the learned.

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31 In the Slovak secondary school where the field research took place such methods have already been implemented in a programme called ‘Walking in the Footsteps of Memories’. This initiative brings together pupils, their elders, and teachers to discuss the commonly shared past. In Latvian schools, pupils are encouraged to participate in the contests of research works on history, including family history and shared pasts, some activities are offered as part of the “Latvian School Bag” launched in 2018 by the Latvian government. However, neither have anything to do with the regular school curriculum, especially teaching cultural diversity.

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