

# National Identifiers of Croatian Immigrants in Toronto

---

**Piskač, Davor; Sršen, Andreja**

*Source / Izvornik:* **Toronto Slavic quarterly, 2015, 140 - 152**

**Journal article, Published version**

**Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:111:176776>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-12-01**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Repository of University of Zagreb, Centre for Croatian Studies](#)



Davor Piskač, Andreja Sršen

## National Identifiers of Croatian Immigrants in Toronto

### Introductory hypothesis

The issue of nation as a phenomenon from where the concept of national identity derives always requires a research element with new phenomena of historic movements at its centre of focus, which, in this paper, is presented through national identifiers of Croatian immigrants (individuals with higher education qualifications) in Toronto. This paper will present the results of a pilot-research conducted in 2014 among members of the Association of Alumni and Friends of Croatian Universities (AMCA)<sup>1</sup>. The research was conducted by means of an online survey, in which the National Identity Scale – NAIT (Čorkalo, Kamenov, 1998), consisting of 27 statements, was used. The main goal of this research was to verify the assumption of the theory of social identity in terms of declaration of national identity in Croatian immigrants with higher education qualifications in Toronto.

The starting hypothesis is that, up to the middle of the previous century, dominant was the conviction that Western European countries were becoming increasingly culturally homogenous (which corresponded to the traditional concept of the nation state), which differentiated them significantly from the immigrant societies of the New World (USA, Canada and Australia). However, immigrant societies are becoming increasingly heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity/race and culture due to increasingly diverse immigrant identity flows (Mesić, Bagarić, 2011: 10). Within the meaning of the hypothesis, it can be stated that the Croatian community in Toronto contributes to multicultural diversity, and is one of the active factors of the growth and development of Canadian society. However, at the same time, it is strongly devoted to preserving the consciousness of its national, Croatian identity. Moreover, it can be claimed that Croats in Toronto have a very clear concept of their national identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> AMCA Toronto is an Association of Alumni and Friends of Croatian Universities. Its mission is to connect former members of Croatian universities with each other and, primarily, with the University of Zagreb (Alma Mater). Furthermore, the association advocates and represents Croatian culture in the Canadian multicultural landscape. The key principles of the Association can be summarized in several sentences. First of all, AMCA Toronto provides support to all members, enabling them to participate in sharing important information. Furthermore, it develops various programmes to address continuous the personal and professional development of its members. Perhaps one of the most significant tasks of this Association is to contribute, from the Croatian perspective, to Canadian multicultural initiatives in relevant Canadian academic, cultural and business bodies. In other words, it contributes to the development of both Canadian and Croatian societies as a part of multicultural Canada, and equally to their Croatian homeland. Probably for this reason, AMCA Toronto is one of the best organised Alumni associations, whose activities have an increasing influence on Canadian-Croatian cultural and other types of relations. (For more on AMCA Toronto go to: <http://www.amcatoronto.com/>)

National identity is a much explored topic in social research. Nevertheless, numerous authors still disagree on what national identity is and how it can be measured. Therefore, in this research, we start from the thesis that national identity is a reflection of symbolic, cognitive and emotional sense of belonging of citizens to their country, and it is defined as a consciousness of belonging to a certain national group that includes the existence of common beliefs, values and goals. In the wider sense, the majority of authors concede that national identity represents belonging to a certain group, acquired through the process of socialization, through which language, tradition and culture of a national group are acquired, and through which an individual is related to group values and interests, as well as to the group as a whole.<sup>2</sup> According to one of the leading authors of constructivist theories of nation (Smith, 2003), national identity has a twofold function: the economic-territorial-political functionality, which provides to the country resources, territory and work force, and relies on rational processes, as well as the intimate internal functionality, providing an individual with self-definition, self-respect, as well as the perception of oneself and others.

Therefore, when researching the national identity of Croats with higher education qualifications in Toronto, we draw on the latter function, which raises the question of the possibility of identification and loyalty to their ethnic group and, at the same time, sharing values and feelings of identification with the wider heterogeneous group.<sup>3</sup>

To put it more accurately, by analysing and interpreting the data collected in this research, confirmed was the hypothesis that present in the respondents in Toronto is a form of national belonging, which implies **patriotism and a high level of national identification**.

## **Research method**

The process of social identification is related to group behaviour, which includes ethnocentrism, conformism, perception of oneself and members of one's own group within the framework of significant group stereotypes. The categorisation stresses similarities among people of the same category, and at the same time, diversity compared to other categories. Actually, the term "diversity" is used in theory, research and public discourse for differences that have been constituted in terms of special group identities (Mesić, Bagarić, 2011: 8).

The groups to which people identify are diverse. One of them is definitely the nation, which plays a primary role in social identity in general. In that sense, social identity, derived from the feeling of belonging and identification with a specific nation, is called national identity. National identity has

---

<sup>2</sup> The questions of culture and identity belong to the central issues of contemporary societies. Cultural differences in identity in the European reality nowadays reflect the pessimistic perspective of a process that strives to unite structural dimensions of national identities with instrumental rationality of the new European supranational identity. (Sršen, Piskač, 2012: 160).

<sup>3</sup> Public discussion on the role of minority identities dates back to the 1980s and 1990s, whereas, nowadays, an increasing polarization of two opposed stances can be observed – the strengthening of national cultural belonging and multiculturalism. (Sršen, Bogeljić, 2014: 114).

cognitive, emotional and motivational importance for an individual, which makes it a matter of interest for social research, and its identifiers represent the dimensionality of national identity, which, in this research, refers to the Croatian national identity.

Of all types of social identity, national identity had, and still has, the greatest influence on the Croatian immigrant community throughout the world. The majority of papers on national identity of the Croatian immigrant community to date explains the results within one of the three following theoretical frameworks:

- Theory of social identity,
- Theory of acculturation and cultural conflict,
- As well as development theory of identity formation (Phinney, 1990).

In accordance with the above stated and in terms of the hypothesis, it can be summarised that the theoretical approaches concerned with national identities of immigrant communities regard national identity as:

- Dynamic dimension that is continuously changing and being constructed;
- Dimension that originates in the interrelation and interaction with other nations;
- Pointing to similarities within members of a certain group, as well as to their differences in comparison to members of other groups;
- Cannot be reduced to one single determinant, and is context dependent (Đorđević, 2003).

Based on the above stated, the hypothesis set in the research was confirmed:

**The national identity of Croats with higher education qualifications in Canada is highly emphasized.**

When interpreting the obtained results, the fact that the research confirmed the scale saturation of two factors should be highlighted:

- feeling of national belonging and
- loyalty to nation.

Those two factors were the most prominent ones, therefore, on the basis of their analysis and interpretation, the conclusion confirming the hypothesis can be reached.

## **Questions and method for conducting survey**

After conducting the survey and research of the current state among respondents, certain results were obtained, statistically processed, and finally interpreted. Graphs depicting the research results are

presented in what follows. Respondents' answers are presented in the graphs. In accordance with the answers, the data obtained were statistically processed.

The first set of statements (questions) that respondents could select on a five-level scale (from completely disagree to completely agree) shows the results whose task was to measure the **feeling of national belonging**. Respondents had to state to which extent they agree with the following statements:

- a) Emphasizing national symbols is a sign of primitivism.
- b) Children should be taught to love their nation.
- c) I am proud of the history of my nation.
- d) Children should be instilled with the national spirit.
- e) The feeling of belonging to one's nation is one of the most beautiful feelings an individual can have.

The second set of statements (questions) that respondents could select on a five-level scale (from completely disagree to completely agree) was used to examine **loyalty to nation**:

- a) Loyalty to one's nation is more important than loyalty to oneself.
- b) A person without a clear feeling of national belonging is a person without identity.
- c) I consider myself very aware of belonging to my nation.

## Depiction and interpretation of results

One of the fundamental questions related to the construction of national identity concerning the Croatian immigrant community is identifying and measuring its various components. Most authors (Phinney, 1990) enumerate four fundamental components that are assumed to form national identity<sup>4</sup>. Accordingly, we have based our research on the above-stated components that can be represented by 6 statements in the survey, to which respondents provided the least ambiguous answers:

- a) Emphasizing national symbols is a sign of primitivism.
- b) Children should be taught to love their nation.
- c) A person without a clear sense of national belonging is a person without identity.

---

<sup>4</sup> 1. Self-identification or self-definition of a person as a member of a national group.

2. Self-identification can be determined by a person's origin, however, it is also possible as a personal choice, regardless of origin.

3. The feeling of belonging to a certain ethnic group. The intensity can vary from a strong feeling to only a formal belonging to a group without emotional connection. Since this component refers to emotional processes, due to their changeability, it is difficult to measure it. In the majority of studies, it is investigated through connection to one's own group, and sometimes as a feeling of diversity and detachment of one's group compared to other groups.

4. Attitudes towards being a member of a group can be positive or negative. Positive attitudes are mostly expressed and examined through positive affective reactions, such as pride and satisfaction with belonging and acceptance of one's own group. The lack of positive attitudes and/or expressing negative attitudes towards one's own national group can be regarded as denying one's own national identity.

- d) I consider myself very aware of belonging to the Croatian nation.
- e) Every time I hear the Croatian national anthem I feel a sense of pride.
- f) I feel worthy due to the rich culture of the Croatian nation.

The results obtained for the remaining statements are also affirmative, however, in the above-mentioned 6 statements, the tendency is very clear, making it easier for interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of confirming the hypothesis, it can be stated that the Croatian community in Toronto is fully aware of its Croatian national belonging. It is proud of it and feels worthy due to it. The results of the research are presented in what follows.

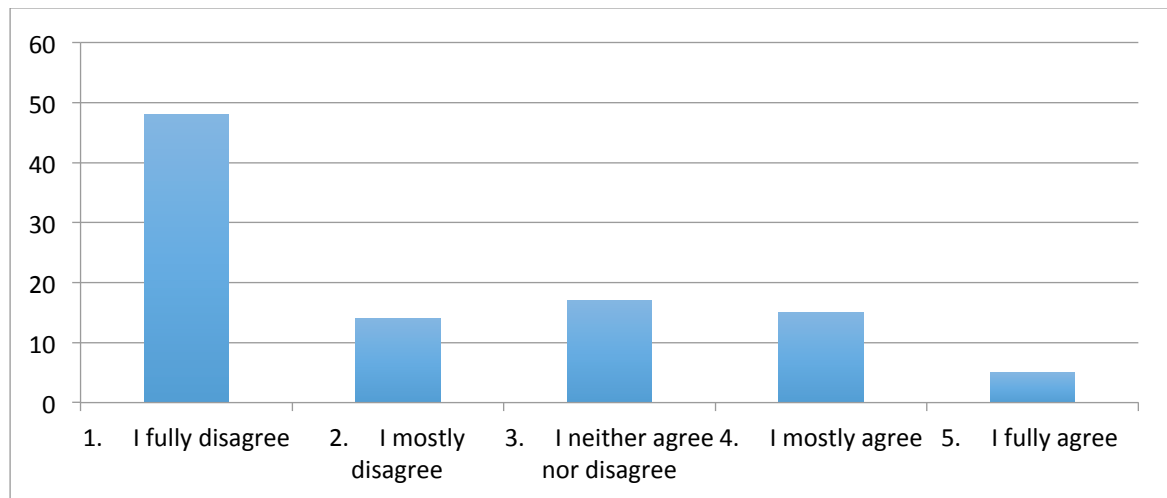
When investigating public opinion, one must always start from an individual's opinion, that is, from an individual's self-consciousness that spills over into the collective consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, one must, first of all, start with one's consciousness of oneself and one's own belonging, then check to what extent that pattern is visible at the statistical level. In terms of self-identification or self-definition of an individual as being a member of a national group, the respondent group of Croats in Canada is prone to emphasizing its national identity. Over 60% of Croats will almost always, in appropriate situations, emphasize their national identity. One of the best ways of examining what we want is to contrast it to what we do not want. Moreover, it is much easier to arrive at what we want when we know exactly what we do not want, which is always easier. For that reason, we begin the interpretation of results with a "negative" statement, that is, in terms of the hypothesis, easier to be determined as something that is not wanted in the Croatian community in Toronto. So, we will start by interpreting the statement:

---

<sup>5</sup> The entire survey can be found on the Internet page: [https://www.hrstud.unizg.hr/predmet/socide?@=20rsi#news\\_78280](https://www.hrstud.unizg.hr/predmet/socide?@=20rsi#news_78280)

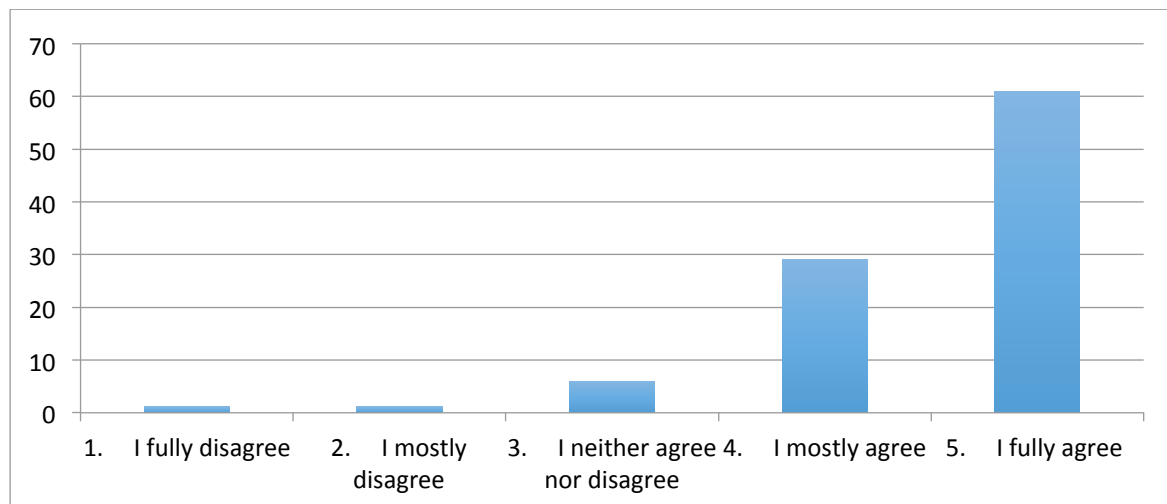
<sup>6</sup> "The theoretical viewpoint on the independence of the collective consciousness in relation to individual consciousness was developed by the French sociologist É. Durkheim with the help of the terms "mechanic" and "organic solidarity". Mechanic solidarity refers to primitive and traditional (peasant) societies where an individual unconditionally adheres to collective beliefs and rules of behaviour, whereas organic solidarity refers to industrial societies where an individual conditionally adheres to common beliefs and rules, based on a contractual relationship. A similar viewpoint was developed by the French psychologist G. Le Bon, who emphasized that a civilized man becomes a barbarian as soon as he/she joins a mass, given that he/she loses self-control and the ability to judge independently, thereby acting only according to instinct. Contemporary research in the spirit of Durkheim and Le Bon confirm that social consciousness is not fully one-dimensional, but rather multi-faceted, so the term social consciousness is replaced by the term "social representation" (S. Moscovici). In addition, the behaviour of individuals in a mass is, in rare cases, fully irrational, that is, there are several types of masses (D. McPhail). Generally, the question of whether social consciousness exists, and in which form, is resolved methodologically in two manners. "Methodologically individualist" researchers consider social or collective values and norms to be the results of individual orientations, whereas "methodologically collectivist" researchers claim the opposite, that is, that individual orientations are the results of social values and norms." in: Hrvatska enciklopedija, see: <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=16316>

### Emphasizing national symbols is a sign of primitivism.



As can be seen, national self-identification of Croats is very positive, that is, the majority (> 60%) **disagrees** with the statement that Emphasizing national symbols is a sign of primitivism. This is probably due to the fact that Croats in Toronto are strongly connected by their common origin, and given that the group of respondents is very coherent and homogeneous, they are emotionally strongly affirmative to their group.<sup>7</sup> In terms of converging answers to similar questions, the answer to the statement Children should be taught to love their nation bears witness to the strong emotional stance of Croats to being a Croat as a definition of their identity.

### Children should be taught to love their nation.

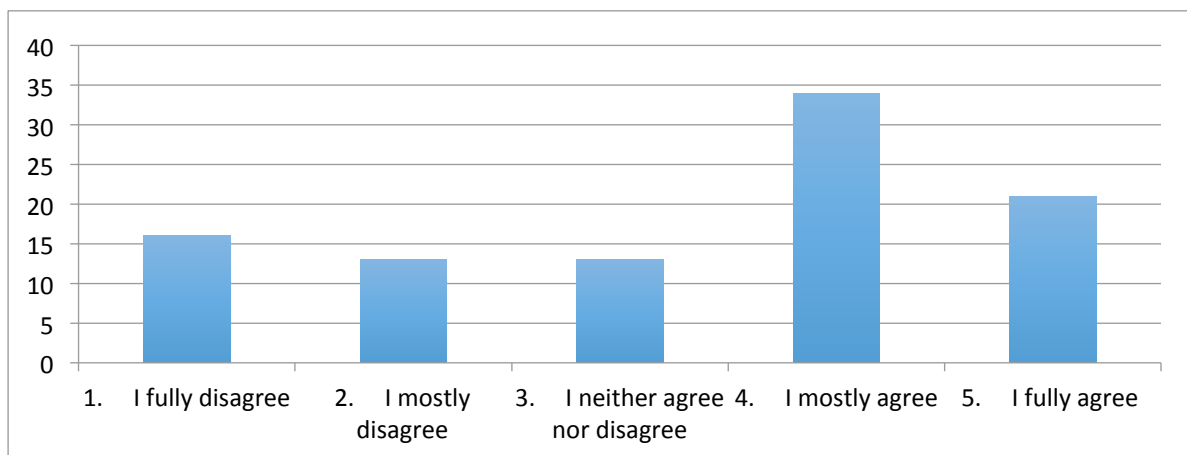


<sup>7</sup> In this type of research, the most frequently used indicators of involvement are: use of national language, ways of making friends and intimate relationships, that is, whether belonging to the same ethnic group is important to them, belonging to and practicing a certain religion, participating in the work of and forming of socio-national institutions (homeland clubs, associations...), involvement in political activities related to the prosperity of one's own national group, selection of place of residence in accordance to national belonging, fostering national values, interest for country of origin, as well as being familiar with one's national history and culture.

Given these two answers, and if the results are converged, it is fully clear that the Croatian community in Toronto is not only aware of its national identity, but its members have a strong intent to pass it on to their descendants. For emotional reasons, we always want the best for our children. When we add to this the fact that Croats in Toronto want to pass on the national feeling and pride to their children, it is obvious that they consider their national identity very important, even crucial for the self-determination of their descendants.

Furthermore, the feeling of belonging to a specific Croatian ethnic group varies from a strong feeling of belonging to only a formal belonging to the group without an emotional connection. Given that the connection component is related to emotional processes, and due to their changeability, measurement is rather specific because it is rather difficult to carry out direct measurement of the emotional component. For that reason, emotional connection is, in the majority of cases, examined indirectly, through connections to one's own group. In other words, measured is the feeling of diversity and detachment of one's own group in relation to other groups. In terms of the research conducted, it is very interesting to examine the answers to the statement:

**A person without a clear sense of national belonging is a person without identity.**

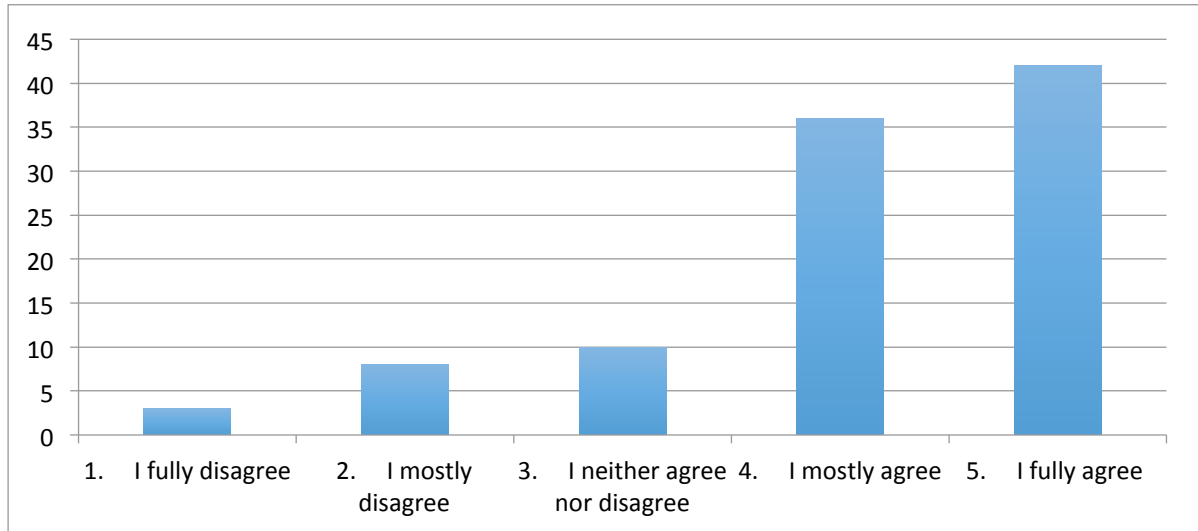


From the data, we can notice that over 67% of Croats are strongly emotionally connected to belonging to their own group. The reasons for this are varied. As stated above, the common origin plays an important role, nonetheless, important are similar age of respondents (over 50 on average), length of stay in Canada (for the most part over 20 years), and level of education (higher education qualifications). All of the above mentioned, in addition to the above-average material status of respondents, enables better understanding within the group. Namely, respondents belong either to the middle or higher middle class of Canadian society (respondents are, for the most part, architects, engineers, doctors, teachers and recognised or respected cultural professionals). Furthermore, significant is the fact that Croats in Toronto managed to unite their efforts and establish the Croatian Language, Literature and Culture study programme at the University of Toronto. Given that it is a world-renowned university (in particular in the humanities, which, according to some assessments,



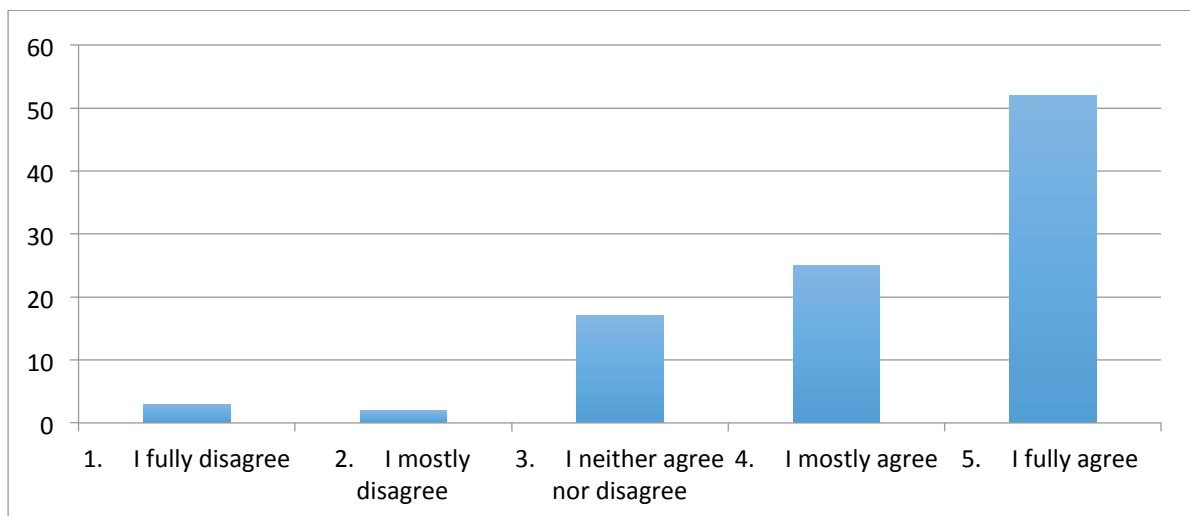
belong to the top ten in the world), the Croatian Language, Literature and Culture study programme, as part of the University of Toronto's Department of Slavonic Language and Literature, is definitely a huge success. All of the previously mentioned is confirmed by the level of consciousness that Croats have for themselves, which is visible from the answers to the statement:

**I consider myself very aware of belonging to the Croatian nation.**



Moreover, attitudes towards membership in the group, that is, towards Croats, can be positive or negative. Positive attitudes are mostly expressed and examined through positive affective reactions, such as pride and satisfaction with belonging, as well as acceptance of one's own group. The lack of positive attitudes and/or expressing negative attitudes towards one's own national group can be regarded as denying one's own national identity. Answers to the following statement are relevant for the conducted research:

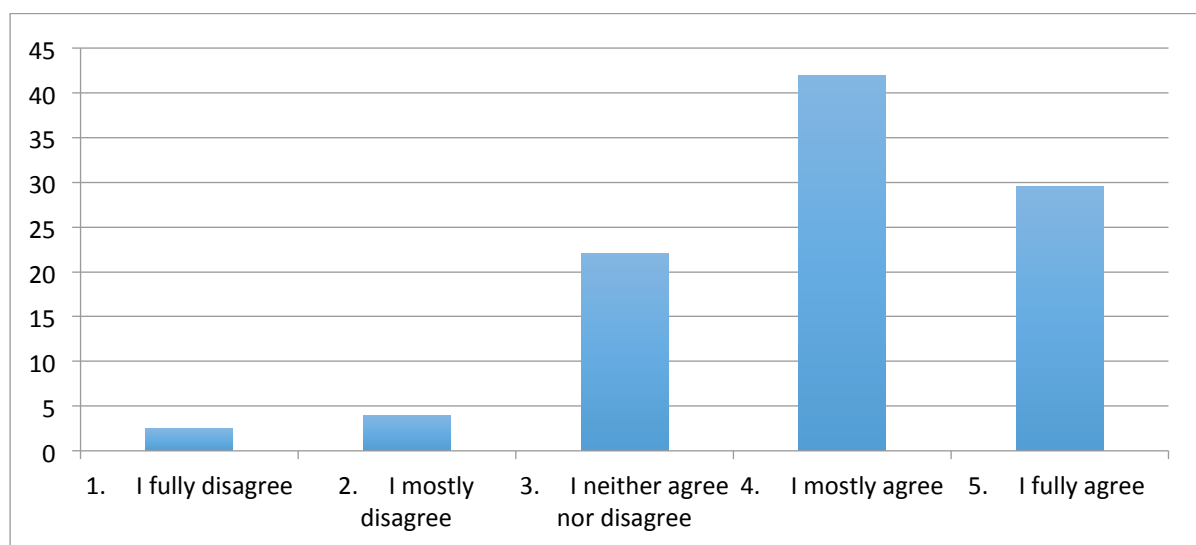
**Every time I hear the Croatian national anthem I feel a sense of pride.**



It can be said that Croats have an exceptionally affirmative attitude towards belonging to their national group because almost 80% of Croats have a feeling of national pride. This is particularly evident from the activities that Croats in Toronto undertake in order to foster their national pride. For instance, AMCA Toronto organises regular lectures given primarily by Croatian experts, along with other respected and well-known experts, in various fields of science, culture and art.<sup>8</sup>

The following statement refers to being involved in the work and life of the Croatian national group. It is also related to the extent to which Croats participate in upholding the tradition and culture of the Croatian nation, and is determined according to the answers to the following statement:

**I feel worthy due to the rich culture of the Croatian nation.**



Given the answers, over 70% of Croats participate in upholding the tradition and culture of the Croatian nation, which makes them feel more worthy.

## Conclusion

The obtained results indicate that national groups have a special status in determining group identity. When the dominant group in a society underestimates or humiliates a minority group, members of the minority group can develop a negative social identity. However, this case has not been proven by this research. Nevertheless, one should always bear in mind potential problems related to a minority group. In contact with the majority group, members of a minority group can develop low self-esteem because they are perceived as members of an inferior group. There are various ways an inferior group can defend itself. Tajfel and Turner (1986) claim that identification with one's own group is most prominent when the boundaries between the groups are impermeable, status relations unstable, and

---

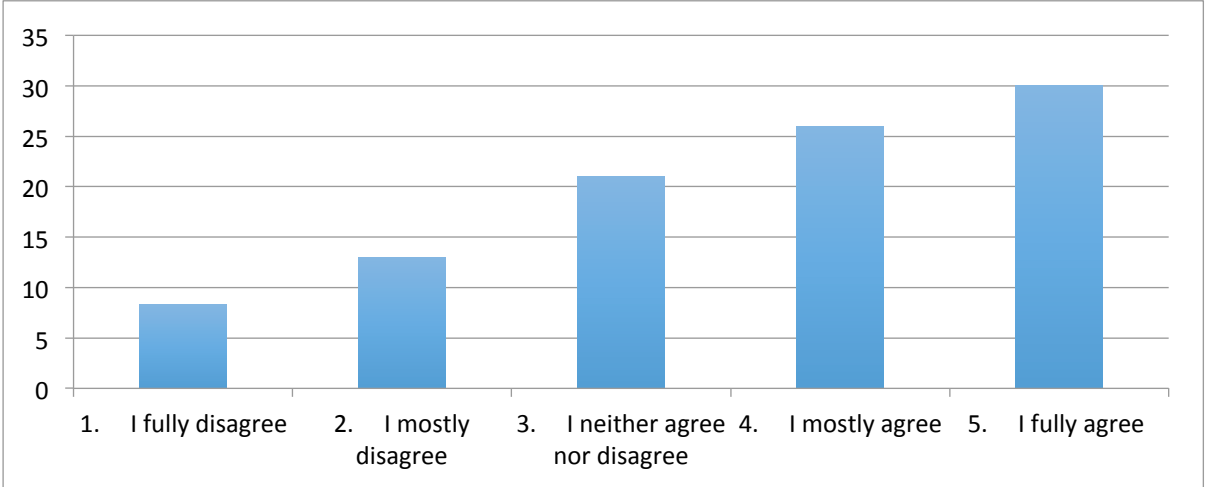
<sup>8</sup> <http://www.amcatoronto.com/category/lectures/>

when differences are perceived as illegitimate. Identification with two different groups can appear in people who live under the influence of two cultures. It might have an unfavourable influence on the development of national identity in members of a minority group (which was not the case in this research when it comes to respondents in Toronto) due to the conflict of values, attitudes and norms of behaviour among one's own group and the majority group. The influence of two cultures can, in some situations, have a positive influence on one's cultural identity. This occurs in practice when cultures are compatible with similar norms, values and attitudes. In this research, in respondents in Toronto, prominent is the model of acculturation, which points to the fact that national identity can be viewed as a stable variable, which then enables the analysis of wider changes in cultural attitudes, values and behaviours.

Some of the results obtained in the research point to the conclusion that, in the Toronto sample, emphasized is the national belonging, including patriotism and a high level of national identification, as well as acceptance of belonging to other nationalities. Equally present is the type of national belonging that implies multiple national belonging representing a form of internationalism characterised by a feeling of loyalty towards one's own nation, as well as a desire for international cooperation.

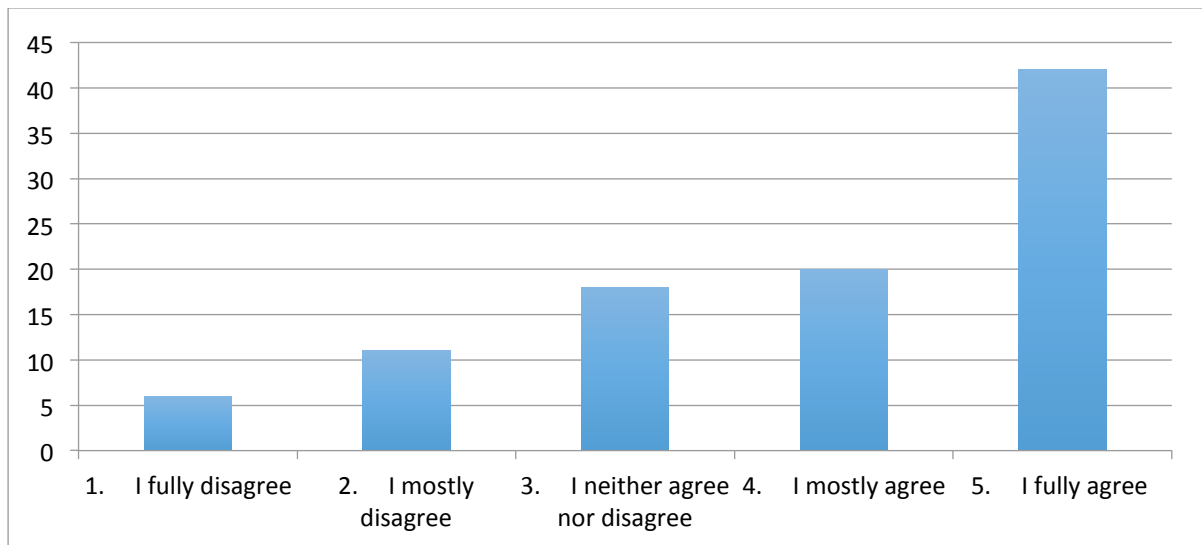
The following tables demonstrate another dimension of Croatian identity, which goes in the direction of the cosmopolitanism. From contemporary authors, who are moving in this thematic trail, is certainly the most relevant Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1989; 1991). Taylor, who, starting from specific Canadian experience, come to the insight that human existence would make no sense if he, as a subject, she waived the connection, unity or oneness with others.

**I would like to live as a citizen of the world, not just as a citizen of one state.**



Here, loyalty takes on a cosmopolitan character, that is, it is expressed towards what is evaluated as humane, valuable, advanced for all nations and people, but not excluding the feeling of belonging to one's own nation.

## **I am, first of all, a member of humanity, and then member of my nation.**



It should be particularly emphasized in the end that anationalism (the lack of being aware of national feelings) was not present in any of the samples.

In conclusion we can say that Croats are a modern nation with a clear and strong sense of their identity. Croats in Canada have a strong sense of belonging to the Croatian national identity. In the same time they have a strong sense of belonging to Canada's social system. Also, they feel as citizens of the world. In fact, at the very end of the article we can conclude that: to be a citizen of the world is one of the highest values of Croats in Canada.

### REFERENCES:

1. Čorkalo, D. i Kamenov, Ž. (1998) Nacionalni identitet i međunacionalna tolerancija, Izvještaj s VIII. Ljetne psihologijske škole, Odsjek za psihologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Zagrebu.
2. Milošević Đorđević, J. (2003). Jedan pokušaj klasifikacije teorijskih razmatranja nacionalnog identiteta, *Psihologija*, Vol. 36 (2), 125-140.
3. MESIĆ, Milan; BAGARIĆ, D. (2011) Stavovi hrvatskih građana prema kulturnim različitostima, *Migracijske i etničke teme* 27, 1: 7-38.
4. Phinney, J. S. (1990) Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, No. 108, pp. 499-514.
5. Sršen, A. Piskač, D. Hrvatski nacionalni identitet i Europska unija. *Slavia meridionalis*. 12 (2012) ; 159-171.
6. Sršen, A. Bogeljić, M. Multikulturalizam u Europi danas – novi rascjepi granica identiteta i prava. *Međunarodne studije*. 14 (2014) , 1; 103-118.
7. Smith, A. D. (2003) Nacionalizam i modernizam. Kritički pregled suvremenih teorija nacija i nacionalizma. Zagreb, FPZ.

9. Tajfel, H. i Turner, J. C. (1986) The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Conflict. *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations.*, (pp. 33-47), Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
10. Taylor, Ch. (1989), *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
11. Taylor, Ch. (1991), *The Ethics of Authenticity.* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.