The Stranger in the Society: Exploring Student Attitude to Migrants

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Abstract. A lot of people decide to leave their homes in search of a job, more favourable living conditions or just safety. Most modern European societies are full of people who were born in other countries but change their place of living in the hope that they will improve their living conditions. Some of them are willing to accept the new culture and system of values but sometimes they find it very hard to assimilate into the host society. The paper intends to compare the attitude of Spanish and Polish students towards people of different ethnic origin. The introductory part of the paper provides a definition of the stranger based on Georg Simmel's theory. The main part aims at showing young people's attitude to strangers in the society based on the survey carried out in the group of the 3rd- and 4th-year students of English Philology at Krosno State College and Valladolid University.

Keywords: cultural values, Spanish, Polish**,** tolerance, openness.

1. Introduction

In the modern world a great number of people decide to leave their homes in search of a job, a better-paid job, more favourable living conditions or just safety. New places where they arrive offer either warm and friendly welcome or hostility which can make the mobility a painful experience.

For centuries, anything that was different than one's own was stigmatized. There are numerous examples in the world history when a different culture, religion or language encountered hostility and aggression. Cultural difference was synonymous with inferiority and treated as a potential danger for the tradition-oriented world. Mass destruction of North-American Indians, Incas in Peru, Mayan people in Mexico, Aboriginal Australians, the Armenian Massacres, the Holocaust or the more recent Rwandan Genocide, the Balkan War of the 90s, Islamic State fight against Christians or the ongoing violence in Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria are just some of the examples of destructing what was or is different from the self. The problem of Syrian asylum seekers has become the most frequently discussed topic recently as the number of people who risk their lives to flee the war in Syria

and move to Europe is enormous. The European Union is trying to coordinate the surge of refugees and resettle them in the member states which proves to be a hard task. Some countries like Germany, Sweden and France - the three most desired destinations - are willing to accept newcomers and help everyone who claims the dole. (BBC News, 22nd Sep.2015) However, the European Union is far from unanimity and there are some countries which are erecting fences to prevent the refugees from entry or even shifting the burden onto others. Governments demonstrate different attitudes to strangers in the society, so do individuals. Quite often members of the same society are in disagreement about how strangers should be treated. Some of them are supporters and others are opponents of living in a multicultural community. The aim of this paper is to present young people's attitude to strangers in their societies. Are they open to newcomers or do they regard them as a threat to stability and national security? The paper focuses on different definitions of the stranger provided by some well-established scholars. It also explains methodology used and provides findings and detailed analysis of the data collected in the survey which reveals student attitude towards strangers.

2. The Concept of the Stranger

Traditionally, the stranger was regarded as a wanderer who "who comes today and goes tomorrow" and establishes only a transitory contact with the dominant group. Georg Simmel often called the father of "the stranger" defines the alien as a potential wanderer "who comes today and stays tomorrow" and is free to come and leave at any time but decides to stay in one particular place. There occurs a paradox because the stranger is a hybrid of the settler and the wanderer; he is both fixed to a place and has freedom to come and go. He crosses boundaries or as Tanya Cassidy says, "defines and defies boundaries, or builds bridges over them". (Cassidy, 2000, p. 15) Simmel's stranger can be regarded as an insider because he brings his own qualities into the host society which "are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it". This is a person who is concurrently an outsider due to living on the outside of the group. (Simmel, 1971, p. 143)

Simmel's stranger does not aspire to be assimilated into the new community. When strangers enter an unfamiliar community, they present themselves as those who belong somewhere else. Simmel gives an example of a Jewish merchant who does not possess any land but deals with intermediary trade and moves from place to place. Because only a transient contact with the new society is established, such a person is socially accepted but not encouraged to join the majority community, therefore will rather stay on the outside of the group. That is why he will stay on the outside of the group. Zygmunt Bauman maintains that "Jews, indeed, were the very epitome of Simmel's strangers – always on the outside even when inside,

examining the familiar as if it was a foreign object of study, asking questions no one else asked, questioning the unquestionable and challenging the unchallengeable". (Bauman, 1989, p. 53) There is another home, a place which the stranger comes from and which constitutes his/her cultural heritage. Although there is the spatial closeness to the predominant group, Simmel's strangers will not belong to it because culturally they are very far away from it. This indicates that closeness and remoteness of the stranger coexist. Spatially, strangers are close to those from whom they are away in cultural terms and distant from those to whom they are close culturally.

> "In the case of the stranger, the union of closeness and remoteness involved in every human relationship is patterned in a way that may be succinctly formulated as follows: the distance within this relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near. The state of being a stranger is of course a completely positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction." (Simmel, 1971, p. 143)

Simmel's stranger unites the notion of closeness and remoteness and is not fixed in time. The issue of assimilation into the new community is not what the stranger cares about. However, according to Simmel's philosophy, strangers have a positive influence on the majority community since they enrich it with their own culture and experience, and in that way are no longer strange.

Simmel contends that unlike the host the stranger retains objectivity because neither conventions nor "custom, piety, or precedent" limit him. (Simmel, 1971, p. 146) Strangers are freer than the host as they can keep some distance from the situation and examine "conditions with less prejudice". (Ibid.) However, in some situations this objectivity may turn into disloyalty and then the stranger may become disloyal or even dangerous to the host. According to Alfred Schuetz, disloyalty is more than a prejudice on the part of the dominant community. This is true when the stranger expresses unwillingness to substitute the cultural pattern of his home group with a new one. (Schuetz, 1944, p. 507) When strangers refuse to accept the new cultural pattern which is proper and logical for the natives, they impute ingratitude to them. Such reluctance to the new pattern is justified by the fact that a newcomer acquired some basic values as a child and they became part of what Hofstede calls the mental software. Migrants leave their own, usually collectivist, communities and move to a new individual society which tends to be less traditional than their own group. The new cultural pattern, especially in the beginning, is a very complicated " labyrinth in which he has lost all sense of his bearings". (Ibid.)

Simmel points out that strangers are always perceived by the natives as the whole, people of a certain type, not individuals. What is noticed at first glance is

their foreign descent and outsider status, not their personal qualities. He gives the example of the Frankfurt Jews who were imposed with the same tax regardless of their financial status. They were not treated individually but as a large group of people of the same foreign origin: "(…) the Jew had his social position as a Jew (…) the Jew as taxpayer was first of all a Jew". (Simmel, 1971, p. 149)

A crucial factor which determines the level of strangeness is the proximity i.e. how close someone is to the dominant group spatially, socially and culturally. Spatial proximity means the geographical nearness or remoteness, whereas the social one refers to how alienated the newcomer is by the dominant group. According to Lesley Harman, social proximity is determined by visible indicators both ascribed like the skin colour and achieved like clothes or accessories. (Harman, 1987, p. 13) Cultural proximity is affected by how much the stranger is fluent in the language of the host society and how well he knows its culture, habits and beliefs. According to Simmel, the stranger may be both close and far but there is a boundary that prevents him from becoming one of the group. On the one hand, there is closeness between the majority society and strangers because they may display many qualities similar to ours such as physical appearance, character, similar family background or occupation. On the other hand, strangers are far because these qualities extend beyond the stranger and the host group and connect many other people. (Simmel, 1971, p. 147)

Alfred Schuetz, an American sociologist of Austrian origin, defines the stranger as an adult "who tries to be permanently accepted or at least tolerated by the group he approaches". (1944, p. 499) Unlike Simmel's definition, Schuetz's stranger is not necessarily an immigrant who aspires to the membership in the host society but he could be a future groom who wants to be accepted by his fiancée's family, the farmer's son who starts college and seeks his classmates' approval or a recruit who joins the army. The stranger grows up in another culture and in the process of upbringing he absorbs the knowledge of cultural norms and values handed down by parents, grandparents and teachers. That is to say, the person has sufficient knowledge of the "cultural pattern of group life". Schuetz contends that this knowledge is incoherent and contradictory at times. Theoretically, strangers have the ready-made pattern for interpreting the new world which they enter. However, it may not prove adequate and can even disintegrate when they face the challenge of interaction with the host community. Things clear to the dominant group are non-understandable for strangers because they grew up in another tradition and are not part of the host community. The new culture and history

> "(…) has never become an integral part of his [stranger's] biography, as did the history of his home group. Only the ways in which his fathers and grandfathers lived become for everyone elements of his own way of life. Graves and reminiscences can neither be transferred nor conquered (…) from

the point of view of the approached group, he is a man without a history."
(Ibid., p. 502)

Schuetz's stranger realizes that he or she cannot use "thinking as usual" but needs to gain the adequate knowledge of the cultural pattern of the host group.

Margaret Wood argues that the most important factor in defining the stranger is the first encounter between the host group and the stranger. Her stranger is a newly-arrived outsider

> "(…) who has come into face-to-face contact with the group for the first time. This concept is broader than that of Simmel… For us the stranger may be, as with Simmel, a potential wanderer, but he may also be a wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, or he may come today and remain with us permanently. The condition of being a stranger is not, for the present study, dependent upon the future duration of the contact, but it is determined by the fact that it is the first face-to-face meeting of individuals who have not known one another before. (Wood, 1934, p. 44)

She distinguishes two factors which determine the way strangers are received by the dominant society: the reason why they enter the new society and the time they are going to spend there. Levine diverges from this viewpoint and says that the time is not significant at all. What really matters is the type of relationship the stranger wants to establish with the majority group. The factor that affects the relationship between the stranger and the host is the purpose of stay, e.g. to pay a visit, to live or to join the host community. The stranger may come as a tourist with no intention of becoming one of "them" or may want to live in the host society but has no desire to be assimilated. Finally, he may plan to settle down in the new community and become a fully integrated member of it. (Levine, 1979, p.30) Wood makes a division of newcomers into tourists and immigrants according to how much they interact with the majority society. The former stay in the place temporarily and their purpose is superficial, the latter plan to settle down and their reason is more serious. (Harman, 1987, p.31)

Levine points out that strangers' attitude towards the host community depends among others on the reasons of their arrival (e.g. boredom, disaster, financial problems, political oppression), contact with other strangers, and conditions of entering the new society (e.g. amount of reputation, movable resources). (Levine, 1979, p.32) The dominant society's reaction to the stranger also depends on some factors. Robert Zajonic argues that the longer the stranger stays in the new community, the more frustrated response from the group he receives. (Ibid., p.26) Levine mentions four factors that have an influence on the host's reaction to the stranger. In the first place he puts similarity between the stranger and the host in terms of e.g. ethnicity, religion, race, value orientations and

language. Then, he mentions existence of special cultural categories and rituals for dealing with strangers. Next factor is the criteria for group and societal membership, like religion, citizenship or classificatory kinship. In the last place Levine puts conditions of local community such as the size, age, degree of homogeneity. (Ibid., p.32)

Zygmunt Bauman places the stranger, as an unclassifiable term, in an undecidable category. He says, "There are friends and enemies. And there are strangers" but the stranger is "[n]either friend nor foe" but can be both of them. (2007, p. 78) According to Bauman, this undecidability may have perilous consequences because it lets in those who should stay outside. It also brings chaos which is inextricably connected with incongruity, incompatibility, illogicality, ambiguity and ambivalence. (Ibid., p.79) Friends are in opposition to enemies and they exist because there are enemies. Due to this opposition, friends can define who they are and who they are not. In that way enemies are distinguished from friends because they have opposite qualities. In the same way the stranger stands in opposition to the self. Only when we manage to define ourselves will the stranger also be recognized because he is not-self. However, the contact with him is significant because, as Prof. Filek (2004) says, it allows us to define ourselves. Dąbrowski (2009) shares this view and says that we would not be able to learn anything about ourselves without the contact with strangers. Bauman contends that strangeness is permanent and cannot be removed. Therefore, the stranger will never enjoy the membership in the host society. In Simmel's sociology, the stranger can have a beneficial influence on the society, whereas Bauman diverges from this view. He maintains that the distance between the stranger and the host will never decrease because strangeness can be tolerated only at a distance. (Ibid., p.65)

Wandenfels uses the term "alien" when he explores the concept of strangeness. He defines the stranger as an individual who is not a product of

> "(…) a mere process of delimitation [of self and other]. It emerges simultaneously as an inclusion and an exclusion. The alien is not opposed to the same, rather it refers to the Self, to myself or to ourselves, including the "sphere of ownness"…from which it escapes. What is alien does not simply appear different, rather it arises from elsewhere. The sphere of alienness is separated from my sphere of ownness by a threshold, as is the case for sleep and wakefulness, health and sickness, age and youth (…)
>
> (Waldenfels, 2007, p.7)

It is evident in the above quotation that alienness is a dynamic phenomenon. The alien who enters our complex world at the same time leaves behind the world where (s)he used to live. Not only does (s)he lose the spatial proximity but also spiritual bond with the place of origin and becomes what Julia Kristeva defines as an alien "[n]ot belonging to any place, any time, any love". (1991, p. 7) Like the sickness attacks the healthy body, uninvited aliens violate the order of the place

where they arrive. Their settling down in our sphere of ownness suggests a permanent state which leads to disorder. Robert Park calls migration "the breakdown of social order (…) initiated by the impact of an invading population, and completed by the contact and fusion of native with alien peoples". (Park, 1928, p. 885) Zygmunt Bauman (2007) holds the same view that the stranger destroys the social order in the host community. He contends that each culture has own social stability, an established pattern which shows how to perceive the world. This stability may be undermined or even threatened when the stranger occurs, which proves how fragile it is. Jacek Filek (2004) points out that if stability may be threatened so easily, it means that it is not solid and the feeling of safety it seems to ensure is illusory.

According to Bauman, strangeness is what we have not encountered before and goes beyond the cultural pattern of the home group. Strangers go beyond the cultural pattern of our home group, therefore it is so difficult to adopt a proper pattern of behaviour towards them. We know neither who they are nor what their place of origin is. They are undesired aliens perceived as a danger and threat to our tradition- and stability-oriented world. This threat in turn can lead to fear of the unknown - in this case of strangers. As Mary Douglas maintains they are identified with impurity which cannot be accepted because it creates chaos. She concludes:

> " Eliminating it [impurity] is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment (…) in chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance". (Douglas, 1966, p. 2)

No matter how hard aliens try, they will never become one of them. As Bauman states: "The stranger cannot cease to be a stranger. The best he can be is a former stranger, (…) a person vigilantly watched and constantly under pressure to be someone else than he is." (Bauman, 2007, p. 72) A stigma of otherness cannot be removed and the stranger will always feel inauthentic in the new community or will be even excluded from the society. Bauman illustrates this with a joke about an assimilated person who says: "I used to a Jew." And his friend answers: "Oh yes, I know the feeling. I used to be a hunchback." (Ibid.) Julia Kristeva holds a similar view that the stranger cannot get rid of his strangeness and will never feel a sense of belonging to the host society even if he has been living there for a long time. (1991, p. 7)

Over the centuries different definitions of the stranger were formulated. Simmel's strangers can have a positive influence on the new community because they share their knowledge, experience and culture. By doing this, the distance between them and the host group decreases. For Bauman, the stranger had only negative connotations. In his definition stranger's occurrence always violates the social and cultural order. Proximity mentioned by Simmel is impossible in

Bauman's theory which makes the stranger unable to enjoy the membership in the host society. This in turn generated tension or even identity crisis.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

The survey was carried out in May 2015 in two groups of students of English: the 4th-year students of Valladolid University, Spain, and the 3rd-year students at Krosno State College. There were 24 students altogether, 12 in each group. The survey was divided into two parts. The first one asked questions which were to explore how participants assessed a general approach of their society to strangers. Part two included questions whose aim was to explore students' personal attitude to immigrants.

The first two questions asked about how friendly the society was to strangers who according to Margaret Wood's theory were divided into tourists and immigrants. The results show a significant disproportion between the approach to tourists and immigrants in Spanish society. All the Spanish students surveyed indicated that their society was always very friendly and helpful to tourists, whereas only 60% of the Polish participants expressed the same view. The rest regard Polish society as a closed community with a negative attitude to strangers. As far as immigrants are concerned, 11 out of 12 Spanish respondents said that their society did not have a positive attitude to immigrants.
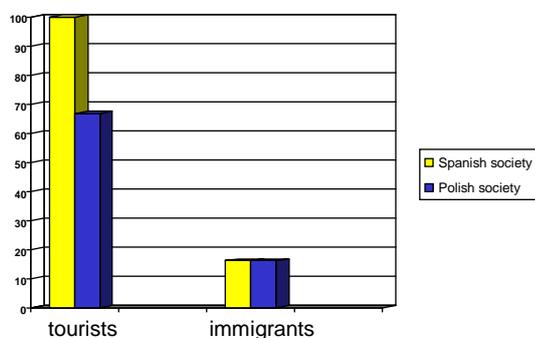

Figure 1.
Attitude towards tourists and immigrants in the society

When asked about forms of prejudice, the majority of the Spanish students selected racist attacks as the most frequent. They range from offensive behaviour like making fun of strangers in public to mugging in the street. Only one student stated that immigrants sometimes were victims of murders. However, all of the

Spanish participants agree that in many cases the main reason for such attacks is immigrants themselves who provoke such situations. Polish students hold the view that their society demonstrates a negative attitude to immigrants. Only 2 people out of 12 had an opposite viewpoint. Nearly 80% indicated that the most common form of discrimination was racist attacks including offensive behaviour and jeering. Only one person blamed politicians and the media for being prejudiced against immigrants.
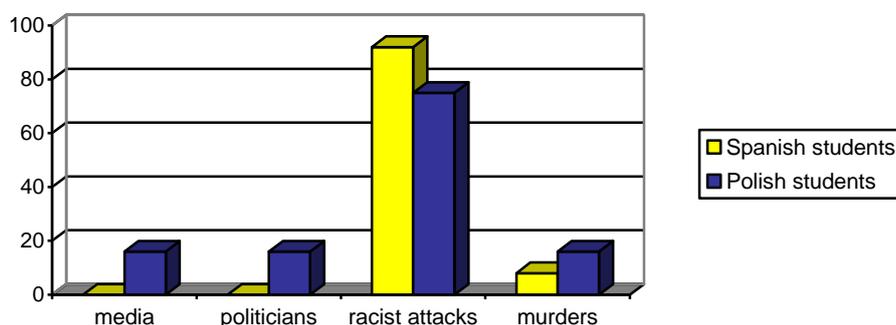

Figure 2.
Forms of prejudice

Another question related to the representation of immigrants in the media. Over 60% of the Spanish students indicate that immigrants rarely appear in the media but when they do, they are portrayed worse than reality. The majority of them are aware that such a negative portrayal is almost never true. This negative view of immigrants results mainly from media generalization of strangers who appear in the media as one homogenous group who they are not. In his sociology, Georg Simmel blamed societies for treating strangers as the whole not individuals. A good example of this is an association of immigration and terrorism: each Muslim immigrant is regarded as a person without scruples because many terrorist attacks were carried out by Muslim extremists. Personal characteristics of Muslims are simply missed out. The Spanish respondents realize that this image of immigrants in the media is stereotypical and 11 of them indicate that stereotypes are only clichés. Only one person in the Spanish group assumed that there must be some reason behind such a bad reputation of some migrant groups. 42% of the Polish students surveyed state that the media present a true image of immigrants without distorting reality. 33% indicate that the real image of strangers is worse than shown in the media. They hold the view that the media do not reflect the reality as they embellish accounts of immigrants. 25% share the view of the Spanish students about media generalization and state that the media present strangers worse than they really are. Nearly half of the Polish respondents realize

that the image of strangers in the media is hardly ever true. About 60% indicate that the representation of strangers is only sometimes true. When asked about stereotypes of strangers most of them stated that they were clichés. However, only 42% of the Polish respondents expressed that view compared to 83% of the Spanish students. The same number of the participants in both groups stated that there must be some reason for stereotyping strangers.

One of the questions which aimed at showing the attitude of the society was to point out the most prejudiced minorities. The respondents had a few options to choose from but they also could think of their own. Interestingly, there was no concurrence in the responses received from the Spanish participants. Some of them indicated that the most prejudiced group in Spain was Romani people. A possible explanation is that they constitute a considerable part of the Romanian community which is the largest of all minorities in Spain (1.7%). Spain has quite a high proportion of non native-born citizens at about 10% compared to nearly 3% in Poland. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain) Among the selected options was the one of black people including people from the Maghreb who constitute the majority of the black population in Spain. They are almost as numerous as Romanians. Although the influx of immigrants is growing, the responses (84%) indicate that racism in Spain is not increasing but has remained on the same level for the past few years. Interestingly, the most unpopular group for the Polish society is not Russians as it could be assumed on the basis of difficult Polish-Russian relations. Only 30% of the Polish respondents stated that the society is prejudiced against them. Overall, the most disliked group is Muslims, the attitude to whom is mostly affected by the media and the recent terrorist attacks in which Muslims were involved. Other unpopular groups include Gypsies (59%) and Jews (40%). Only one person indicated that the most unpopular group for the Polish society was Germans.
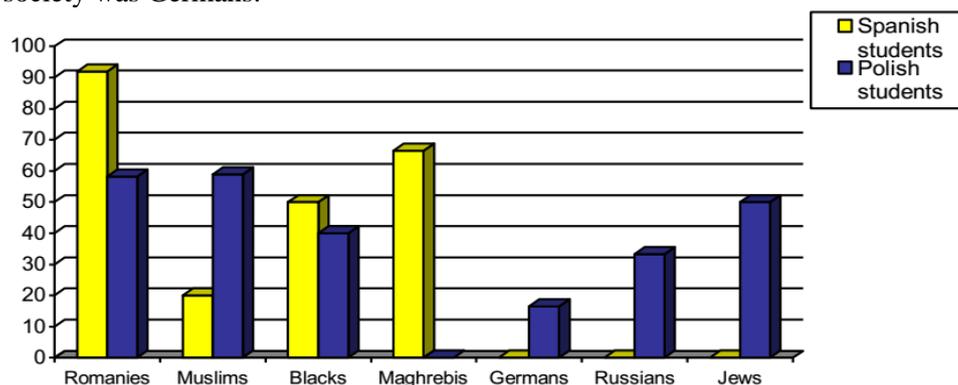

Figure 3.
Who is my society prejudiced against?

In the second part of the survey the respondents could express their personal approach to immigrants. There was no concurrence in the Polish students' responses because only 60% stated that they made friends with peers of different ethnic origin. Positive responses to the question about having friends of different ethnic origin indicated Spanish students' openness to immigrants. All of them demonstrated their positive attitude to ethnically and culturally different immigrants and stated that they would not like to live in an ethnically homogenous society. According to their responses, immigrants can make the society more varied and culturally interesting. It is of interest that the further question revealed an apparent contradiction and showed they were selective in their acceptance of immigrants. When asked to pick ethnic groups they disliked most, only 33% stated they were not prejudiced against anyone. The choice of Romanies made by over 60% of the Spanish students corresponded to the attitude of their society.

Unlike Spanish students, half of the Polish participants classified their attitude to strangers as negative. They indicated that they would like the Polish society to remain ethnically pure. When asked about the group they disliked most, the mean response became Russians, Ukrainians (25%) and Muslims (25%). 17% of the Polish respondents expressed their dislike to Romanies. It does not correspond to the general preference of the society who according to the students' assessment did not bear much animosity to Russians and Poland's eastern neighbours - Ukrainians. Among those who could live in a heterogeneous community (50%) only one person stated that he liked strangers. The rest made a more neutral response "I don't mind" but also indicated they were not prejudiced against anyone.
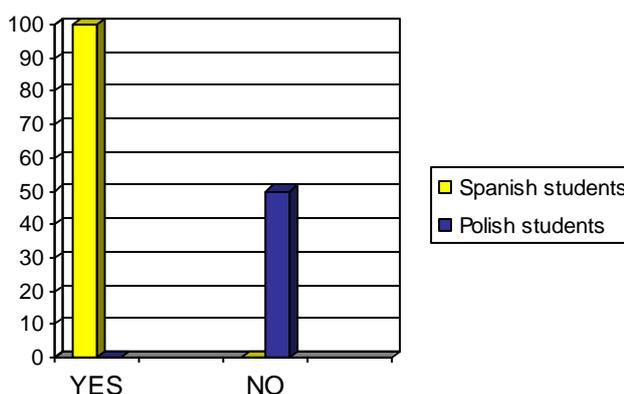

Figure 4.
Do you accept ethnic minorities in your society?

As far as Muslims are concerned, half of the Spanish students and over 60% of the Polish respondents admit to having changed their approach after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Students were asked how they would react if a mosque was erected next door. Those Spanish students whose attitude towards Muslims had not changed at all stated that they would be happy if Muslims had their own place to pray. The students who demonstrated a more unfriendly attitude expressed the view that they would not mind as long as the mosque did not affect them directly. Most Polish respondents stated they would not care if a mosque was erected next door but none of them shared the view of the Spanish students who would be happy that Muslims had a place to pray. This question generated over 30% of negative responses from the Polish students who took part in the survey. They opposed the idea of mosques and stated that the spread of Islamic religion in Poland would make them angry.
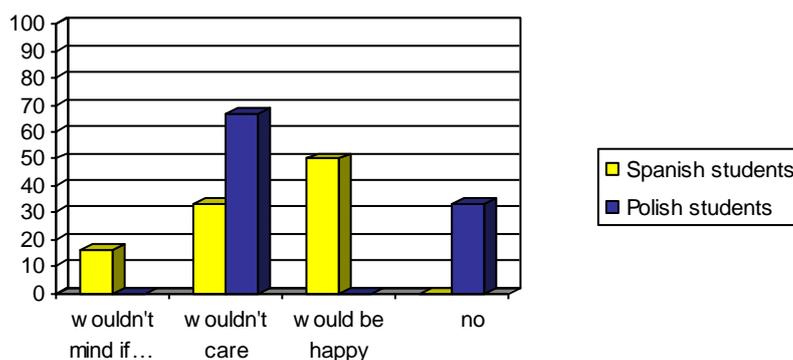

Figure 5.
Would you like to have a mosque next door?

The question related to a duty to help strangers generated only positive responses from the Spanish participants. According to them, immigrants should be above all provided with education and free health care. One person stated that financial help would prove valuable as well.
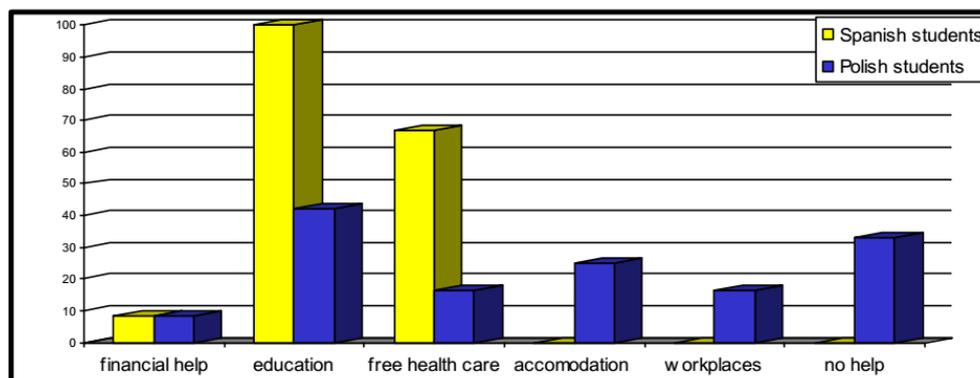
Figure 6.
Should ethnic minorities be helped?

Unlike the Polish participants, none of the Spanish respondents held the view that immigrants should be left alone and given no assistance. Over 30% of the Polish students indicated that strangers should not be helped in any way. Those who held the opposite view selected education and accommodation as the most significant types of help.

The final question asked the students if strangers did enough to achieve coexistence with the host society. There was no concurrence in the responses. 4 out of 12 Spanish students stated that immigrants wanted to retain their own culture and were reluctant to accept any change. They stick together and are not willing to be integrated. The same number of students stated that minorities made an effort to achieve coexistence but it is not sufficient. The reason is that immigrants find it hard to accept changes and a new way of life. Also 30% of the Spanish respondents indicated that coexistence with the majority community depended on the origin of immigrants and their age. They agreed that young people had a better ability to integrate than their parents. The majority of the Polish students surveyed expressed the view that strangers should make more effort to integrate with the host society. For one person the effort already made is not sufficient. One student indicated that strangers did not want to be integrated at all because they stuck too much to their home culture and were not open enough to the culture of the dominant community.

4. Conclusion

The results of the survey conducted among the Polish and Spanish students reveal different attitudes towards strangers. The Spanish respondents seem to be more open to strangers than the Polish participants which may result from the

perennial multiculturalism of the Spanish society. Different groups coming not only from Europe but also from the former Spanish colonies in Africa and Latin America have made the Spanish society culturally varied, as indicated by the respondents. Nearly all of the Spanish students surveyed classified their attitude to the multicultural society as positive unlike the Spanish society which according to the responses is unfriendly towards immigrants. In contrast, Polish students' approach to strangers is not consistent. Some of them classify their attitude as positive. The others have a rather negative image of strangers and are reluctant to accept immigrants in their society. The groups that they are most prejudiced against are Muslims, Russians and Ukrainians which results from the media influence, difficult Russian-Polish political relations and generally an unfriendly approach of the whole society. This is in contrast to the Spanish students who are prejudiced against those minorities which are the most numerous.

The Spanish students surveyed were more open to acceptance and integration with strangers. The distance between the Polish respondents and strangers can be justified. Those students who took part in the survey have little experience of travelling and meeting strangers. What is more, Polish society has never been a multiethnic community which means that they are not used to living together with people of different origin and have no first-hand experience of strangers. Encountering something unknown may generate fear and anticipation of what Baumann calls social disorder. Polish students' negative attitude is also affected by xenophobic political slogans and media coverage warning Poles against immigrants who pose a great danger to the safety and national purity. Polish society has become more willing to establish cross-cultural communication but there is still a lot to be done to eradicate prejudices and fear against the unknown.

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