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## THE DECLARATIVE TRANS-CULTURAL IDENTITY OF EUROPEAN ADOLESCENTS – AN ANALYSIS OF TEXTS PUBLISHED IN *TRAIT D'UNION*

**ABSTRACT** Transcultural identity elaborated upon by Wolfgang Welsch is, in my opinion, the answer to the following question: how identity of youth is transformed with regards to globalization, particularism and cosmopolitanism. Cultural identity is comprised of a cosmopolitan component but it also includes local affiliation. It focuses on the individual right to create memberships not only based upon one's national, ethnical or cultural affiliation but rather, it is a coalescence of all aforementioned elements defined from an individual perspective. The membership is subordinate only to individual assessment. Transcultural identity is the awareness of adventure, irregularity and continuity. And it is in this way that European youth perceive and define their identity. They describe their identity as active, nomadic, cyber and performative. This kind of identity is a declarative identity which is also the subject of their writing. The following article aims to describe and define the identity of contemporary European youth and the subject of identity in articles published in The *trait d'union* – an on-line journal created in 2004 with support of European Commission. The *trait d'union* is a platform of European youth communicating and exchanging opinions. It is also a tool used for intercultural teaching. Articles written by youth are an attempt to illustrate their daily experiences connected with globalization, European mobility and trans-culturalism. These articles are also an interesting source used to analyze contemporary means of communication.

**Key words:** identity, declarative, transculturalism, European identity, on-line platform

## TRAIT D'UNION

*Trait d'union*<sup>1</sup> is an intercultural platform of communication and cooperation between pupils and teachers. It was founded in 1999 by teachers and pupils from a German school in Toulouse. Initially *Trait d'union* was supposed to be a platform of educational cooperation with a Victoria Hugo de Colomiers intercultural secondary school, followed by a Romanian secondary school under the leadership of Bertrand Russell. From 2000 to 2008, additional schools joined *Trait d'union*. At the present moment, there are more than 20<sup>2</sup> schools in the project – mainly from Europe but also from Africa and North and South America.

The project is comprised of a number of schools from all education levels, but it predominantly caters to secondary schools. Between 2000 and 2003 *Trait d'union* was recognized as an intercultural educational project and came under the support of Comenius Program from the European Commission. The platform primarily dealt with issues of multiculturalism and interculturalism, focusing on the problem of language, culture, intercultural relation, globalization as well ways of identifying cultural differences and similarities. An important component is the ability of pupils to have a platform to present their point of view and to express their daily life through writing. All articles written by pupils within *Trait d'union* platform are published online in several languages. Primary languages are English, German, Spanish and French, but in total, articles have been published in fifteen languages which include, but are not limited to: Arabic, Chinese, Kurdish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Lithuanian, Polish, Dutch, Albanian, Armenian, Bulgarian, Japanese etc. All texts are discussed in a public setting. The articles are subsequently edited and published in a thematic, multilingual, online journal once a year. The first issue appeared in 2001 and it was entitled: 'Everybody is a stranger'<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.traitdunion-online.eu/>.

<sup>2</sup> The participants of the project: Borg, Krems (Österreich); Çankırı Süleyman Demirel Fen Lisesi (Türkei); Christelijk Lyceum Apeldoorn (Niederlande); Deutsche Humboldt Schule Guayaquil / Colegio Alemán Humboldt Guayaquil (Ecuador); Deutsche Internationale Schule in Den Haag (Niederlande); Deutsche Schule Bilbao / Colegio Alemán (Spanien); Deutsche Schule Moskau (Russland); Deutsche Schule Toulouse (Frankreich); École Borde d'Olivier de L'Union (Frankreich); École Collège Lycée Massillon, Clermont-Ferrand (Frankreich); Halepaghen-Schule, Buxtehude (Deutschland); Instituto (I. E. S.) "Profesor Hernández Pacheco", Cáceres (Spanien); Liceo Classico „Sesto Properzio", Assisi (Italien); Liceo Classico Statale Sperimentale "Bertrand Russell", Roma (Italien); Liceo Scientifico Statale „Leonardo da Vinci", Genova (Italien); VIII Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Stanisława Wyspiańskiego, Kraków (Polen); Lycée "El Hadji Malick Sy", Thiès (Senegal); Lycée International Victor Hugo, Colomiers (Frankreich); Michaeli-Gymnasium München (Deutschland); Mikalojaus Daukšos vidurinė mokykla, Vilnius (Litauen); Prytanée Militaire Charles Tchioréré de Saint Louis (Senegal); Šilutės pirmosios gimnazija (Litauen); Tarsus Anadolu Öğretmen Lisesi, Tarsus (Türkei); The Graham School, Columbus/Ohio (Vereinigte Staaten von Amerika); Zespół Szkół Hotelarsko-Turystycznych, Zakopane (Polen); In Kooperation mit *trait d'union*: DOMINO, Interkulturelle Jugendzeitung, Berlin (Deutschland).

<sup>3</sup> Nr. 01/2001: 'Wir alle sind Fremde'; Nr. 02/2002: 'Unsere Zukunft'; Nr. 03/2003: 'Unsere Identität. Jung sein zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts'; Nr. 04/2004: 'Boys & Girls'; Nr. 05/2005: 'Träume und Entwicklungen'; Nr. 06/2006: 'Courage'; Nr. 07-08/2007-08: 'Schwarz & weiß'.

The subject matter as well as the medium is chosen independently by each pupil. The following essay focuses primarily on published articles but in *Trait d'union* also publishes images, drawings, songs, films, presentations and combination of all sorts of statements. Students prepare their statement under thematic guidance of teachers. The most important element of the platform is discourse, an exchange of opinion. Authors learn not only how to write, analyze and comment but they acquire knowledge on culture, thus becoming more tolerant and creative. They prepare themselves for adulthood in a transcultural world. Currently the platform is in the process of transforming itself into the Intercultural Magazine of Youth.<sup>4</sup>

The work model of *Trait d'union* somewhat resembles models that combine identity with otherness proposed by Ricoeur, a French philosopher who writes about the translation model, noting that *European* [world] *is, and will inevitably be multilingual*,<sup>5</sup> and noting that translation of a text refers not only to translating the language, but also – and above all – the cultural dimension. Translations from culture to culture do not translate words, but the semantic content. That's how the participants participate within the platform by not only translating texts into other languages, but through the prism of their own culture read the texts of authors representing different cultures, clarifying ambiguities, noting the similarities and differences in the perception of reality. Ricoeur writes further about the pattern of memories, or exchange differences relating to customs, rules, norms, beliefs, beliefs that make up the cultural identity and the identity of groups and individuals. Communication of history and his philosophy leads, according to the author of the essay *What is to be the new ethos of Europe?*, to cut various elements of individual history to formulate a branch of collective history. And he concludes: *new ethos is born of understanding relating to the mutual entanglement of new stories that form the structure and shape of the junction* [text].<sup>6</sup> An exchange of texts of young authors from many countries is to create a platform for understanding and building a common identity of young people. The platform is a linguistic and narrative way of exchanging memories, combining different linguistic traditions and hospitality. Articles in the *Trait d'union* are written in a form of an online post. The author places a text under a particular heading that subsequent authors comment about and rate, but also write their own point of view. That's what I was interested in the *Trait d'union*, the discourse of young people about their identity. Furthermore, my interest centers around knowing how young people perceive and construct their identity, moreover how is this individual process of creating oneself as a person and as a member of the group, captured in their writing in *Trait d'union*. The article aims to describe a model outlining identity of modern young internet users, and in doing so also analyze the existing written texts which address the topic of youth, identity, and the assessment of the world around them. Among the titles there are: *The events that change our life; Our Future; Change the World; Growing up; Show your face if you want, Young people – not only*

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.traitdunion-online.org>.

<sup>5</sup> P. Ricoeur, 'Jaki ma być nowy etos Europy', *Znak*, No. 10 (1993), p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

*fun; The more I grow, the less I know; The power of youth; Verloren in the Welt, Social Media and Its Impact on Youth; Education: one of the most powerful weapons you can use to change the world; How youth changes the world* etc. The key is to choose the text where an analysis of a particular subject can be conducted, thus, for the most part excluding texts about sports, movies, projects or music. It is important to point out, however, that due to an enormous number of articles included in the platform, a thorough analysis of every related article was not possible. An analysis of more than 300 published texts was made during the span of 3 years.

In all these texts, the most surprising element was the amount of similar statements among young people living in various countries from Spain to Lithuania, from Italy to Poland. Commenting on the rapidly changing nature of the world around them, and their inability to adjust to these changes, they wrote:

*We are lost in the miracles of modern technology* (Agnieszka Twardosz, Poland).

*Because the world is changing. Our mission is to help our families to adapt to this new era* (Bayram Doğan, Turkey).

*Therefore there are generation conflicts between children and parents. On the one hand, while the young are trying to create their own world, on the other hand their parents are trying to suppress the world which they are trying to create* (Nakiye Güventürk, Turkey).

*We understand that the world is changing, but we shouldn't forget that we are changing too. That's why we should be more careful and think before we do anything, because that may alter our life for worse* (Martynas Jakas, Lithuania).

*The development of a person does not begin with personal changes but with the discovery of himself* (Erica Becchetti, Italy).

*We are just lost in this contemporary* (Marta Tomczyk, Poland).

*If I think about what is changing my life now I suddenly reflect on big themes like globalization, the advent of new technologies etc. but in reality it is useful to start from the little aspects of everyday life, to understand the change and see its tangible results* (Margherita Tiriduzzi, Italy).

*We are involved because we are part of the world, and being part of the world means to be part of every single community. [...] Everything can change my life today. Global recession, wars, international political events (such as the war between Israel and Palestine, the conflict in Syria, the re-election of Obama as U.S.A President but also the next Italian elections in February) can change my future, and the reason why it can happen is globalization. This word means the process of international integration arising from the exchange of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of different cultures, but it includes also the spreading of the characteristics of a particular kind of society. Today this society is the Western one, which is industrializing and exporting its politics, economy and ideas all over the world* (Jlenia Famiani, Margot Masci, Italy).

These statements are just some of the many problems associated with a changing world. Youth stresses that the changes affect them positively on the one hand, make their world more colorful and richer, but on the other hand, cause their parents and grandparents to age faster. They also note that they feel lost in the present, in a globalized world, in the world of rapidly evolving technology, and therefore try to create

their own and experience some version of it themselves. As already stressed by Martin Buber, the technology has a dehumanizing impact on people, never leaving them untouched, always leaving a mark. The Austrian philosopher writes: *This particular dimension of the contemporary crisis of inability of man I like to call for their own work. [...] Technique. Machine invented to serve man, confined it to serve one [...], the man has become the extension.*<sup>7</sup> One of the issue so conceived dehumanization is to treat each other as a commodity for public use, improved exposure, ideal version of oneself, which leads to blurring the boundaries between what is real and what is not real. The authors of the texts included in *Trait d'union*, feel determined by technological development, to frequently build alter-egos in the network, thus constructing performative / declarative cyber-identity.

Some authors write, among other things:

*Communicating with other people in different cultures is so good for us. But sometimes we want to be like them* (y Elif Guleçoğlu, Turkey).

*Human beings have changed unbelievably with the social media and the improving communication systems. In our standards, likes and attitudes to people there have been serious differences. "Social media" – this is the most preferred one today. Now is the time to talk about the social media and world's changes on Facebook and Twitter. With these websites people have experienced nearly an evolution. Firstly news media has changed; people witnessed an event anywhere in the World at the same time, the visuals and the contents obtained from the media were commented on and shared [...]. For Europeans by the effect of negative aspects of the world of social media and the development of information technology have caused for the peasant to have limited vocabulary, poor self-expression, of losing identity, virtualization, depression and aggression. On the other hand some people who aim the world of social media as a means can be in all kinds of activities and they are analytical and forward-thinking, far from pessimism, despite being intertwined with technology they are not freaks, they are well-informed, can express themselves and their beliefs correctly, are confident, have goals. You need to push the boundaries with everybody in society for achieving the real prosperity and development* (İnanç Çiğdem, Turkey).

*With the effect of the social media, we can share our ideas with people from all over the world; we can easily and freely express our comments on the worldwide events whenever we want. In this respect, the social media creates opportunities for young people to communicate each other and share ideas about the events. [...] The young people who know how to use the social media can be very successful. Thanks to the social media they can become organized and reach the elements to realize their projects easily* (Merve Gül Biyikli, Turkey).

*Fictional worlds are like "holidays from real life". [...] It's more like a possibility to get away from the stress of my daily life* (Jessica Reinhardt, Germany).

*We're spending more and more of our lives online. [...] In fact, many of us live a large part of our lives in cyberspace. [...] It's very easy for someone to pretend to be someone else* (Monika Simkute, Lithuania).

*Our generation grew up with Internet* (Valeria Turi, Italy).

<sup>7</sup> M. Buber, *Problem człowieka*, trans. by J. Doktor, Warszawa 1993, p. 44.

Internet users take on a representational cyber-identity, expressing one's idealized image on portals, or presenting oneself through their declared but not necessarily true views published on-line. Sherry Turkle<sup>8</sup> proposes even the usage of a term "cyber-identity," to emphasize the fact that the body can create several "avatars" of oneself. As noted by Turkle, the identity of the modern man is increasingly being displaced by an identity created in cyberspace. Identity Portal – because that is how it is described – it is an artificial, rootless creation. As it is emphasized by Internet users the Portal is today an opportunity to present yourself, to get to know different cultures and their representatives, to comment on the ongoing events of the world. It is a response to the increasingly spatially shrinking world. It is also a way to find models which young people want to identify with. To count in today's world, they feel determined to present themselves on the Internet. This form of exposure, or showing-off, a virtualization of identity leads to, on the one hand, to freedom – the freedom to shape the image of their identity, but also gives one the ability to hide oneself, create an avatar which is the perfect incarnation of the person, and to escape problems and stress of everyday life. At the same time it leads to a loss of identity, and awareness of the dissonance between the true identity and that of a declarative cyber-identity to frustration, depression and even aggression.

Representational cyber-identity as the real identity is transcultural identity without borders and rigid schemas. Students describing themselves refer to both local and global elements.

## TRANSCULTURAL IDENTITY

Kenneth J. Gergen, an American psychologist underlines in his articles that contemporary identity seems to be in dissolution. According to Gergen, rejecting an essentialist idea of identity is caused by development of new technology such as internet as well as excess to information, opinion and values.<sup>9</sup> He claims that new dialogical technologies such as mobile phone and internet lead to break-up of the tradition of community and create floating worlds. The consequence of changing world leads to a fluency and changeability of identity which is no longer a constant issue. He writes in his article 'Self and Community in the New Floating Worlds' that identity becomes an idea of flexibility, as a chameleon can change from one context to another.<sup>10</sup>

One of the more interesting theories analyzing the issue of identity in a reality described by Gergen is an idea further elaborated on by Wolfgang Welsch, a German philosopher. He introduces the theory of transculturality and transcultural identity. It is worth emphasizing, however, that he is not the first to write about transculturality.

<sup>8</sup> S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York 1995; eadem, *Alone Together. Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, New York 2010.

<sup>9</sup> K. Gergen, 'The Self in the Age of Information', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2000), pp. 201-202.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, 'Self and Community in the New Floating Worlds' in K. Nyíri (ed.), *Mobile Democracy. Essays on Society, Self and Politics*, Vienna 2002, p. 108 (*Communications in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*).



Fernando Ortiz Fernandez, a Cuban anthropologist who in 1940s in order to describe Afro-Cuban culture used the notion of converging cultures. He characterized cultural convergence as the world in flux. He understood transculturality as a tendency to adjust, adapt and to resolve conflict, promote mutual cooperation as well as find a solution. The phenomenon of convergence addresses the world as well as the aspects of identity. He defined identity as a mosaic, a multidimensional idea that consisted of geographical, national, local and increasingly virtual levels. Following Ortiz, also other theoreticians wrote about transculture, among others: Jeff Lewis, an Australian researcher in media and culture, who in his article 'From Culturalism to Transculturalism' underlines a very important feature of transculturality. Lewis notices that transculturalism is a term characterizing contemporary relationships and the role of language. Transculturalism describes, according to him, the situation of multilingual reality and accepts that languages interact with unstable locus of specific historical conditions. Moreover, he writes: *Transculturalism mobilizes the definitions of culture outlined above through the expression and deployment of new forms of cultural politics. [...] Transculturalism emphasizes the transitory nature of culture as well as its power to transform. [...] [It is also] language strategies [which] may be deployed in order to constitute personal or social assemblages.*<sup>11</sup>

Just like Lewis, Ortiz also mentioned that language can be changed within a single generation by generation through multilingualism. Wolfgang Welsch combined the various approaches of several theoreticians and created his own idea of transculturalism. And while for example Gergen perceives multiculturalism and flexibility as a menace and the source of identity disruption, Welsch presents another point of view. According to him, transformation of culture and identity is the result of a long-term evolution. Furthermore, he believes transculturalism has existed from the dawn of time but has not been described. Welsch in order to characterize the condition of contemporary times he uses notion of multiculturalism as interculturalism and defines the idea of transculturalism. In the place of wholesome culture, he introduces the idea of cultural nets.<sup>12</sup>

Transculturalism is a conception which characterizes the world based upon the process of merging or mixing, hybridization and penetration. Furthermore, it describes culture as heterogeneous. This kind of culture is comprised of an exchange of values, beliefs, and traditions. Welsch defines transculturality as the puzzling form of cultures today.<sup>13</sup> Internet and new technology allow for an exchange to be considerably faster. Transculturalism concerns the culture of media, art, city etc. It manifests itself on the macro level<sup>14</sup> – in the process of cultural coalescence. Transculturality is – as Welsch writes – in the first place, a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity

<sup>11</sup> J. Lewis, 'From Culturalism to Transculturalism', *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1 (2002), pp. 24-25, at <<http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=ijcs>>.

<sup>12</sup> W. Welsch, 'Transkulturowość. Nowa koncepcja kultury' in W. Kubicki (ed.), *Filozoficzne konteksty rozumienia transwersalnego. Wokół koncepcji Wolfganga Welscha*, Vol. 2, Poznań 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, 'Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today' in M. Featherstone, S. Lash (eds.), *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, London 1999 (*Theory, Culture & Society*), at <<http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/Papers/transcultSociety.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

of modern cultures. [...] *Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other. Lifestyles no longer end at borders of national cultures, but go beyond, and are found in the same way in other cultures.*<sup>15</sup> Culture is not limited by national, ethnical or local parameters. A possibility exists to combine several elements from different cultural levels. Transculturalism manifests as well on the micro, or individual level (transcultural formation of individuals<sup>16</sup>). Identity is shaped by few cultures and it is defined and created by the individuals from their unique point of view. Welsch wrote that the process of defining identity is frequently the work on integration of few components with origin from few cultures.<sup>17</sup> Identity can be defined as cross-cutting, as written by Bell<sup>18</sup> and transcultural identity as proposed by Welsch. He underlines: *“Whenever an individual is cast by different cultural interests, the linking of such transcultural components with one another becomes a specific task in identity-forming, [...] And only the ability to transculturally cross border will guarantee us identity and competence in the long run.”*<sup>19</sup>

Statements made by various writers who published on the *Trait d’union* platform indicate that the authors’ identity could be described as being a part of trans-declarative culture. They create their identity and describe it as devoid of boundaries and rigid schemas. The majority of authors characterizing their identity or describing themselves refer to both local and global elements. Similarly to Ortiz and Welsch, they describe their identity in many languages, often using wording specifically related to a given foreign language, even when they write in their native language. They fluently apply traditions and symbols that belong to foreign cultures, and simultaneously define themselves through it, rather than referring to their own national culture. For example, Jakas Martynas, a student from Lithuania refers to four events that – in his opinion – shaped his identity, which he describes as temporal, constantly changing.

*This year during the meeting in Turkey we presented the occurrences that change our identity. We talked about 4 events: important to our country and the two to our school. We briefly introduced them to you, but this article will let you know more about these events. First of all one of the most important is the presidency of the council of the EU. [...] The next event is the third place in the London Olympic Games. Evaldas Petrauskas, a young sportsman from our town took the third place in the London Olympic Games in boxing. [...] Finally, the other two events which are important to our school are our school’s folk dance group’s “Atlaja” victory and the highest state exam results in our district. These people achieve high goals and make us, the pupil of Silute Pirmoji gymnasium, feel proud. They let us set out hard objectives and motivate us to achieve them, because they show us that with a lot of work we can achieve everything. [...] We are changing this world, but we shouldn’t forget, that we also change ourselves (Jakas Martynas, Lithuania).*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Idem, ‘Transkulturowość...’, p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> D. Bell, *The Winding Passage. Essays and Sociological Journeys, 1960-1980*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1980, p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> W. Welsch, ‘Transculturality...’; idem, ‘Transkulturowość...’



The student simultaneously lists events connected with what is happening in Lithuania, as well as internationally, addressing events related to political life, sports, but also related to school life. This trivial example demonstrates that the boy describing the most important events that are shaping him, also refers to those which he drew from the media, which directly influence his reality. Martynas describes events that for him, retain a sense of familiarity, significant and value from a local as well as a global perspective. Meanwhile, a Polish student writes:

*I think it was precisely the change of regimes in the country, all the time I have to somehow adapt* (Edyta Śladowska, Poland).

The aforementioned event is described above address the residual impact on the author's identity but at the same time describes political developments. The German students on the other hand, talk about a historical event.

*Several different historical events concerning Europe have shaped our European identity. This progress has been going on for hundreds of years and nowadays we, as Europeans, perceive ourselves in a very particular way* (Marc Wenigmann, Henning Lütje, Germany).

Others believe that one of the elements that shape their identity is their pride generated from the cultural heritage of their country, nation or Europe in general.

*I feel proud of being Italian when people talk about our culture and the history of Europe* (Sara Vantaggi, Italy).

In this framework, in my opinion it is the Welsch's transcultural identity that is precisely the answer to the question examining what happens to the identity of young people in the age of globalization, particularization and cosmopolitanism. At the same time it is neither a hybrid identity, consisting of a merger of two identifications or affiliations, nor an identity of the "third way", that is, the creation of a specific and separate categories of identity, or the situational identity appearing in certain contexts or situations.<sup>20</sup> Transcultural identity contains both cosmopolitan and local affiliation. It focuses very much on the right of an individual to freely create or develop their membership, which is not simply reduced to basic membership in a national, ethnic or local culture, but it is an unusual mix of them all, made from one's own perspective, and subject only to an individual assessment. The awareness of the contingency and the volatility and processual. Students in many texts write about the mingling of culture and interculture.

It is therefore the identity acquired during a journey. It is shaped by many cultures.<sup>21</sup> *Network of transcultural identity* – Welsch explains – *is like a cocoon woven partly with the same and partly with different threads which are not identical in terms of color nor pattern.*<sup>22</sup> Moreover, this identity is closely linked with the knowledge and understand-

<sup>20</sup> M. Melchior, *Spółeczna tożsamość jednostki (w świetle wywiadów z Polakami pochodzenia żydowskiego urodzonymi w latach 1944-1955)*, Warszawa 1990, p. 406.

<sup>21</sup> A. Gutmann, 'The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1993), pp. 171-206.

<sup>22</sup> W. Welsch, 'Tożsamość w epoce globalizacji – perspektywa transkulturowa' in K. Wilkoszewska (ed.), *Estetyka transkulturowa*, Kraków 2004, p. 35.

ing which, according to Welsch, we should call transversal. Reasoning should therefore lead to a conscious reflection and elimination of conflicts; it is subjective and related to the power of judgment, always looking for commonality.

It is also surprising that the students who speak foreign languages fluently are aware of many cultures and borrow from them, defining their identity as intercultural declarative, but at the same time deny a European identity. It seems that they would agree to define their identity as being transcultural (during the many workshops that I conducted with young people, they actively acknowledged the term), but do not agree on defining their identity as a European.

Fifteen years old Lea Tiedemann from German city of Buxtehude writes:

*All in all you could say that there is no real common European identity because there are too many different cultures, but the European Union is very important for our identity and takes the first step to create one. Finally it may develop an identity which will represent nearly all of us* (Lea Tiedemann, Germany).

## CONCLUSION

Declarative European youth identity – of various online writers – is thus at the same time, the result of experience, self-reflection and self-creation. In this sense, like Małgorzata Melchior has outlined, we can call this type of identity an internal aspect of social identity.<sup>23</sup> It relates to one's own beliefs and at the same time, identifies oneself with a social peer group. Some of the important features are a sense of sense of origin, community and commonality with others. Young authors in their texts are clearly speaking on behalf of the group, while emphasizing their individuality and by expressing their opinions. It is, therefore, as the British social psychologist, Gerard Duveen would say,<sup>24</sup> the representation of self and others. Their cyber-transcultural identity has a perception by young people themselves as subjective, conscious and as combining elements of many cultures and traditions as part of an ongoing process of creation. This identity – according to Welsch – would be described as trans-sectorial and trans-medial relating to knowledge, awareness of and reflection on postmodern reality. Its *raison d'être* are experiences and transgressions. This constant confrontation of "I" with reality in order to define oneself is most easily done at the level of the virtual world. Moreover, transcultural identity in the European space is consistent with what Ulrich Beck's proposal that Europe should be perceived as a cosmopolitan unity. Beck and Grande in an article entitled 'Cosmopolitan Europe' write that cosmopolitanism, in this approach, assumes the transition to a transnational level, not negating the existence of nation states in the Union, but separating these two orders. Only such a model of a united Europe, according to the author, is consistent with the empirical reality of Europe,

<sup>23</sup> M. Melchior, *Spoleczna tożsamość jednostki...*, p. 393.

<sup>24</sup> G. Duveen, 'Representations, Identities, Resistance' in K. Deaus, G. Philogène (eds.), *Representations of the Social. Bridging Theoretical Traditions*, Oxford 2001.

which emphasizes a sense of unity in a diverse environment.<sup>25</sup> Today's diverse Europe does not need a stable identity, but rather something that Beck and Grande commonly called "Europeanisation narrative" – identity, understood as the process of combining different and variable elements of different cultures.

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