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INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND CROSS-CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

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Abstract: *In the current international context when we are talking more and more about the penetration in some cultural areas of certain groups coming from a different cultural background, the idea of coexistence of these distinct cultural groups within the same state entities and the need for intercultural dialogue can be challenging. The paper aims an analysis of the concept of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity, made of epistemological perspective and in terms of educational issues related to intercultural education. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of training of the intercultural competences and to identify the development of these concerning two groups of young people, who live in a multicultural space and which differentiates in terms of higher education that they attend. The methodology of research aimed at quantitative and qualitative analysis of data obtained through the application of a questionnaire on Cross-Cultural Sensitivity. The results of research lead to the conclusion that the existence of cultural diversity, of intercultural barriers and the need for interaction confirms the importance of intercultural competence training.*

Keywords: *cultural diversity; intercultural communication; Cross-Cultural Sensitivity; intercultural competences; intercultural education*

1. INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE – EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Within the actual context where the globalization process undergoes a continuous expansion the shaping and development of intercultural competence is necessary for the citizens of every country. In a world that is more and more changeable, in the context where the idea of giving up traditional internal frontiers keeps on being promoted, where the individual is raised and educated in an *a priori* multiethnic country, intercultural competence becomes a key-competence.

The intercultural competence represents the ability to communicate efficiently and properly with the representatives of other cultures, to empathize and act efficiently when concerned with them. As a result, it is related to knowing their language, but also the significances of non-verbal language, as well as essential cultural symbols but also understanding the value system.

Intercultural competence is made up of four components: *knowledge*, *empathy*, *self-esteem* and *cultural identity*. Knowledge is concerned with a different culture, but also with the behavior of persons belonging to this community. Empathy involves understanding feelings and needs belonging to persons that are different, that are part of other cultures. Self-esteem refers to knowing own desires, as well as strengths and weak points, and cultural identity refers to knowledge own culture.

The concept of intercultural competence regards a whole of knowledge, abilities, capacities and behaviors, that used harmoniously and complementary, allow the individual to solve some situations of intercultural interaction (Dasen *et al.*, 1999). Constatin Cuco (2000:43) considers that, we have three constitutive elements in the case of intercultural competence: knowledge, capacities and attitudes. Knowledge deals with: initiation within the close social environment and in the nature of social relations, implemented in interpersonal and intergroup areas; acquiring the axiological context of own culture and foreign cultures, accepted as a result of continuous influences counted as acculturation and knowing the way of interaction of intercultural terms with the purpose to avoid ethnocentric, discriminatory and xenophobe tendencies. When we speak about capacities, we speak about: appreciation of reasoning (their beneficial or maleficent nature, of cohesion or separation, constructive or

destructive); the analysis of the way of manifestation of self-stereotypes or hetero-stereotypes and of ways in where these influence behaviors regarding representatives of foreign cultures; an efficient self-analysis and self-control of personal and situations and behaviors, with the purpose of a subsequent correction of unfavorable manifestation in the intercultural social environment; adapting the message to the sociocultural context and intercultural communication.

As far as the attitudes we relate to: enhancing a correct, civic position, fighting ignoring actions and behaviors, diminishing of importance and discriminating heterogeneous cultures, promoting tolerance and reciprocal cooperation.

Hans Jürgen Lüsebrink (2005:10) considered that we can speak about two aspects, a cognitive one and an emotional one of intercultural competence. There are persons that are brilliant in one of these aspects, but an important role is played by intercultural experience, too. That is why, besides these two aspects, we also have a behavioral element. When defining intercultural competence, Wiseman (1995) brings in three dimensions: cognitive competence, emotional competence and operational one. Cognitive competence involves the ability of initiation into the culture and language belonging to the person that is interacted with, the ability to understand history, institutions, worldviews, customs, traditions, norms and rules of relationship. The emotional competence makes us think of the ability to intercultural adaptation through involving emotional and motivational competences, to the availability to empathize. This refers to a whole of attitudes, like: respect, knowledge, open-minded features, valorization and curiosity towards the other that every individual should develop and manifest in confrontation with the others.

As far as the operational competence is concerned, this involves the ability to prove a certain behavior, to experiment positive intercultural behaviors, to combine verbal or non-verbal behaviors, to tolerate the other's presence, to find and to use to the best ways to adapt in situations of intercultural interaction, to efficiently relate (Cozma, 2001). As a result, we can say that intercultural competence can be assessed at cognitive level (concerns the capacity to realize and understand different aspects/situations, to relate adequately and efficiently), at emotional level (it is concerned with attitudes, degree of emotional involvement, desire and motivation to properly and efficiently communicate with the others and at behavioral level (it refers to abilities, energetic attitudes manifested within behaviors, in

order to efficiently relate in intercultural interactions). Lüsebrink considered that shaping intercultural competence involves certain stages. These are: ethnocentrism, as an excessive appraisal of own cultural identity usually, accompanied, by not admitting real values from other cultures; the attention paid to a foreign culture and to its representatives; comprehension or capacity to properly read values and symbols of other cultures; accepting or a certain tendency to respect cultural differences, even the fundamentally opposed to own axiological standards; appreciation or respect for other cultural values or standards, up to a certain form of identifying with them; intentional adoption of values, cultural standards and systems of symbols of the other (Lüsebrink, 2005:69).

Byram and Zarate (1997:18-65) considered that there are five distinct categories contributing to the shaping of intercultural competence, as it follows: *attitudinal* (like curiosity, an open attitude towards subduing stereotype traditions about other groups and about own group); *knowledge on social groups, „products" and their experiences,* taken from own culture or acquired from the others' culture and are concerned with general processes of social interaction at the macro level but also micro level; *abilities of interpreting and relating* (like preference to a proper analysis of a document or an event originating in a certain culture or proper explanation and relating with events generated by own culture); *abilities of interaction and discovery* (among which the capacity to receive and acquire new elements and experiences belonging to other cultures, to deal with knowledge, attitudes, abilities in limitative conditions and real interactions) and *abilities of reflection and critical assessment*, relying upon criteria, perspectives, experiences and "products" from own culture and others.

2. NECESSITY OF AN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPING AN INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Intercultural education must be regarded as a response to the new global context. This must involve an intercultural pedagogy that can be realized by taking into consideration „the dynamic character" of cultures. This is a must of the European Union. In the United States and Canada, *multicultural education* turned actual at the beginning of the 70's, in those times being published the first scientific articles concerning this topic. In the same period, the first educational solutions regarding multicultural challenges also appeared in Australia. Later on, the concept of

multicultural education started to appear in Anglophone countries. In Europe, approaching this concept happened mainly in countries where immigrants were dominant (France, Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands). In the 50's-60's, a particular attention was paid to overcoming linguistic problems in schools. On the one hand, there were measures to learn the languages of host countries and on the other hand, there were conditions for preserving and developing the students' and pupils' native cultures, promoting the idea that returning to their own country was possible any moment. In the 70's, in some countries, there were launched new specializations, due to an increasing number of foreign children in schools like *Ausländerpädagogik* (*Pedagogy for foreigners*) in Germany or *Pédagogie d'accueil* (*Familiarization Pedagogy*) in France.

From the 90's, The European Council approached the issue of interculturality from the educational point of view but also from the political one, while the interactions between different cultures were regarded as beneficial to cooperation and solidarity, avoiding dominance, conflicts and isolation. After 1989, The European Council intensified its cooperation with Central and East Europe, helping countries from this region develop, taking into account human fundamental rights and those of national minorities. In collaboration with The European Union, UNESCO, The World Bank, OSCE, UNICEF and Foundations for an Open Society from different countries, was launched the project *Education for Democratic Citizenship*, a huge project that involved rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, encouraging and facilitating the youngsters' participation in such process. Intercultural education, as a political objective, was launched in several European states of the European Union, like Italy (*the Ministry Memorandum concerning Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence*, 1997) or Finland (*The Program for Global Education,* 2007). Some directing tendencies appeared in Austria, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Slovenia encouraging schools and other institutions to elaborate projects regarding familiarization with other cultures, promoting traditions.

The years 2000 represented a study of the principles of intercultural education within The European Union texts, there were elaborated a series of specific methodologies for implementing them de facto in school pedagogy. Thus, Recommendation 12 (2002) introduced in a separate annex the pedagogical objectives and education methods for a democratic citizen ship, within

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intercultural dialogue, recognition and respecting differences and building up a tolerant, respectful climate represented main concepts. The same, Resolution 7 (2003) underlined as main topic regarding the youth education the promotion of intercultural dialogue (DGIV/EDU/DIAL, 2004:15-16).

In the UNESCO report on education in the 21st century, instruction is represented as relying upon four basic elements: the capacity to know, to do, live together with the others and the ability to exist. These four complementary roles cannot be dissociated and they convey towards the idea of the individual emancipation as an ability to participate to a complete citizenship in an open and democratic society. Intercultural education corresponds to the third pillar of education: the capacity to live with the others. This is considered a very important element of education, a vital element in developing a harmonious society. It refers to the capacity to live next to the others, "by developing how to know the other, his history, traditions and spirituality" (Delors, 1996:18).

The actual situation from Europe, determined by migratory groups, that significantly changed the structure of European population, by the European Union expansion and geopolitical changes, by the intensity of controversies and debates upon systems of values, a growth in discrimination and racist incidents, impose a particular care to intercultural dialogue. In this respect, cultural diversity and social cohesion acquired a particular place in political agendas and national governments from Europe had to introduce intercultural education as a separate element or integrated in public policies.

3. DIDACTIC ASPECTS OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

As a determining factor in the educational process, school plays a fundamental role with respect to intercultural competence. The instructive - educational process must be oriented not only towards creating a proper environment for personal self-development, but also towards defining an environment bringing intercultural and multicultural educational experiences. The adjustment, accompanied by the sensitivity of every individual regarding a foreign context and his capacity to change the reference system, unavoidably leads to shaping intercultural competence (Bennet, 1993: 21-71).

Beacco J. C. claims that intercultural education is a condition for democracy and „education in foreign languages is an ideal place of anchoring"

(Beacco, 2005:217). Intercultural education is seen by Trim J. as the only means towards a lasting European peace, because

> the best protection towards any form of racism and xenophobia is ensured by knowledge and direct experience of the other's reality through an improvement of communication capacities (Trim, 2001:7).

Acquiring knowledge on national and universal culture, developing correct attitudes, manifesting open-minded attitudes and availability of communication and civilized interaction with owners of any culture, developing cooperation abilities to solve common issues, all are important aspects contributing to the development of intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence involves a civic dimension, those forms of behavior allowing every person to efficiently participate to social and professional life. The civic dimension include aspects like: democratic citizenship, use of knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes necessary to promote inclusion, justice and sustainable development, respecting rights and liberties that are fundamental to humans. In this respect, redefining the concept of *citizenship* is an essential part of intercultural discourse, regarding new horizons and ways to practice a participatory democracy locally, nationally, European and internationally. In this respect, educational systems, mainly school have major roles and responsibilities. The student must be, constructively and positively educated in relation with the notion of diversity; to manifest respect for own rights, but also for the others', no matter the ethnical origin, the language, the culture, the religion, the gender, the age or their social status; to respect social and cultural traditions, rejecting any kind of intolerance, extremism or racism; to prove responsibility for the self and for the ones around, for society and environment; to wield actively and responsibly own rights, respecting the others' rights, too; to praise diversity; to prove tolerance and inclusive attitude; to practice and to promote human values in everyday life, like: respect for personal dignity, fighting against prejudices and discrimination of any kind, against poverty and marginalization.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Meaning of Research. The research aimed at examining Cross-Cultural Sensitivity among 65 students from "Ovidius" University in

Constanta, Romania. Constanta is a Romanian city located in the Dobrogea area, a territory situated between the Danube and the Black Sea. There is a multiethnic and multicultural space in which many ethnic minorities, such as Turks, Tartars, Russian - Lipovans, Armenians, Greeks, Italians, Roma, are living together with the Romanian majority. The area is considered an intercultural model in the Romanian space, thanks to the harmonious coexistence of the ethnicities living here.

The study aimed at examining the different levels of student understanding of the concept of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity. In addition, the data were collected to determine whether there is a relationship between the results and the demographic factors that are frequently mentioned in the literature.

4.2. The objectives and the hypothesis of the research. The Objectives of Research were: O1. identification of psycho-individual and social factors that mediate the formation and development of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity; O2. comparison of two groups of students, different from the point of view of the specialization they are studying, regarding the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity, from the point of view of *Cultural Integration*, *Behavioral*, *Intellectual Interaction*, *Attitude Toward Others*, *Empathy*.

The Hypothesis of Research were: H1. There are significant statistical differences in the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity from the point of view of *Cultural Integration*, *Behavioral*, *Intellectual Interaction*, *Attitude Toward Others*, *Empathy*, between the two groups of distinct students who participated in the research; H2. There are no significant statistical differences regarding the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of students that have participated in the research in correlation with sociological variables of ethnicity and religious confession.

4.3. Methods and research tools. The study was conducted by applying a questionnaire on Cross-Cultural Sensitivity, known as the Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS). The questionnaire was adapted after the *Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity* and *Cross-Cultural Sensitivity Scale* (CCSS) proposed by Pruegger, V. J. and Rogers, T. B. in the study "Development of a scale to measure Cross-Cultural Sensitivity in the Canadian context", published in 1993 in *the Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science* (Pruegger, Rogers, 1993:615-621).

4.4. The group of participants. The group of participants is made up of students from "Ovidius"

University of Constanta, Romania, who study in two distinct specializations, namely: *International Relations and European Studies* (IRES), from the Faculty of History and Political Sciences and the *Pedagogy of Plastic and Decorative Arts* (PPDA), from the Faculty of Arts. We mention that the students from the specialization *International Relations and European Studies* (IRES) learn, according to the curriculum, the following subjects: *Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, *Introduction to European Studies*, *History of Europe in the 20th Century*, *International Relations Theory*, *History of European Integration*, *EU and War against terrorism*, *Dimensions of security in the Balkans*, *Contemporary political ideologies*, *Geopolitics*, *Totalitarian regimes in the 20th century*, *Atypical threats to world security*, *Foreign policy and diplomacy*, *Current trends in world politics*, *Globalism and globalization*. We believe that studying of these subjects has an important role in the intercultural education of the students. As far as the students of the *Pedagogy of the plastic and decorative arts* (PPDA), they are going through a much smaller number of subjects, which we can say that contribute to their intercultural education. These include: *History of Culture and Civilization*, *Education of Plastic Creativity in Interdisciplinary Context*, *Postmodern Aesthetics*.

The study was attended by 31 students from the *International Relations and European Studies* (IRES) and 34 students from the *Pedagogy of Plastic and Decorative Arts* (PPDA). We consider that the results are significant, as the degree of participation of the students from the two distinct specializations was over 50%.

4.5. Results. The results of the research regarding the first hypothesis that has been formulated, demonstrate that there are statistical differences between the two groups of distinct students who participated in the research, when we relate to *Intellectual Interaction* and *Behavioral*.

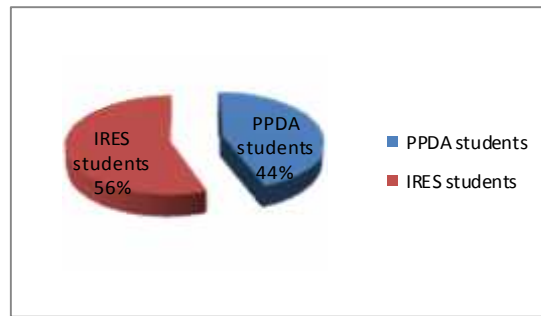Fig.1Representation on *Behavioral* of IRES and PPDA students

Fig.2. Representation on *Intellectual Interaction* of IRES and PPDA students

Thus, PPDA students are more open if we relate to *Behavior* (53%, compared to 47% in the case of IRES students), and IRES are more open in terms of *Intellectual Interaction* (56%, compared to 44% in the case of PPDA students).

Regarding the other aspects that we have analyzed: *Cultural Integration*, *Attitude Toward Others* and *Empathy* the results of research are somewhat similar. Thus, the results of the research show that the students from PPDA specialization are more open than IRES students to the issue of *Cultural Integration*. The difference is not very high, meaning that if PPDA students registered a 51%, the percentage of IRES students was 49%.
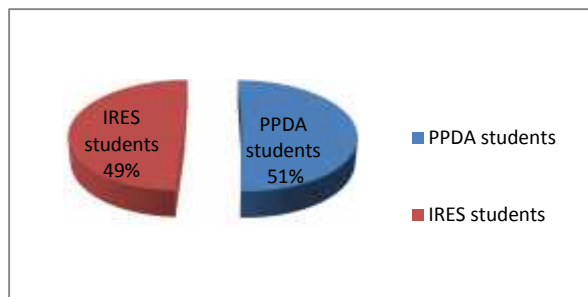

Fig.3 Representation on *Cultural Integration of* IRES and PPDA students

Regarding *Attitude Toward Others* and *Empathy* the results of the research were similar and show that the students from IRES specialization are more open than PPDA students.
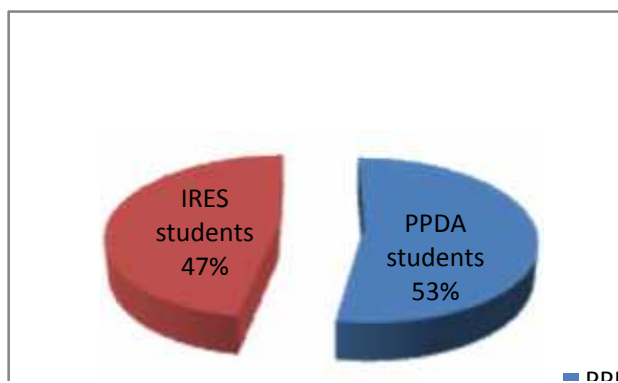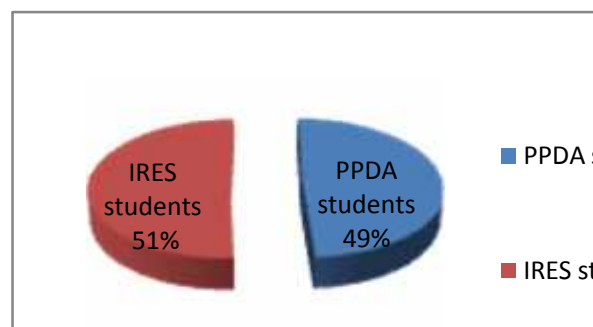

Figure 4. Representation on *Attitude Toward Others* of IRES and PPDA students

The difference is not very high, meaning that if IRES students registered a 51%, the percentage of PPDA students was 49%.
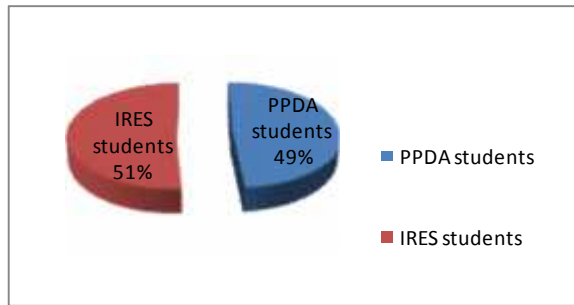

Figure 5. Representation on *Empathy* of IRES and PPDA students

Two sociological variables were considered important in the realization of this research, namely: ethnicity and religious confession. Thus, regarding the students from the *Pedagogy of Plastic and Decorative Arts* (PPDA), we mention that 67% were Romanians, 6% Russian - Lipovans, 3% Greek, and 24% did not declare their ethnicity. When we relate to the religious confession, 79% are declared themselves as Orthodox Christians, 3% as Old Orthodox Christians, 3% Catholics, and 15% did not declare their belonging to a religious confession.

On the other hand, regarding the students from *International Relations and European Studies* (IRES), we mention that 73% of Romanians, 9% Tatars, 6% Germans, 3% Russian-Lipovans, 3% Aromanians, 3% Turkish and 3% Gagauz. When we relate to the religious confession, 75% have been declared Orthodox Christians, 13% have been Muslims, 6% Catholic and 6% Agnostic.
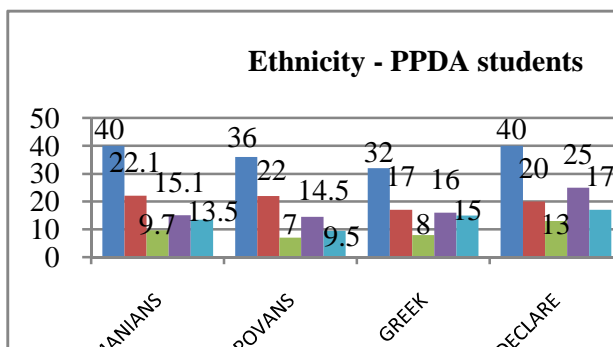

Fig.6 Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of PPDA students in correlation with *ethnicity*

If we are to relate to the ethnicity the results of research show that there are statistical differences regarding the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of PPDA students that have participated in the research. Thus, ethnic Greeks have recorded, by comparison, the lowest scores in terms of *Cultural*

Integration and Behavioral Scale, the Russian-Lippovans students have registered, by comparison, the lowest scores in terms of *Intellectual Interaction* and *Empathy*.
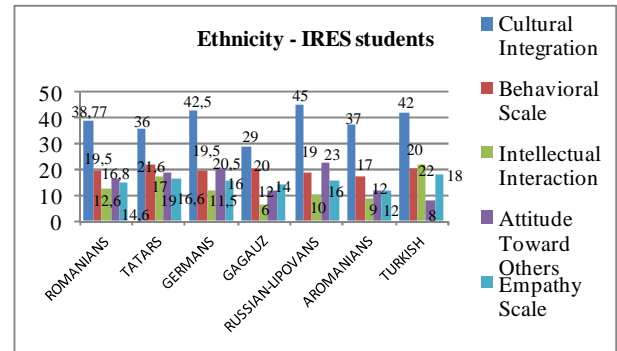

Fig.7 Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of IRES students in correlation with *ethnicity*

Regarding the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of IRES students in correlation with *ethnicity* we can see that the lowest scores, by comparison, were recorded on *Cultural Integration* and *Intellectual Interaction* about Gagauz, and on *Behavioral* and *Empathy* about Aromanian people. Instead, the highest scores, by comparison, were registered by Turkish ethnicity, with regard to *Intellectual Interaction* and *Empathy.*

Correlating Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of PPDA students that have participated in the research in correlation with religious confession, we can appreciate: the highest scores, by comparison, were recorded on *Cultural Integration* and *Attitude Toward Others* by students who did not declare their belonging to a religious confession and the lowest scores, by comparison, were recorded on *Intellectual Interaction* and *Empathy cores* by those who declared their confession to Old Orthodox Christians.
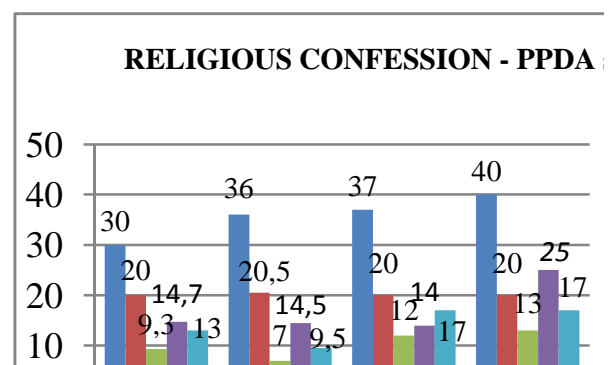

Figure 8. Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of PPDA students in correlation with religious confession

The interpretation of the data obtained regarding the correlation of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity with the religious confession among the IRES students shows that the persons who declared themselves as Orthodox Christians and

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Catholic had, by comparison, the lowest scores on *Cultural Integration* and respectively *Behavioral*, and the persons who declared themselves Muslim have recorded, by comparison, the highest scores on *Intellectual Interaction*, *Attitude Toward Others* and *Empathy*.
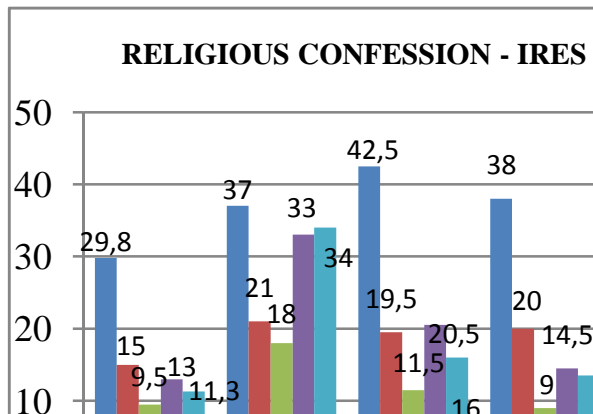
RELIGIOUS CONFESSION - IRES

Figure 9. Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of IRES students in correlation with religious confession

5. CONCLUSIONS

Under the impact of modern civilization within the globalization context, we are permanently influenced by other cultures. In this respect, they necessity of intercultural development is a must. Shaping intercultural competence needs conceiving and unfolding a coherent series of educational events that could generate knowledge apprehension, forming abilities and attitudes, proving an openness, flexibility, tolerance towards traditions, values, others' norms. In this respect, a fundamental role is played by the educator, who must guide the shaping of future personalities in relation to the expectancies of a multicultural society. We are witnesses of a time where diversity is growing, b ringing opportunities and challenges. As a result of numerous transformations, the contemporary world cannot be characterized and regarded only through the point of view of cultural homogeneity. We are mainly facing heterogeneous societies, and in this context, it is mandatory the shaping of abilities of intercultural communication and intercultural competence, that are the key for developing and maintaining sustainable democratic societies. These, too can be developed by promoting a quality education. The results of the research show that the first hypothesis was partially validated, meaning there are statistical differences in the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity, only from the point of view of *Behavioral* and *Intellectual Interaction*, between two groups of distinct students who participated in the research. In terms of the second hypothesis, it was partially validated. The results of research have shown there are no very significant

statistical differences regarding the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of students that have participated in the research in correlation with sociological variables of ethnicity, but there are significant statistical differences regarding the level of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity of students that have participated in the research in correlation with and religious confession.

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