

Vladislavs Volkovs

**LATVIJAS ETNISKO MINORITĀŠU IDENTITĀTES VĒRTĪBAS:  
STARP NORMATĪVISMU UN PLURĀLISMU**



Latvijas Universitāte  
Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts

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## Summary

### **Values of Latvian Ethnic Minorities' Identity: between Normative and Pluralistic Interpretations**

The book reflects on the main intellectual trends peculiar to the sociological thought in relation to the understanding of a collective identity, and, in this context, also to the understanding of national minorities' ethnic identity. The choice of such a large context is not random. The ethnic minorities' identity is a special case of a social collective identity which has a brightly explicit historic dimension which was determined by the evolution of multi-ethnic nations started from the victory of the national state principle in the West in the 19th century and up to the modern century of pluralism. In this situation, the issue of the place of national minorities' collective identity within a national identity is relevant. The book also presents material of the four sociological surveys carried out by the author in the period 2010 – 2015 in order to study the place of ethnic minorities' identity within the public space in Latvia.

The main theoretical approaches to the attributive description of a collective identity developed in the 19th – 20th centuries. These approaches can be applied to all social groups, including ethnic minorities' identity. A lot of works on national and ethnic groups' identities apply the ideas of theoretical sociology in one or another way. At the same time, their application is not always systematized. It was structural functionalism which generated a normative approach to the understanding of ethnic minorities' identity. On the one hand, this normativity involves the idea of a nation as a necessary form of organization of historically diverse environment in modern societies. It is more correct to consider a common national identity in this meaning as a value for all citizens of a national state. Therefore, a national identity also becomes a significant value component for ethnic minorities' identity. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to think that a national identity is formed outside real interaction and cooperation in a multinational state between a national majority and ethnic minorities



whose interests could be ignored on the grounds of national unity. The idea that social diversity, including ethnic diversity, is subjected to a national unity, as an individual is secondary towards society is very explicit in functionalism. Therefore, within the frame of functionalism, this ethnic minorities' identity is understood as subjected to a national identity.

However, a national identity of multiethnic societies cannot ignore the fact of ethnic diversity, as well as the fact that it is an individual who should decide how to connect in their consciousness and behavior both a national and their own ethnic identities. Liberal researchers into national identity and ethnic minorities' identities are well aware of both positive aspects and flaws of functionalism. However, researchers frequently focus their attention on a nation's historic evolution which coincided with the transition from a traditional society to a modern one, and, therefore, demonstrating the value of a common national identity in comparison with a fragmented identity of ethnic minority groups of early societies. As a result, the value of ethnic diversity within modern national states is not always emphasized, but ethnic minorities' identity is considered as a manifestation of a normative national identity. Therefore, in order to understand ethnic minorities' identity, its analysis should be supplemented with theories which highlight the principles of pluralism in the study into modern society. This approach emphasizes the idea that a person has the right to a free choice of ethno-cultural values which may become an important part and resource of a national identity. Consequently, in democratic societies, ethnic minorities' identity may be described as one of the forms of a national identity.

Ideas of liberal multiculturalism are becoming widespread across methodological approaches of research into ethnic minorities' identities in the last decades, as well as in the legislation that protects ethno-cultural identity of ethnic minorities, modern political practices of non-discrimination and involving these groups of people in political participation and their fully-fledged inclusion into various spheres of social life. Societies themselves or at least their most prominent social groups and activists more and more frequently insist on the necessity to recognize ethnic minorities' identities as one of the possible forms of national identity. Such recognition is a key criterion of a pluralistic attitude towards ethnic minorities' identities, the refusal to consider them exclusively as subordinate towards the identity of

an ethno-national majority. The material of sociological surveys carried out by the author of the book over the recent years, demonstrate a request for an expert assessment (one of the qualitative sociological survey) as well as public assessment of a positive recognition of ethnic minorities' identities (two quantitative sociological surveys and one qualitative survey). At the same time, the limitations in such recognition which are associated with the problems of rooting of universal liberal values in general and in inter-ethnic communication in particular.

Ethnic minorities' identities are not something specific in the modern and postmodern multicultural society. They are part of the system of collective identities, and they are related to the same public values and undergo the same transformations as other collective identities. Therefore, the studies into them require a more thorough approach than the one offered by the theories of nation and nationalism, and then they move onto paradigms of general sociology. Ideas of various ethnic collective identities that are being formed in the process of social differentiation could be considered a common phenomenon in the society that had appeared already in the 19th century. E. Durkheim insisted on the need for normativity of one dominant collective identity, which in fact devaluated the social value of the identities of non-dominant groups of society. M. Weber, G. Simmel, H. Spenser demonstrated the significance of the individual choice in the formation of identity. However, sociological theories of that time considered the scrutiny of ethno-cultural differences in society as marginal in general. The 20th century emphasized the necessity for society integration, which enhanced a normative interpretation of national identity, and, as a result, ethnic minorities' identities. However, these ideas often led to the understanding of ethnic identities' minorities as subordinate to the identity of ethno-national majority and actually put minorities in unequal conditions (T. Parsons, L. Wirth). These views were rooted in the systems of ethno-social stratification, in which ethnic minorities were neglected, and these systems were established in a lot of countries. This situation could satisfy neither ethnic minorities nor scientists who shared liberal and humanist views. Collective identities of ethnic minorities are social constructions (P. Berger, Th. Luckmann), but they are not a mechanical copy of ethnic minorities' place in the system of ethno-social stratification. Their formation is bound to the

self-identification of an ethnic group as a social subject (A. Giddens), as an individual integrity (J. Habermas), to the complex individual identification processes (A. Schütz), interactive practices (Ch. H. Cooley, G. H. Mead, E. Goffman), and selective attitude towards the world (N. Luhmann). Therefore, in modern sociological theories there is a clearly expressed tendency to move away from the opposition between the identity of ethno-national majority and ethnic minorities (P. Bourdieu). At the same time, sociologists demonstrate that collective identities, including the ones of ethnic minorities, are becoming the object for manipulation by the government and market institutions (M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, J. Baudrillard, P.-M. Foucault).

The data of sociological research carried out by the author of the book prove that in Latvia both at the level of expert community and public consciousness there is a need for the confirmation of normative as well as pluralistic interpretations of ethnic minorities' identities. Normative interpretation of social phenomena is determined by the demands for society's modernization. Apparently, Latvia has not completed these processes yet, and therefore, a significant part of the society considers it important to repeat the way of the nation consolidation and formation of national identity which was done by the Western European and North American nations in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. In the Latvian society there are views on the necessity to form national identity taking into account the ethno-cultural diversity of the society, which complies with the main trends in the protection of the right to the individual choice of values, the equal right to which have both Latvians and ethnic minorities.

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