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Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future

Case Study Reports: Non-formal Cultural Participation and Socialisation in Slovakia

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1. Executive summary

The aim of the research was to describe and analyse the discourses about culture, cultural heritage, identity and cultural diversity amongst leaders and youth participants in two selected Slovak organisations dealing with non-formal education. The first selected organisation is anonymised as Slavic Natives. Slavic Natives are in a sense a new religious movement aiming to (re)construct "Slavic original spirituality". The second organisation, anonymised as Civil Liberties Organisation, focuses on the education about democracy, civil rights, discrimination and cultural diversity. Data were gathered by standard ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviewing and additionally studying of their textual materials, such as their magazines, books, web pages and leaflets. The data were theoretically analysed and namely conceptualised through various theoretical approaches involving Hobsbawm´s concept of *invented tradition*; Anderson´s *imagined community*; Latour´s critique of cultural relativism; theory of ritual; etc. The research generated data concerning several topics. The *emic* interpretations, i.e. the meanings through which the chosen organisations construct their notions of culture and cultural heritage have been investigated. The investigation also generated data about the relations between the organisations' ways of constructing or deconstructing the notion of cultural heritage with respect to the formation of the young people's identities. Finally, the research addressed the ways in which the notions of culture and cultural heritage determine the approach to cultural diversity among the organisations´ leaders and participants.

The discussion section of the report contributes to ongoing debates on the aforementioned concepts revisited in light of our research findings. . The report also discusses the results of ethnographic research by contrasting two selected organisations.

2. Introduction

The objective of the research was to examine the discourses referring to culture, identity and cultural heritage constructed within two selected organisations and consequently to investigate the forms of non-formal distribution of these discourses amongst leaders and young participants of both organisations. Therefore, on the one hand, the research investigates how the theory (knowledge) of culture, identity and cultural heritage is constructed in the context of given organisations. On the other hand, it examines the practice of sharing and distributing of such knowledge. Based on preliminary analysis of the organisations´ web pages and other textual materials, we put forward a hypothesis that the organisations represent two contrasting cases in respect to their attitudes towards key concepts of our research.

Our research aimed to answer following research questions:

1. What is the emic meaning of the term *culture* in a given organisation?
2. How are criteria for the selection of elements from the past used in a given organisation as representation of the cultural heritage?
3. How are such representations of the past and cultural heritage "actualised" for the present and/or future purposes of a given organisation?
4. How does construction of cultural heritage by the organisation affect the identity of its members and their feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic, religious, social group?

3. Methods

3.1. Selection of non-formal education settings

Two non-formal organisation were selected to provide contrasted case studies in their approach to CHIEF's key concepts, such as cultural heritage, cultural identity, cultural literacy and cultural diversity. The agenda of the Civic Liberties Organisation (CLO) is based on ideas of multiculturalism, cultural diversity, and intercultural tolerance. According to data from interviews with our informants, the concept of cultural heritage is implicitly framed into a wider sense of the heritage of human kind.

The second selected organisation, the Slavic Natives (SN) is essentially the new religious movement that reconstructs pre-Christian Slavic and Slovak cultural and spiritual heritage. As demonstrated below, the common tendency of Slavic Natives members is ascribing the spiritual meanings to a wide range of material and immaterial artefacts of traditional Slovak culture. Similarly, the organisations differ in their members´ approach to identity. The constructivist approach to identity is typical for members of CLO problematising the concept of identity itself. They identify themselves rather in terms of Central-Europeans, Europeans or human. On the other extreme, the members of SN do not hesitate to demonstrate their Slovak (Slavic) ethnic identity. Some of them demonstrate their feelings of belonging to the Slovak ethnic group by wearing the parts of folk costumes (or clothes which are designed accordingly to the patterns of folk costumes) on a daily basis, or by playing traditional Slovak musical instruments.

In general, our interview data have shown that CLO and SN differ in their position towards the main issues in current public debates - attitudes towards immigrants, Muslims and LGBT people and their views on the geopolitical orientation of the Slovak Republic. CLO agitates for the continuation of Slovak republic membership in European and transatlantic structures; SN

is very critical of the EU and sees the military neutrality as the best option for the country. Although the selected organisations at times represent opposing attitudes, we can also see some commonalities. The organisations are rather similar in their non-formal educational approach. In both organisations, lecturing itself is only one and by far not the most important part of the educational process. More frequently, the transmission of ideological contents comes through the collective games aimed at introspective and experience-based understanding of the topic (as described below), creative activities or even ritual. Through these activities, both organisations spread their vision of reality propagating specific forms of cultural literacies and worldviews among their young people who participate in their activities.

3.2. Data Collection

After selecting organisations that provide non-formal education, Work Package 4 (Qualitative research in non-formal education settings) researchers identified the most accurate events/sites that represent ideological scope, worldview and activities of these organisations.

In the case of CLO, our research started with a two-day seminar with high school students. The purpose of the seminar was to prepare high school students for an exhibition about Anne Frank, which connected her life story with current forms of discrimination (see more in the part about CLO site description). We also took part in the opening of the exhibition and witnessed the first guided tour led by students. The last opportunity to conduct participant observation research was during the evaluation meeting with students and CLO lecturers. After the participant observation phase of the research (April 2019), we conducted interviews with students and lecturers.

In the case of SN, we chose the biggest event organised annually - the Summer solstice. The celebrations of the solstice took place in the mountains of central Slovakia between the 20th and 23th June 2019. Visitors across the country attended the festival, and for logistical reasons we conducted interviews and participant observations simultaneously.

In our research, we employ two methods: participant observation and qualitative interviewing. The researchers[1] participated in the games, discussions or rituals at the same rate as other participants. We also documented both events photographically and made notes according to the principles of *thick description* (see Geertz 1973).

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[1] Out of four members of our research team, there were three male and one female researchers. The age of researchers was between 25 and 33 years. None of the researchers had previous experience with the researched groups.

In additional to the participant observations and interviews, we analysed the textual materials of both organisations, which we consider an important tool for "distribution" of their particular ideas of cultural literacy.

The preparation of interview guidelines was a crucial part of the research. It was necessary to translate the etic concepts coming from CHIEF's academic vocabulary and formulate questions intelligible for young people. We designed an interview schedule in order to learn about topics including cultural heritage, identity and cultural literacy through the questions aimed at implicit rather than explicit answers. For instance, in the case of SN followers, it seems to be more useful to concentrate on the practical continuation of the "ancestral/national heritage" in the everyday life of respondents than to ask about their understanding of vague and abstract meanings of developing/re-making of cultural heritage. Moreover, for many respondents such terms were almost meaningless and they were not able to fulfil them with any content except by pointing out several castles or buildings propagated as cultural heritage in schools, travel agencies or government campaigns. Mentioned circumstances added the next reason for conducting semi-structured interviews, since we had to modify and adapt the questions to the specific contexts of every informant. We conducted 14 interviews with SN participants (11 youths, 3 leading personalities). The most profound problem of the research was the lack of willingness among young participants on CLO activities to take part in our interviews. Only 6 students agreed to be interviewed[2]. In addition to students, we interviewed both lectors who led the workshop. All interviews were audio-recorded. The total length of records is over 20 hours.

Due to the limited number of youth participants in the activities of both organisations (and in the case of CLO a limited willingness of some students to take part in interviews), the only criteria used for selection of respondents was their age. However, we should mention an important difference between the participants of CLO and SN. Those who participated in the Winter solstice originate from various places and social backgrounds, while participants from CLO were students from elite high schools situated in the capital city. Most of these students are apparently privileged children from economically well-situated families belonging to the ethnic majority.

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[2] Our access to the group was managed through the CLO lectors, who allowed us to take part in the workshops and exhibition. During the workshops, we asked young participants for their contacts in order to conduct interviews after they completed their work as tour guide volunteers. However, when we contacted them, only six people responded.

3.3. Data Analysis

The first phase of the data analysis consisted of re-reading the interview transcripts, fieldwork notes and textual materials of both organisations. In this phase, we concentrated on identifying either explicit or implicit expressions related to the key concepts of CHIEF´s research interests (e.g. cultural heritage, cultural identity, cultural diversity, etc.). In addition to the CHIEF concepts, we identified several recurring themes from the data collected (e.g. interviews, fieldwork notes and textual materials) in both organisations. Finally, we compared the approaches and expressions of both organisations and marked mutual contrasts and similarities referring to the aforementioned referential frameworks. On the base of these initial analyses, we developed basic analytical categories and hierarchies and structured them according to the Nvivo coding tree.

The final phase of the data analysis was to consider academic theories that could be helpful to interpret and conceptualise the data about the researched phenomena. Selected academic theoretical approaches and their potential for application to our particular set of data will be discussed in the Discussion part of this report.

3.4. Ethical Issues

The anonymisation of respondents is a default position for ethically sound research. We proceeded according to standard principles of anonymisation and pseudonymisation. Every informant received a unique code; the only demographic information retained is their gender and age. All names of the participants were changed to pseudonyms. Similarly, the faces of participants in the photos made during participant observations were blurred. Before the participant observation started, researchers were introduced to all participants who explained the reason for their presence and goals of the research project. We pseudonymised the names of informants and the names of organisations as well.

All informants who took part in interviews have signed an informed consent form; in cases where informants were aged under 18, an informed consent form was provided by their parents. We did not note any particular ethical issue emerging from the concrete research situations. In relation to SN, we had concerns that participants would withdraw their consent when informed about the European Union background of the project. Luckily, the members of SN who belong to critics of Slovak membership in the EU did not deny their participation and accepted our presence.

4. Findings

General characteristics of non-formal education settings in the country

The tradition of youth non-formal education in Slovakia traces back at least as far as the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938). The beginning of the Communist era brought the prohibition of many youth organisations (e.g. Scouts); others were integrated into the *Národný zväz mládeže* (National Youth Association). Along with the National Youth Association, Communists established the *Pioneer* organisation for children. The foundation and structure of these organisations was inspired by Soviet Komsomol and Pioneer organisation. Both organisations were state controlled and their aim was to grow a "new man" for life in the "new society". Along with providing leisure activities, the main purpose of both organisations was to educate children and youths in the Communist ideology. Membership in these organisations was obligatory. After the intervention of Warsaw pact troops to Czechoslovakia, the *Socialistický zväz mládeže* (Socialist Association of Youths) was founded and substituted the former National Youth Association. The end of communism brought also the end of the aforementioned organisation and some youth organisations, forbidden during the previous era, were re-established. More specifically, Christian clubs and Scout organisations, banned during the Communist era, became very popular again. Today, youth organisations vary in their aims and forms of activities. Generally, Slovak youths are involved in sport and hobby clubs, political organisations, artist and cultural ensembles or religious groups. Also popular are volunteering organisations dealing with environmental, cultural, social and cultural heritage preserving activities. In the rural environment, it is traditionally very common to belong to volunteer fire fighter brigades.

The Youth Council of Slovakia is the biggest "umbrella" association, which covers 25 organisations for children and youths. The total members of these organisations is 25,000.

Obviously, due to the diversity of youth organisations, we cannot generalise any common approach to culture or cultural identity. However, it is worth mentioning that in recent years in Slovakia extreme nationalist and paramilitary youth groups have been formed. The most significant is the organisation *Slovenskí branci* (Slovak Guards) who spend their leisure time undergoing tactical combat training in forests. They also actively share their agenda of xenophobia, nationalism and anti-Europeanism through social networks and occasional public gatherings. This paramilitary group has a strict army-like hierarchy led by its 24-year-old "highest commandant". Slovak Guards also promote themselves by voluntary and self-initiated help during natural disasters. A similar strategy of increasing public sympathy was also used

by the party *Kotlebovci[3] – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko* (Kotlebovci-Folk Party Our Slovakia). This parliament party has been formed from the core of the Slovak neo-Nazi scene and their drastic change of neo-Nazi outfits for smart clothes and slight change of rhetoric brought them to the Slovak parliament. The party also founded its youth organisation.

In Slovakia there are no official statistics quantitatively evaluating membership in youth organisations or sorting them under any criteria. Nevertheless, at least we can trace the main sources of their funding. We can recognise youth organisations funded by state (often on the municipal level), churches, the European Union and those funded from private sources, especially from members´ fees and contributions.

4.1. Case 1: Slavic Natives
4.1.1. Site Description
Slavic Natives are one of many neo-pagan revivalist organisations that appeared in the former Eastern Bloc after the fall of the Communist regime. SN appeared in a medium sized city in western Slovakia during the 1990s. Veleslav is the founder and charismatic leader of the organisation. SN cannot be understood as a sole organisation but rather as a group of organisations, music band and projects gathered around the personality of Veleslav – band *Spirits*[4], project *Farmer´s and Craftsman´s Rebirth*[5] or magazine *Original Spritiuality*[6]. All of the activities of the organisation are oriented to the revival of pre-Christian culture and its values. The organisation strongly empathises its "Slovakness" and especially its glorification of so-called "Old Slovaks". SN members perform rituals which they claim are part of the Slavic pagan religion[7] with friendliness towards nature being at its core. Veleslav defines the philosophy of SN as an "original natural spirituality". The organisation shows also strong Euroscepticism. It propagates radical linguistic purism. They also present themselves as a self-declared oppressed dissident group. Since the organisation does not require formal membership it is hard to say its exact size, however, for a rough estimate we could use the number of followers on Facebook – profile *Veleslav* has 697 followers, page *Veleslav – Slavic Natives* has 2126 followers, and page *Farmer´s and Craftsman´s Rebirth* has 620 members (data from 10.10.2019). According to the participant observation, approximately 160 people took part in the Summer solstice festival therefore the number of active followers are smaller, than the number of Facebook followers.

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[3] Named after Marián Kotleba, the leader of the party.
[4] The name of the band was changed
[5] The name of the project was changed.
[6] The title of the magazine was changed.
[7] Pre-Christian Slavs were worshipers of pantheon, which is (by function of Gods) analogical to other Indo-European pantheons (e.g. God-thunderer, God of underworld or Goddess of Spring). In addition to such personified natural powers, arguably Slavic pagan practices also included worshiping sacred forests, springs or other natural objects.

Nowadays activities of the SN are mainly lectures propagating the "native culture", workshops of native spirituality, concerts of band *Spirits* (consisting solely of the members of SN), and common celebrations of festivals such as the summer or winter solstice. As a rule in their educational practices, SN mix and link different formats (such as lectures, concerts and celebrations). Among the recent activities should be listed also podcast *Original wisdom*[8] broadcasted on a certain online radio, well known in Slovakia as a so-called alternative medium and conspiracy medium. According to previous research (Puchovsky, 2017), many young followers became aware of the organisation thanks to this radio station. The target audience of SN seems to be any ethnic Slovak interested in folk music and folklore, history or ecology.

According to the organisation, the summer and winter solstice are among the most important festivals of the year. While the winter solstice is a more intimate celebration, which is usually held only for the inner circle of followers, summer solstice is a three-day event ($20^{th} - 23^{th}$ June 2019) open to all. The main event is the burning of four ritual bonfires. The celebration also serves as an "initiation" of new followers – who gain new Slavic and spiritual names. Another ritual that takes place is *postrižiny* understood as spiritual purification and a ritual of "protection of the newborns" aiming to replace Christian baptism.

The celebration of the Summer solstice took place in the mountains in central Slovakia and was attended by approximately 160 visitors. However, SN followers claim that the number of visitors used to be much higher, but this year the weather was not auspicious for spending the weekend in nature. Our team was present at this festival since it represented a good opportunity to speak with the young and new followers of Slavic Natives.

SN does not have a fixed place for gathering and organising lectures; the mountains in central Slovakia were the festival took place is not the only locality of their gatherings. In fact, they organise events all over the country in nature (especially around Veleslav´s house in the middle of forests) and in cities, where they meet in teahouses or shops selling alternative medicine and natural products.

Veleslav plays a critical role in the organisation's life. He then delegates the management of partial tasks to his closest and most loyal followers. The organisation is financed exclusively from member fees and voluntarily contributions.

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[8] The title of the podcast was changed.

4.1.2. Emerging Themes/Results of Analysis

Slavic Natives is a new religious movement propagating comeback to "original spirituality found in nature" which is based on "ancient traditions of old Slavs". Significantly, practice of SN, formulated by its leader and founder Veleslav, is based on (re)constructing the religious worldview and rituals of "old Slavs". However, Veleslav denies describing his movement as re-constructivist. He argues that his group does not follow the spiritual practice of the pre-Christian Slavic religion strictly and is open to innovative elements. These elements he draws from his spiritual inspiration by "joining the pure source". This "pure source" could be explained as a higher consciousness of the Universe as a reservoir of all knowledge and in a sense also Nature. Apart from Veleslav's individual approach and vision, the core of SN rituals is based on the materials selectively appropriated from the academic literature, namely ethnological, historical, archaeological and linguistic. This is why Veleslav alternatively calls his spiritual system as an "old-new spirituality" (*novodrevné duchovno*). However, the key concept of Veleslav´s teaching is *vedomectvo* (sageness in a spiritual sense).

Although Veleslav addresses his messages to all sorts of audiences and his followers originate from various social and age groups, young people represent a very significant portion of the visitors attending his events. Undoubtedly, every kind of event organised by SN could be characterised as non-formal education. Veleslav and his fellows do not miss any opportunity to spread the teaching and philosophy of "ancestral original natural spirituality". Veleslav transmits his teaching through his songs[9] and musical performances, workshops, lectures, magazine, books, websites, radio broadcasting and rituals[10]. His workshops address various topics and activities; for instance, spiritual ways of playing traditional Slovak musical instruments; agricultural work such as skiving with scythe or gardening; traditional cooking; crafts; conducting rituals etc. Obviously, whatever the topic of the workshop, Veleslav accents the spiritual dimension of these activities and encourages participants to understand the deeper meanings of their actions during activities and to constantly keep the work in touch with nature and sageness in the sense of his teaching.

Bringing light to the general approaches of the SN and emerging themes of our research, it is crucial to explain how Veleslav and his followers understand and work with the term culture.

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[9] Veleslav´s songs are arranged for musical instruments typical for Slovak folk music. He also uses the folk musical patterns or even whole melodies, which he enriches with his own lyrics. In his lyrics, he presents his worldview and spiritual teaching. During his performances, he is often accompanied by his band.

[10] Although our research focuses on the non-formal education of youth, it could be interesting to note, that Veleslav works also with children. He organises summer camps in nature where – along with his philosophy – he teaches children practical skills of traditional crafts, agriculture and woodcraft. The woodcraft and scout movement inspired him to organise such camps, which he wants to spread to more places all over the country.

According to Veleslav "*culture and spirituality are parallel concepts*" (Veleslav, P, M, 52)[11]. Veleslav does not understand nature and culture as dichotomous; rather he sees culture as a continuation of nature. He does not consider culture only as "ways of thinking, speaking or clothing", but adds that the culture is everything humans can inherit including DNA, blood group or stomach enzymes. "*Bacteria in stomach are also cultures.*" (Veleslav, P, M, 52). Such an approach to culture corresponds with his worldview that makes nations, humankind, the earth and even the whole universe a living being.

For Veleslav and for most of our informants, culture makes sense only in relation to nature. SN followers are convinced that Christianisation opposed such an understanding; Christians ignored nature and oppressed its worship. Veleslav imagines the sensitivity of the Slavic culture to nature and its hidden powers as a *"culture prohibited in 9th century"* (Veleslav, P, M, 52). As many of our young informants confirm, this view has become a stereotype amongst SN followers. However, Veleslav and SN followers admit that there still exist residues of "original culture" (traced by SN members to the times before the 9th century, when Christianity spread over the area of present day Slovakia). They claim to develop those residuals and preserve them for the future. This leads Veleslav and his fellows to (re)construct the cultural heritage from the times of the pre-Christian Slavs. Since the terms *ancestors* and *heritage* are used frequently in SN, it is possible to say that this organisation represents "heritage in the making". This fact is illustrated as follows:

> *Actually, we ourselves are cultural heritage. I wear tunica /.../ and it is also the culture and we are moving it forward. I will come in tunica, someone will like it and he will also start wearing tunica.* (Borislav, YT, M, 19).

Such an understanding of heritage stems from the idealisation of pre-Christian Slavic culture which, to a large extent has been constructed and stereotypified by Veleslav.

Furthermore, Veleslav himself understands cultural heritage as a *"spiritual heritage and thus everything good and bad /.../ we have inherited."* (Veleslav, P, M, 52). Apparently, followers of SN, so to say, spiritualise meanings of various material and immaterial artefacts coming from Slovak ethnic culture. They see spiritual references in embroidery of folk costumes, lyrics of folk songs, traditional styles of dancing and so forth. A typical example representing this approach is the work with the traditional flute called *koncovka*. SN consider it a perfect tool for meditation connected to the four natural elements - water, earth, fire and air. SN followers frequently use this primitive flute without holes for individual and group meditations. Playing

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[11] The reference to informant consists of his/her pseudonymised name and form of engagement in the organisation – practitioner (P) or youth participant (YP); gender (M/F) and their age.

koncovka includes specific steps; before start to play, the practitioner should greet and pay respect to the instrument by lifting it in both hands above his/her head and then touching his/her chakras (*čarokolá*[12] in the SN term Slavicized by Veleslav) with the flute. *Koncovka* is also very important requisite for many SN rituals. However, there is no scientific evidence indicating the traditional use of *koncovka* for meditative or ritual purposes. Conversely, Veleslav does not try to deny that such peculiar deployment of *koncovka* is his own invention. Nevertheless, his followers fully accepted his approach to playing it and they consider *koncovka* a traditional instrument aimed for spiritual purposes. Apparently, in SN cultural heritage gains new and unusual meanings and becomes part of spiritual practice. Hence it is possible to claim that SN have made Slovak/Slavic cultural heritage spiritual and the SN's followers are worshiping, so to say, the cult of cultural heritage.

While informants shared relatively clear ideas about Slovak and Slavic culture, most of them found questions pointing to Europe and/or its cultural heritage confusing. They claimed, that they cannot imagine anything from the terms *European culture* or *European heritage*. "*It is an empty concept which is founded on nothing.*" (Bojana, YT, F, 15). Except for one respondent who tried to define European culture as "*rich, but rich with money*" (Chranibor, YT, M, 19), Only one person could talk about common European culture listing Roman law and Greek democracy as something commonly shared in Europe (Dalibor, YT, M, 19). It is worth mentioning that this informant was also the only person who did not have a problem identifying himself as European. Such an identification is very rare among Veleslav followers, who are rather critical of the European Union and Slovak membership of the EU.

However, when referring to Indo-European culture a slight notion of European culture emerges in Veleslav´s teaching. On the one hand, arguing with the notion of Indo-European serves him as a tool to legitimise the historical authenticity of Slavic culture; on the other hand, it legitimises the spiritual authenticity of his teaching. According to Veleslav, Indo-European culture and spirituality were connected to nature and therefore it shares common ground with SN "original spirituality found in nature". Veleslav also often mentions other cultures founded on the same universal natural values (especially the cultures of Native American Indians) during his speeches. Importantly, neither he nor his followers consider Slavic culture and spirituality as superior to other cultures which have preserved their "original spirituality". He declares all cultures as equal, even if paradoxically he speaks about some cultures with a certain disdain. Apparently, the value, which Veleslav ascribes to other cultures, depends on the distance of a given culture from Veleslav´s vision of universal spirituality found in nature. Notably, he considers Islam as a culture that is too anthropocentric, very far from nature and "*not smoothed for cohabitation with other cultures*". Veleslav welcomes the diversity of

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[12] 'Čarokolá' literally means 'magic circles'.

cultures, but at the same time, he thinks that cultures should not be overly mixed, because mixing of cultures causes cultures to lose their originality and the world becomes less diverse.

Most of our young informants have negative attitudes towards the "*mixing the cultures*". Some of them advocate their attitude with similar arguments as does Veleslav, but others go even further and claim that having a child with people belonging to other races is equal to "*betrayal of own blood*" (Bojana, YT, F, 15). Most SN members share an essentialist vision of culture seen as belonging to a certain ethnic group. According to them, belonging to an ethnic group is given at birth and ethnicity, as well as a certain ethnic culture, resides in someone´s blood. This essentialism is well expressed by Bojana, who thinks that if she were to have children with someone from another ethnic group their *"children would be something between both (ethnic groups, noted by report author), they would be neither this, neither that."* (Bojana, YT, F, 15)

Therefore, for SN members, culture and ethnicity is rooted in nature also in a biological and genetic sense. Perhaps that is the reason why many SN members claims that the "Slavic DNA" is very old, as confirmation of the ancient historical origins of Slavic DNA would help SN members to get more deeply anchored in their newly invited Slavicness.

4.2. Case 2: Civil Liberties Organisation
4.2.1. Site description
The Civil Liberties Organisation is a mid-size NGO founded in 1991. CLO belongs to the oldest of Slovak NGOs. The organisation was founded to "*develop democracy, culture, tolerance and civic society"*. Its members engaged in many projects dealing with human rights at schools; oral history (e.g. remembering the genocide of Jews and Romas during the holocaust, totalitarian persecutions); activities with socially excluded Roma communities (e.g. helping youths studying in high schools, research, community work, organisation of seminaries); education of children to become active citizens or the support of transatlantic cultural exchange.

Nowadays, the organisation is developing a new strategic plan based on the three following pillars: diversity, inclusion and memory. Under the first pillar, CLO currently trains teachers to teach intercultural education more innovatively. For people who work with youths, immigrants, NGOs and state institution workers, CLO also organise various training, workshops and seminaries on various facets of diversity. It also organises a multi-genre festival annually, called *Synthesis[13]*. The main purpose of the festival is to promote ideas of cultural diversity and respect to all kinds of minorities.

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[13] The name of the festival was changed.

The pillar of inclusion concerns their agenda that is oriented towards poverty and Roma communities. CLO predominantly develops public policies and works with Roma grassroots activists.

The last pillar is oriented toward historical memory. CLO organises courses, workshops and seminars for teachers and students about the holocaust, totalitarianism and other historical traumas of current Slovakia. Most important for our research is the project of a travelling exhibition named *The Diary of Anne Frank – the historical message to this day.* The exhibition and its associated activities have been selected as our WP4 research site.

The travelling exhibition, *The Diary of Anne Frank – the historical message to this day,* is a non-formal educational project that addresses the holocaust, totalitarianism, antisemitism, racism, discrimination and violation of human rights. The exhibition visits different high schools. The project is based on "*peer education*", i.e. during the two day workshop, the CLO team train students to guide their classmates through the exhibition. The idea of the project is to present the story of Anne Frank and to search for links between historical discrimination and forms of discrimination present in modern society.

It is worth mentioning that students were asked to read the book *Diary of Anne Frank* before they attended the workshop. Our team took part in a workshop in Bratislava (at the end of April 2019) along with 16 students from three of Bratislava´s high schools. Two lectors leading the workshop prepared an intensive programme of various non-formal educational activities aimed at tackling discrimination; they were designed in a way that made the workshop attendees realise that everyone, even them, could be the victim of discrimination. The other games and activities included for instance crossing the floor according to an individual's agreement or disagreement with the words said by the lecturer (e.g. I am Slovak; I am feminist; I like football). According to the lecturers, this activity led students to realise that under certain established criteria everyone could be part of a minority. During another activity, everyone was asked to write on sticky paper some characteristic that was unfairly ascribed to him/her by the other people. Every student stuck the label on his/her clothes to let everyone see what had been written. Then the students had to introduce each other while using negative stereotypes (e.g. wonk, bighead, dressed up girl, crazy). The labelled students were told that the goal of the "exercise" was to give them to better understanding of A. Frank's situation, who was also labelled (with the Star of David); however, nobody seemed interested in the fact that she was a complex personality with a unique inner world. Obviously, there is insufficient space to list and provide detailed descriptions of every activity held during the workshop. In general, the lectors used experiential education, drama, discussions and peer education as their methods. Only the last few hours of the workshop were dedicated to practical preparation of students´

for their upcoming role of guides for the exhibition. During this time, they were asked to study historical facts related to exhibition banners and were trained to speak in an interesting and fluent way about the given topic in front of an audience. Several weeks after the workshop, the opening ceremony of the exhibition took place at the Philosophical faculty of Comenius University in Bratislava. The Ambassador of the Netherlands formally opened the exhibition. Amongst other invited guests of honour, were representatives of local religious (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) communities. The following month, students acted as exhibition guides for groups of visitors from elementary and high schools.

Apart from this project, CLO currently runs four other educational projects (for young people and teachers). Two of them are dedicated to the holocaust, and the other two address totalitarian regimes and relations between memory and attitudes.

The CLO is based in the Slovak capital of Bratislava, but collaborates with schools across whole country, where they offer the described educational programmes for students and teachers. The organisational structure of CLO includes an administrative board, its founders, internal and external workers, volunteers and, of course, the participants of its programmes. The sources of CLO´s finances are predominantly from projects coming from European Union institutions.

4.2.2. Emerging Themes/Results of Analysis

As is apparent from the previous lines, the important part of CLO's activities relates to intercultural and anti-discrimination education. However, the lectors of CLO refuse the approach (otherwise typical for Slovak educational policy documents and often found also in academic texts) of teaching children and young people about *other* cultures. Such an approach, according to the lectors, presupposes any dominant characteristic of a certain *culture* as ethnicity or religion.

> *We are trying to disrupt such an approach with the transcultural approach. This approach takes into consideration the conjunctions of cultures, but also the uniqueness of every single individual, who can draw from for example ethnically defined culture, but he absorbs various influences./.../ We do not avoid speaking about other cultures, but we are trying to perceive them as something that is not constant but rather conditioned by the longer time enclosed community which created its norms. /.../ However, in the educational process we are oriented to a so called norm-critical approach. It means doubting one's own norms and figuring out that norms are conditioned by environment* (Adam, P, M, 39).

According to the CLO lectors, instead of the term of culture, they prefer to work with *'identity, stereotypes, prejudices and the perception of diversity'*. Another CLO lector claims that their education aims to problematise the concepts, which students consider as entirely clear. Therefore, the effort of CLO lectors is oriented to deconstruct the seemingly obvious concepts related to ethnicity, identity or culture. (Eva, P, F, 31). They call this way of education *personality based intercultural education*. The focal point of this approach is emphasising the personal experience and characteristic nuances of each individual life story, which should be superior to any collective criteria. This experience is moderated in a *"safe and controlled environment"* (Eva, P, F, 31). The connection between the tragic story of Anne Frank and current stories of discrimination of concrete people, which was the main idea of exhibition, is an accurate illustration of this approach.

Our informants evaluate the approach of CLO lectors very positively; *"It was big experience which opened my eyes"* (Barbora, YP, F, 15). Others claim that thanks to the workshop, they have started to perceive "*things*" in a different way and have become more sensitive to discrimination. However, it is crucial to mention, that the attendees of the workshop were in fact privileged children from the elite high schools of the capital city. Moreover, in order to be admitted to the workshop, they had to write an essay about Anne. However, by doing this the organisers created conditions that enabled the selection of students interested in topics such as discrimination, the holocaust or human rights. Those who were not interested, or even worse, who sympathise with any extremist ideology effectively stayed at home…

When we asked the organisers whether they considered it fruitful to keep distance from people, who already distance themselves, they defended themselves with the argument that this exhibition was predominantly based on the principles of "peer education". It means that beneficiaries or the secondary target group of the project are mainly classmates, peers, friends or relatives of the workshop attendees who will offer informal occasions to discuss the themes of the workshop (Adam, P, M, 39).

However, our informants who were delegated to share the message of CLO amongst their peers, do not entirely accept the views of their lectors. Although they adopt a constructivist approach to culture (and display an understanding for cultural dynamics) with affirmations as for instance, *"Culture are people who create it."* (Katarina, YP, F, 17), as well as, proclaim that we should respect all cultures, when it comes to migration or "mixing of cultures", many of them showed a negative attitude.

Paradoxically, they built their arguments against mixing of cultures on the concepts and terminology, which are key to the CLO agenda: *"Discrimination of people, or even aggressive*

oppression of people is not mature. Developed people from developed cultures do not have reason to do it" (Katarina, YP, F, 17). Another informant asserts:

> *Middle East does not have its place in Europe, because we have totally different culture. Moreover, their culture tends to dominate. They spread their culture to other people and cultures. And that is right opposite to what we are taught: 'Be kind to everyone and do not force people to anything.' They are taught quite contrary.* (Emil, YP, M, 16)

When we asked the lector if CLO deals also with the cultural heritage, she did not hesitate and immediately pointed to human rights understood as "*universal laws*" (Eva, P, F, 31). She thinks human rights are "*universally valid*" and should be universally introduced across all societies of the world. Although fully aware of the fact that human rights are the product of Western culture and history, she was sceptical about the spreading of the human rights agenda by force, since we have witnessed many failures of such a method. The most effective way, according to her, is to educate people and to support locals who try to change their countries. When asked whether she implicitly taught that the distributed European or Western knowledge is superior to knowledge of less developed countries (in the sense of the Western concept of human rights), she responded:

> *Essentially, yes, I told it. Now I consider human rights as the best what we have, but it is not in contradiction with the possibility to change our view, adjust or reform and right through dialogue with other countries we can figure out that maybe something does not work as sufficiently as we thought. /.../ So yes, I think in my words is hidden certain superiority, but I am not closed to dialogue with other countries in context of things which they consider as right* (Eva, P, F, 31)

Despite advocating openness to dialogue with other societal and cultural models, she did not deny that the Western cultural product (or in her terms even cultural heritage) of human rights is superior to other socio-formative models. The possibility of discussion with other models seems grounded only within the human rights framework. However, CLO proclaims that the respect to other cultures and sharing the cultural relativist attitudes to cultural customs is a crucial part of their agenda. A more detailed view, however, uncovers that a product of particular culture is made a referential point for interpreting other cultures and societies. Using the concept of human rights as a superior criterion and emphasising the need to distribute knowledge - which is culturally determined and often constructed with the employment of power - to other countries along with finding ways to implement the human rights agenda through local agents in these countries very much resembles the principles of colonial practice.

Therefore, a particular contradiction in the CLO discourse appears. While on the one hand it asks for the respect of different cultures, on the other hand it shows support for the cultural hegemony of human rights imagined in the West. Human rights serve as an ideological tool for superior attitudes towards cultures without constituted and/or practised ideals of liberal democracy and those that have not reached a certain level of economic development.

Apparently, the material of this case study represents the continuation of common phenomena, which are in Slovakia observed through all "pro-diversity" materials across all so far researched fields of the project (including academic texts about multicultural education, policy documents, curricula and the formal education process). While many of mentioned actors - either personally or textually - adopted the vocabulary of multiculturalism and "*pro-diversity*", the detailed research has shown that their adoption of "*pro-diversity*" attitudes is arbitrary.

5. Discussion

Now, what does the term *culture* mean for the representatives and followers of the chosen organisations? Firstly, both organisations occupy extremely contrasting approaches to culture. The SN shares a very essentialist perspective toward culture. Culture is inseparably tied to nature. Furthermore, religion, or to use the terms of its members *"the original spirituality found in nature"* should, ideally, serve as a bond between nature and culture. Culture originates in and should be developed from the spiritual understanding and connection to nature. The charismatic leader of the group extended the meaning of culture to *"everything what we inherited"*. He does not exclude from the framework of culture phenomena usually classified to the natural world (e.g. DNA, stomach enzymes, blood group). Culture and ethnicity seem to be, according to our interpretation of the data, *coded* or latently present even in one´s blood cells. To become Slovak (or Slav) is not only a matter of socialisation in a community of Slovaks, but also of biological conception and birth. One is born a member of a certain ethnic group and in fact bears that particular culture on his/her shoulders (or better said - in his/her blood) since his/her biological conception. The data collected amongst SN members actually contribute to the problematisation of the (not only structuralist) viewpoint regarding the nature-culture relation as the central anthropological dichotomy. The academic paradigm advocating the culture-nature dichotomy as the central anthropological category often works with arguments pointing to common cross-culturally observed phenomena of ascribing society as a group of cultural beings and classifying "others" rather as the parts of chaotic nature. (See Levi-Strauss 1999). This tendency often is expressed linguistically by comparing other groups to animals. Claude Levi-Strauss claims that the concept of humankind ends on the border of the tribe, village or linguistic group and many social groups are convinced that other groups are

excluded from the framework of human virtues and human nature. These groups are called "*human apes*" or nits (Levi-Strauss 1999:16). However, the representations of SN offer an example opposing the structuralist viewpoint: nature is not chaotic and unpredictable, but represents a hidden and precious order. Most authentic forms of human virtues correspond with the natural order and valuable cultures know and follow this order. The superiority of one's own culture is thus not defined according to civilisational distance from nature, but on the contrary, according to close contact with nature and deep anchoring in its principles.

In contrast to the SN philosophy of biologically defined cultural and ethnical essentialism, CLO declaratively occupies the opposite cultural relativist position. The CLO lectors refuse to approach cultures as "closed entities" inseparably connected to ethnic or any other collective category. They understand culture as the result of various interactions, which is not limited to boundaries of any collective category. Moreover, they emphasise the role of an individual actor who can absorb various cultural influences. According to the CLO lectors, cultures are mutually pervading and affecting each other. This is the reason why the non-formal educational programme of CLO leads to deconstruction or at least problematisation of collective categories and identities. While SN works with belonging to an ethnic group based on nature and spirituality, CLO discuss such belonging even on the level of an individual´s personal attitudes. The intellectualistic approach of CLO emphasises the social construction of collective categories and encourages young people to a "norm-critical approach". This in turn leads to questioning and reconsidering the norms and *truths* of one's own culture. The CLO representatives claim their approach crosses ethnically or religiously marked cultural boundaries and call it a "transcultural approach". This has two practical consequences; firstly in contrast to SN, where cultural sources are available for constructing youths' worldview and identity is reduced to ethnically defined culture. In the case of CLO, one can search the possible sources of one's own identity and worldview - so to say - outside ethnically or religiously defined "boxes" i.e. in one´s not necessarily mono-ethnic family and its history; in the geographical area, which overlaps countries and ethnic borders like Central Europe; in the results of intercultural dialogue and cohabitation etc. Secondly, the transcultural approach provides CLO leaders with arguments for their criticism of teaching about *other cultures*. According to CLO lectors, such teaching, otherwise common in Slovak formal and as well non-formal education, reinforce the reduced understanding of cultures as the product of particular ethnic groups and nurse existing stereotypes about given groups. At this point, we can see a clear distinction between two dominant approaches to culture and cultural diversity in Slovak pedagogic theory. The first one represented by prominent Slovak theorist of multicultural education Erich Mistrík, works with the conception of culture as a somehow stable and monolithic category. Shortly, in order to bring intercultural tolerance, the education system should provide students with knowledge and experience related to *other cultures*. (Mistrík

2009: 92). People "*within*" those cultures are in fact, perceived as passively captured in a given culture. CLO lectors, along with the representatives of the second approach, are critical towards the aforementioned understanding of culture and diversity. This goes in concordance with the younger generation of Slovak academics who argue, that discourse which defines any culture as a stable and discrete entity with clearly marked borders brings more risks than benefits, because it marks boundaries between groups rather than creating space for mutual interaction and coexistence (Gállová-Kriglerová 2009: 12).

However, there are also surprising similarities between both SN and CLO. Despite cultural relativism and respect to cultural differences (along with their relativization) proclaimed by CLO representatives and their young participants, our interviews disclosed apparent bias to comparisons and evaluations of cultures. While amongst SN members the spiritual bond to nature was the referential point for cultural comparison and evaluation of other cultures, our data from CLO informants have shown that also they have the *criterion* for classification and evaluation of cultures or societies. This criterion or referential point is represented through the concept of human rights and respect towards other cultures, which are amongst some CLO informants considered as *de facto* a paramount cultural product. The young informants recognised as developed cultures only those cultures, which developed the concept of human rights and respect towards other cultures. Cultures that did conform to these ideas were considered underdeveloped. Also, one of the CLO non-formal education programme's leaders expressed analogical bias, when she admitted that she considers western knowledge concerning human rights as superior to knowledge of societies lacking the concept of human rights. Apparently, the cultural relativist position is not as rigid as proclaimed and as it initially seemed to be. Respect towards other cultures is limited by the other cultures´ ability to respect different cultures. The conviction about equality of all cultures is implicitly limited with conviction about the superiority of the western cultural product conceptualised as human rights. As we see, sometimes, cultural relativism cannot be relativistic in all cases. Possibly, this arbitrary relativism could be "*grasped*" through Bruno Latour´s term of "*particular universalism*". Latour explains the term in following manner:

> *One society - and it is always the Western one- defines the general framework of Nature[14] with respect to which the others are situated. This is Levi-Strauss's solution: he distinguishes Western society, which has a specific interpretation of Nature, from that Nature itself, miraculously known to our society. The first half of the argument allows for modest relativism (we are just one interpretation among*

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[14] In terms of Latour, under the concept of Nature we do not need to understand solely nature, but a whole scale of "non-human entities". Consequently, understanding Nature is not understanding nature in the sense of natural sciences, but understanding the ontological essence of the world of *things themselves*.

others), but the ·second permits the surreptitious return of arrogant universalism -
we remain absolutely different. (Latour 1993: 105).

The privileged position of the Western cultural product of human rights, declared by the CLO representative, could be explained with Latour´s "*grand Western narrative*" based on conviction about the West, which is set apart other cultures due to its privileged access to (knowledge of) Nature (Ibid.). CLO are relativist when they compare cultures with their Latourian Natures, in the sense of both "*non-human*" natural and cultural products. Therefore, CLO relativism is enabled thanks to closing the particular and concrete cultural product of human rights in brackets. When they must approach other cultures with the concept of human rights and release human rights from these brackets, suddenly the CLO worldview turns universalistic or as Latour would probably say - particularly universalistic. With other worlds, while SN does not differentiate between the nature-culture dichotomy, for CLO the developed cultures lie separately and a safe distance from natures (and Natures), which could negatively affect the conquest of human rights that have increased thanks to only privileged Knowledge of the world of things.

The second researched question searched for criteria of selecting the elements from the past used in a given organisation as a representation of the cultural heritage.

In the case of SN, the informants highlighted such elements from the past, which would confirm their conviction about the spiritual connection of their Slavic ancestors with nature. They also searched for spiritual meanings in tangible and intangible artefacts of Slovak and Slavic folk culture. They, and especially their leader Veleslav, not only interpreted material and immaterial artefacts in the sense of "natural spirituality", but also constructed new practices, which are admittedly new, but according to the leader, spiritually inspired from the original and "pure source". So to say, the leader´s contemplation leads to connection to the "spiritual source" as the most authentic source for interpreting cultural elements of the past and at the same time claims that newly invented practices, words or rituals are in accordance with the "original culture of ancestors".

This phenomenon could be effectively grasped theoretically with the help of Hobsbawm´s concept of *invented tradition.* Hobsbawm defines invented tradition as "*a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past*" (Hobsbawm 1993:1). The instrumental function of inventing tradition in SN is apparent and leads to confirmation of the leader´s authority (as a

channel for paradoxical historical *authenticity* of his innovations and inventions) and at the same time to legitimisation of the group´s existence and -again- its historical authenticity and reasonability. Neglecting the face-to-face intergenerational transmission of ancient Slavic tradition and substituting it with knowledge from scientific books about Slavs is sought in the tradition, which did not continue in an apparent and palpable way, but continued through some hidden spiritual source, which supplies Veleslav with his inspirations for inventing traditions and consequently supplies his invented traditions with sufficient credibility.

However, the selection of elements from the past and their actualisation for the present purpose is subjected to relatively strict criteria of selection. Veleslav is the person who selects and decides which element fits the group´s practice and which should be excluded. The selected element must originate from the imagined Slovak or Slavic folk cultural heritage. This ethnic, and clearly essentialistic and arbitrary condition for instance excludes many elements from Slovak folk culture brought or developed by non-Slovak/non-Slavic groups. However, in case of need, SN members are able to apologise for the exceptions, which do not have Slovak/Slavic origin and consider useful to integrate them to their practice. Generally, such elements can be integrated if they fulfil the second condition for selection – its relation to nature. As ethnic origin excludes from the SN framework the non-Slovak and non-Slavic elements of folk cultural heritage, the relation to nature excludes the elements of urban classes from folk culture and its heritage, because historically urban classes and their culture were not connected to nature enough. It is noteworthy that this conception is a variation on dominant Slovak discourse about Slovaks as a nation of peasants and shepherds. This discourse is reproduced in the cultural, political and very notably the formal education system.

Visibly, there are two major criteria for selection of elements for SN's further actualisation and re-interpretation. These criteria can serve as a means for exclusion of a particular historical element, but occasionally criteria of natural origin can serve also as the means of inclusion of elements, which do not fit criteria of ethnic origin. Moreover, since Veleslav claims, that "*cultural heritage is everything we have inherited, all good but also bad habits*", the elements which are considered as bad must be excluded from the concept of folk culture (or its construction which remained after its reduction to folk culture without other ethnic groups and urban classes). Veleslav points in this case to traditional Slovak excessive drinking of alcohol.

As already noted, SN members construct their vision of cultural heritage and reconstruct their practice mainly from scientific (ethnographic, historic, archeologic, linguistic) sources. Therefore, the "*heritage in the making*" in the sense of SN begins during the spiritual contemplation of scientific books.

If SN members emphasise the role of folk culture and folklore as a constitutive part of cultural heritage, the CLO lector, considers the developing of folklore as meaningless. She claims that glorification of folklore does not bring any fruit in the sense of its actualisation and application for current times and needs. She also adds that nowadays nobody performs any folk tradition in its authentic form and finds many more inspirations in historical folk uprisings against landlords and Habsburg monarchs, because these historical events could generate discussions about the conditions under which citizens have the right to resist the state establishment. As noted in the previous part of the report, she is convinced that the most precious cultural heritage artefact is the achievement of human rights.

In the case of the CLO leaders, the criteria for selecting elements from the past, which are valuable for their actualisation, consist of the elements concerning human rights and civil liberties. The CLO lector even raised the question whether the loveliness and beauty of old dances or crafts are sufficient features for their definition as cultural heritage and sufficient reasons for conservation of folklore (Eva, P, F, 31). In contrast to her view, another CLO lector sees the purpose of conservation of folklore. This lector, who is otherwise critical of reducing culture to folklore (a very common practice in Slovak education and public discourse), considers folklore events as occasions when one can display one's own local identity. On cultural heritage, he claims this expression is not a very common part of his vocabulary, but he – based on a similar principle to his colleague – also adds, that he recognises the values of humanism and democracy as the accurate representatives of cultural heritage. However, young participants of CLO's workshop apparently did not entirely adopt their lectors´ viewpoint. Young informants identify folklore and folk culture (along with historical architectural sites) as the most accurate representations of cultural heritage. Their characterisation of folklore and folk culture is merely vague and limited to listing folk culture artefacts (e.g. folk costumes, songs or dances). This situation is identical to our data collected in Work Package 2 (Qualitative research in formal education settings).

Our third research question focused on how constructions of the past and cultural heritage are actualised for the present purposes and agendas of the chosen organisations. In the case of SN, the central instrument for actualisation of the past and cultural heritage (constructed in terms of SN ideology) is the ritual. Ritual practice is also a prominent tool for the distribution of SN discourse and knowledge. Participants take an active role in rituals and consistently follow the ritual procedure designed by Veleslav. Rituals that take place several times per year (e.g. the summer or winter solstice or the welcoming celebrations of spring), are the platforms for explanation of the wide thematic scope of SN ideology. Participants are confronted with various topics concerning the cosmology of SN, ecology, spirituality, ethnicity, policy and social issues. An effective tool for communicating SN's messages about these topics are

Veleslav´s songs, which are integral part of SN´s ritual activities. A typical example is the ritual song invocating the Slavic god Rod and implicitly asking him to revitalise the Slavs/Slovaks.

American anthropologist Clifford Geertz recognises two aspects of religion. According to Geertz, religion especially through religious rituals offers the *model of reality* and the *model for reality.* While the model of reality is based on "*the manipulation of symbol structures so as to bring them, more or less closely, into parallel with the pre-established non-symbolic system*", the model for reality is on the contrary based on "*the manipulation of the nonsymbolic systems in terms of the relationships expressed in the symbolic*". Therefore, the model of reality provides the theory or model "*under whose guidance physical relationships are organised*". (Geertz 1973: 93). We can describe the instrumental and most important non-formal educational function of SN rituals in Geertz´s terms. Essentially religious rituals of SN supply participants with symbolic sources, which help them to organise their interpretation (or at least re-interpretation) of the surrounding non-symbolical world (e.g. cosmology or principles of nature) and consequently offer the symbolic pretexts for their acting in the world previously enriched with symbolic meanings and thus subjected to particular SN interpretation. Firstly, SN ritual provides a theory of the world and secondly it provides a symbolic manual for acting in the world. Thus, the ritual in SN also fulfils the non-formal educational function very effectively. Ritual theoretically explains the world and offers practical advice how to live. Moreover, the effect of non-formal education through ritual strengthens due to the intensive spiritual and collective emotions experienced by participants. Our informants understand their participation in rituals as their contribution to the continuation of old and almost erased Slavic spirituality. SN rituals constitute the experience of exclusive community of old tradition continuators who are bringing the old wisdom to current times. The ritual could also bring the model of interpreting the cultural heritage or past and the model for present and future living in accordance with symbolic messages from such a constructed past and heritage. Such interpretations of the past bring the practical consequences for the lifestyle of SN members. They often wear Slavic-like clothes from natural materials; perform personal and collective rituals and exercises recommended by Veleslav; play traditional musical instruments and learn traditional crafts; they do bio-gardening; prefer natural medicine instead of modern; leaving the cities and buying land for farming or joining existing farming communities. Our informants are convinced that they are trying to live in accordance with nature and with original culture and –as already mentioned one informant told us, they are *the* cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, the adherence to their imagology of the past affects also the civic engagements of SN members. They are active predominantly on ecological issues and participate in campaigns against deforestation in Slovakia or against hunting. They also participate in a

Farmers and Craftsmen rebirth initiative focusing on propagation and teaching about traditional crafts, agriculture or breeding farm animals.

According to CLO lectors, the moments of the past worthy for actualisation relate to development of civil liberties, human rights, democracy and intercultural tolerance. In the case of CLO, the actualisations of the past focus mainly on commemorating historical events or eras, interpreted in the organisation as useful messages from the past. The exhibition and workshop named *Diary of Anne Frank – the historical message to current days* is a very illustrative example. The exhibition´s logic also illustrates how the notion of the past connects to the organisation's current purposes. The exhibition, uncovering the life story and inner world of the young Jewish girl, finishes with panels displaying the life stories of representatives of European minorities (e.g. a Muslim girl, handicapped man, transgender woman etc.). The existing discrimination of minorities and ignoring of their unique personality and inner world is, according to our informants, the central idea and red line connecting past with present. The CLO leaders select historical events and eras (considered as accurate for didactical commemoration and the goals of the present) especially from the times characterised by dramatic confrontations between the individual´s fate and socio-political establishment. The CLO leaders work mostly with stories from the times of the Second World War, fascism or communism. The individuals defending human rights and civil liberties during challenging times of totalitarian ideologies offer a sufficient number of role models for young people participating in CLO activities. Past eras with the lack of respect for human rights and civil liberties should lead to young people's deeper appreciation of the socio-political circumstances of their lives and at the same time to awareness that the vulnerable democracy needs to be permanently protected. In fact, the actualisation of the past for present purposes is in the case of CLO the systematic part of their work with young people. Leaders of CLO call this approach *memory education*.

The last research question asked how each organisation´s construction of cultural heritage affects the identity of its members and their feeling of belonging to a particular collective category.

Among SN informants, we observed very intense demonstrations of ethnic identity. This clearly connects the interiorised discourse about history and cultural heritage with the strengthening of young people's ethnic identity. The process of strengthening Slovak/Slavic identity begins with the discovery of the hidden and spiritual meanings (constructed or often even invented by Veleslav) of traditional folk culture. After a young spiritual seeker´s first meetings with Veleslav, the 'boring folk culture', massively propagated in the state´s cultural and educational institutions and appreciated only by pensioners from countryside, suddenly

gains deep spiritual meaning. Young people realise that one does not need to search for wisdom in foreign cultures or exotic religious traditions but has sufficient sources in the cultural heritage of his/her own country. A young SN member no longer needs to admire the imposing history of pagan Vikings nor the ancient spiritual traditions of India. Under the influence of Veleslav and his fellows, he/she figures out that pre-Christian Slavic culture was equally as rich as Vikings´ and that Indo-European Slavs and Slovaks are direct heirs of the Vedic Indian tradition. This usually unexpected appreciation of one's own folk culture's richness provokes deeper interest in Slovak folk culture and increases young people's pride about the Slovak tradition as well as strengthens their feeling of belonging to the collective category of Slovaks and Slavs. SN youths demonstrate their belonging to the Slovak nation on daily basis by wearing pieces of traditional clothing, using purist language avoiding calques and living a lifestyle imitating the imagined life of their ancestors. However, they do not avoid modern technical equipment such as computers, cars or mobile phones. In a sense, they claim that these achievements of modern times are good if used reasonably and for good purposes. Despite the fact that SN members show strong identification with their ethnic group, there are not able to identify with modern Slovaks and their lifestyle – one that is detached from nature and cultural/spiritual roots. Hence, the young SN members are seeking their place in the world by identifying themselves with an idealised group that is more past than actual and more imagined than real. After all, even SN members represent the classic example of Andersen´s imagined community, which is not bound through daily face-to-face contacts, but rather through reading of the same texts (namely Veleslav´s books and web pages) and listening to the same music (See Anderson 2006). All SN members are in direct personal contact only during rituals or workshops. Similarly, as in the case of huge groups described by Anderson, also in the case of small religious groups, there is a need to develop a technique or ideology to connect members of the present virtual community. Very often, it is the connection of the present imagined community with the construction of a historical community of ancestors, predecessors or forerunners, which makes the identity of present community members stronger. It is the mentioned invented tradition, which in the case of SN appeared as the most appropriate tool for binding together the imagined community of those who live with those who are dead.

In contrast to SN members´ identity captured in the organisation´s specific construction of the cultural heritage and *idealised past*, the discourse of CLO rather operates with a *demonised past*, which cannot offer positive collective category worthy to identify with. The only axiological referential points of the demonised past are actually the deviations from its ethos. These deviations are not represented through ethnically or religiously framed collectives, but through resistance of individuals against the socio-political ethos of their era. The CLO brings their life stories as an example worthy to follow by present young people. Therefore, while SN idealises the historical collective of Slavs or "*Old Slovaks*", the CLO offers the demonised

picture of historical collectives and an idealised picture of historical individuals. This picture is drawn exclusively from the perspective reduced to a given historical person's relation to the establishment or ethos of their times. While SN discourse encourages its members to identify with historical collectives and with the past, CLO discourse encourages members to keep a safe distance from their "*own*" history. While the word "*own*" is in SN accented, in CLO this word is doubted and relativized.

This report highlighted the observed differences in the process of adopting the organisations' discourse by young people. When the answers of the young respondents are compared, those of CLO differed more from answers of the CLO leaders than those of the SN. This fact could be due to SN's charismatic leader and the community character of SN, where the mutual contacts between members are closer, more intense and frequent.

In most of the cases, CLO organises only provisional groups lasting only until the end of educational programmes and workshops. There is also a discrepancy between the discourse distributed by CLO lectors and the attitudes of their young participants namely in the context of ethnic identity declarations. Belonging to the Slovak nation seems to be more important for CLO youths than for their lectors. We should also note that in most CLO cases, the young people declaratively refused the idea of nationalism. However, nationalist tendencies were observed through the concrete questions on controversial topics - for instance the Muslim community in Slovakia. Yet, it is not easy to recognise if "*soft*" demonstrations of ethnic identity and efforts to be "*politically correct*" speak about the results of CLO work with the young people, or more likely about the sample of informants who came to the CLO workshop from the best high schools in the capital city, selected based on their voluntarily written essay.

6. Conclusion

Our research focused on the distribution of discourses about culture, cultural heritage, identity and cultural diversity among young people in the non-formal educational environment. We selected two organisations with contrasting approaches to these topics. The first selected case was the Slavic neo-pagan group *Slavic Natives* surrounding its charismatic leader and founder Veleslav. *Slavic Natives* accent their Slavic and Slovak ethnic belonging and claim to follow the "original spirituality of Old Slavs". Connection of religion or spirituality with strong ethnic identity results in specific nationalist discourse "*hyperbolized to cosmic proportions*" (See Bakić-Hayden 2004: 34). Members of SN principally refuse multiculturalism and are critical of the European Union.

The second organisation, *Civil Liberties Organisation,* represents the opposite "pro-diversity" approach. Topics such as human rights and democracy, social inclusion, discrimination, cultural diversity or memory are the fundamental parts of their activities. CLO representatives refuse nationalism and lead participants of their educational programmes to adopt a critical approach towards one's own cultural norms and to the problematisation of cultural or collective identity.

The data gained from the participant observations and interviewing in both groups have shown significant themes emerging from our research. Concerning the emic meanings of the term culture, in the SN community there is strong opposition to the nature-culture dichotomy. For SN members, culture is the continuation of nature moderated by spirituality. Cultures in closer contact with nature are according to SN discourse more developed and valuable than cultures disconnected from nature. SN members include in the framework of culture also elements, which from an etic viewpoint belong to natural phenomena. Consequently, SN cultural essentialism actually reaches the biological level - culture and ethnicity lay even in the depths of DNA and blood cells.

On the opposite side, CLO represents the cultural relativist and constructivist position. The CLO leaders strictly deny approaching culture through collective categories such as ethnicity or religion. They emphasise the mutually overlapping potentials of what is termed as cultures and as well the role of individuals who can draw from various cultural influences. However, according to our data, the proclaimed cultural relativism of CLO is limited, since accenting of human rights and intercultural tolerance as a privileged cultural product conditioning superiority over others is apparently problematic.

SN and CLO also differ in ways how they work with notions of the past and cultural heritage. SN members construct the idealised past of Old Slavs and Old Slovaks and they add spiritual reference to various immaterial and material artefacts of Slavic and Slovak folk culture. In fact, SN members are the worshipers of the cult of cultural heritage. They actualise imagined continuity with their Slavic ancestors predominantly through rituals and practices invented by the organisation´s leader. Veleslav´s *invented traditions* are in the group generally accepted and considered as authentic spiritual meanings of Old Slavic faith, since Veleslav advocates his innovations as the fruit of spiritual inspirations.

While SN produces and works with the idealised versions of the past and historical collectives, CLO rather operates with the demonised past and idealised individuals. The CLO educational agenda includes a preference to work with historic materials and stories from difficult eras of

totalitarian regimes and its morally corrupted collectives. CLO glorifies strong individuals who resisted the collective ethos of their times in order to fight for human rights and civil liberties.

CLO and SN differ in their understanding and approach to culture and to the past, but apparently, they have something in common. They are both actors in an ever-escalating cultural war. Moreover, they both understand that one who wins in history will conquer the future. Possibly, this *common-sense* understanding is our common burden we must carry on, because there are so many histories and so many heritages, but there is only one single contemporaneity.

7. References

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