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Intercultural Interaction in Education and the Economy: The Perspective of the Theory of Cultural Transmission in Minorities

Interkulturelles Handeln in Pädagogik und Wirtschaft: Die Perspektive der Theorie der Kulturtransmission bei Minderheiten

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Abstract (English)

Based on the premise that the improvement of intercultural practice can be best achieved by improving the theoretical understanding of intercultural interaction, this article analyzes intercultural interaction in two areas of social life – education and the economy – from the perspective of the theory of cultural transmission in minorities (Mchitarjan / Reisenzein 2010, 2014a). It is argued that the theory is able to explain central empirical findings on intercultural interaction in these social domains, some of which are unaccounted for by alternative theoretical approaches.

Keywords: Intercultural interaction, cultural transmission, acculturation in immigrant families, educational policies for minorities, diversity management in multinational companies

Abstract (Deutsch)

Ausgehend von der Annahme, dass die Verbesserung der interkulturellen Praxis am besten durch eine Verbesserung des theoretischen Verständnisses von interkulturellem Handeln erreicht werden kann, analysiert dieser Beitrag interkulturelles Handeln in zwei Bereichen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens – Pädagogik und Wirtschaft – aus der Perspektive der Theorie der Kulturtransmission bei Minderheiten (Mchitarjan / Reisenzein 2010, 2014a). Es wird argumentiert, dass die Theorie zentrale empirische Befunde zur interkulturellen Interaktion in diesen Bereichen erklären kann, inklusive solche, die alternativen theoretischen Ansätzen Schwierigkeiten bereiten.

Schlagwörter: Interkulturelles Handeln, kulturelle Transmission, Akkulturation in Migrantenfamilien, Bildungspolitik für Minderheiten, Diversity Management in multinationalen Unternehmen

1. Introduction

Intercultural interaction – interacting with people from different cultures – has become a normal part of social life in modern societies. To meet this challenge, a large literature devoted to intercultural interaction has developed in different branches of social science, including communication science, economics, sociology, psychology, and educational science. The greater part of this literature has an applied focus, dealing with issues such as the training of intercultural communication skills, methods of diversity management in multinational companies, and education for ethnic minorities. However, it can be argued that in the long run, the improvement of intercultural *practice* is best achieved by improving the *theoretical understanding* of intercultural interaction. As the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951:169) put it: “There is nothing so practical as a good theory”. This article tries to support Lewin’s claim for the domain of intercultural interaction, by describing how a theory of cultural transmission in minorities recently proposed by Mchitarjan and Reizenzein (2010, 2014a) can aid the theoretical understanding of intercultural interactions in education, as well as in the economy.

The perspective of the article is interdisciplinary: I refer to empirical data from several disciplines (in particular educational science, psychology, sociology, and communication science), try to explain them with a theory that combines ideas from different disciplines (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014a; see below), and attempt to show that the theory is relevant to intercultural interaction phenomena studied by different disciplines (intercultural interaction in the educational domain, and the economy). Accordingly, this article addresses readers from all disciplines interested in intercultural interaction.

In the first part of the article, the theory of cultural transmission in minorities is briefly summarized and several general implications of the theory for the analysis of intercultural interactions

are pointed out. In the second part, I describe how the theory can help to understand central empirical findings on intercultural interaction in the areas of education and the economy that, in part, pose explanatory difficulties for existing theoretical accounts.

2. A Theory of Cultural Transmission in Minorities

The theory of cultural transmission in minorities (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a) was originally developed to explain intercultural interaction between sociocultural majorities and minorities in the area of education. In accordance with a common usage in contemporary social science (e. g. Layton-Henry 2001, Polm 1995), the term *sociocultural minority* is used to denote a low-power subgroup of a society that has, or claims, a cultural (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.) identity.¹ The term *culture* is understood, again in agreement with a wide-spread use, as referring to a system of socially transmitted beliefs, values, norms, rules of conduct, and practices of a social group that serves to organize group life (e. g. Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2013, Thomas 2005, see section 2.1 for further discussion). The paradigm application case of the theory are interactions between ethnic minorities and majority societies in the educational domain, but extensions to other areas of social life in which cultural minorities and majorities interact are possible. An example are the interactions between staff from different cultural groups in multinational companies, analyzed in section 3.2 of this article.

The starting point of the theory is the observation that cultural transmission in minorities by means of educational activities is a frequent social phenomenon. Historical case studies as well as empirical surveys document that sociocultural minorities living in a cultural majority environment (a) typically practice, within the family, an education shaped by their culture of origin (e. g. Knafo / Schwartz 2001, Kwast-Welfel et al. 2007, Sam / Virta 2003, Vedder et

al. 2009; for a review see Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014b), and (b) beyond that, often also engage in extra-familial educational activities that serve, at least among other purposes, the transmission of the cultural heritage to their offspring, and thus the preservation of culture (e. g. Feidel-Mertz / Hammel 2004, Hansen / Wenning 2003, Hopf 1999, Mchitarjan 2006, 2009, 2010, Thränhardt 2005). These phenomena are regularly seen when a sociocultural group comes into the sphere of influence of a culturally different, more powerful group, and tries to transport its culture to the next generation under these special circumstances. This situation can arise for two reasons: First, as the result of voluntary or forced migration; and second, as the result of a shifting of the borders of the territory under the control of a group (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a).

The theory of cultural transmission in minorities seeks to explain the described educational activities of minority groups, but also the educational policies of the majority towards them. The explanation of these social phenomena by the theory targets two different but connected levels of analysis: (a) the level of the proximate psychological mechanisms that control social action; (b) the level of the distal, cultural-evolutionary processes that resulted in the development of (some of) these mechanisms, and thus explain (part of) the psychological make-up (e. g. the basic motives) of the social actors involved in an interaction. Corresponding to these two levels of explanation, the theory comprises two components or subtheories: (a) an action-theoretical model of minority-majority interactions and (b) a set of assumptions about the cultural evolution of groups (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a). The first theory component is an adaptation of a simple action-theoretical model of group interaction to minority-majority interactions. Action-theoretical accounts are the dominant approach to the explanation of social action in psychology (e. g. Reizenzein 2006) and a strong paradigm in sociology (e. g. Esser 1999, Lindenberg 1985). The second

theory component was inspired by a recent model of the cultural evolution of groups (Wilson 2002, Richerson / Boyd 2005). Thus, the present theory seeks to combine the merits of the action-theoretical approach to the explanation of social behavior (e. g. Conte / Castelfranchi 1995, Esser 1999) with the insights provided by evolutionary explanations (e. g. Wilson 2002, see also Kappelhoff 2004).

2.1. An Action-theoretical Model of Minority-Majority Interactions

The theory's first component – the action-theoretical model of minority-majority interaction – is based on the methodological assumption that the activities of minorities and the policies of majorities towards them, can be analyzed as analogous to an interaction between two individuals. That is, it is assumed that the two involved groups – the minority and the majority – can be treated, for purposes of analysis, as two interacting social actors.² This allows to model their interaction in the standard action-theoretical way (e. g. Conte / Castelfranchi 1995, Reizenzein 2006). That is, it is assumed that the actions of the minority and majority are controlled by the *goals* (motives) of the two actors and their *beliefs* (about the current situation, feasible actions to reach their goals, etc). It is assumed that the two social actors are *boundedly rational*, that is, they try to reach their respective goals in the given historical situation in, by and large, a rational fashion. This means in particular that, when trying to achieve their goals, the minority and the majority take into account the perceived realizability of these goals, as well as situational constraints.

In the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, this basic model of group interaction is elaborated for both the minority and the majority and is supplemented with additional assumptions. The most important of these is the assumption that socio-cultural groups have – in addition to other motives (in particular the desire

to maintain and increase their resources and power) a *culture-transmission motive*, that is, a special appreciation of their culture and the explicit or implicit desire to preserve it and pass it on to the next generation. This assumption is supported by historical studies of cultural transmission in minorities (e. g. Feidel-Mertz / Hammel 2004, Hansen / Wenning 2003, Mchitarjan 2006, 2009) and by the findings of empirical surveys of migrants (e. g. Berry et al. 2006, Boos-Nünning / Karakaşoğlu 2006). Although most of the latter evidence is indirect, a recent survey by Mchitarjan and Reizenzein (2013) obtained direct support for the existence and effects of the culture-transmission motive.

To prevent possible misunderstandings, I emphasize that postulating a culture-transmission motive implies neither a primordial nor an essentialist view of culture (for discussions, see e. g. Bayar 2009, May 2005:19ff., Modood 2007:87ff., Smith 1998:145ff.) but is quite compatible with a (moderate) social-constructivist view. In fact, according to the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, culture is socially constructed in at least three ways: It is socially transmitted; its core components (including norms and values, language, and even the culture-transmission motive itself) are products of cultural evolution (see the next section); and it contains, in addition to objectifiable elements such as language and norms, important subjective elements including the group's self-definition. Such a view of culture naturally accommodates intragroup variations in culture and the idea that cultures are not fixed and immutable (see also Modood 2007:103ff., Richerson / Boyd 2005:58ff.). Hence, the present theory is well compatible with the view of communication scientists that cultures are socially transmitted system of norms, values, rules of conduct, etc. that are partly heterogeneous and changeable (e. g. Bolten 2009:240). Note, furthermore, that postulating a culture-transmission motive *in a group* does not imply (a) that this motive is necessarily strong in all group members, nor (b) that it necessarily has the form

of an explicit desire to maintain and disseminate one's culture; it may also (and perhaps typically does) consist of a plurality of more specific wishes for the preservation and transmission of particular cultural elements (e. g. language, religion, particular behavior norms). However, all this is compatible with the assumption, made in the present theory, that once installed in the members of a group, cultural systems have powerful effects on behavior (e. g. Sober / Wilson 1998:159ff., Richerson / Boyd 2005:1ff., see also May 2005:19ff.).

Like other motives, the culture-transmission motive is not constantly present as a conscious desire in the minds of the members of social groups. Rather, it has the form of a latent concern, of which the group members become aware only under special conditions; especially if they perceive or suspect a threat to the transmission of their culture. According to the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, this situation arises regularly when a socio-cultural group comes into the sphere of influence of a culturally different, more powerful group. That is, in a foreign cultural majority environment, the culture-transmission motive of the minority is typically activated. In this activated form, it then incites actions aimed at safeguarding the preservation of the culture of origin, such as increased efforts at cultural education in the family and corresponding activities in the field of public education (e. g. the founding of own schools). Which method of cultural transmission a minority chooses in a concrete historical situation depends on its appraisal of the situation: its own resources, the attitude of the majority society, national and international laws and political conditions, etc. The theory assumes that the minority chooses that method of cultural transmission which, from its subjective point of view, appears to be most effective in the given circumstances; that is – roughly speaking – the method which maximizes the chances of success of cultural transmission while minimizing costs and negative side-effects.

2.2. Evolutionary Foundations of Cultural Transmission

The second component of the theory of cultural transmission in minorities consists of a set of assumptions about the origins and functions of the fundamental goals and strategies of minorities and majorities in cultural transmission situations. This subtheory is meant to answer questions such as the following: Why do cultural groups have a culture-transmission motive at all? How did this motive emerge? On which cultural elements does it focus, and why on these rather than others?

To elaborate this second component of the theory, Mchitarjan and Reizenzein (2010, 2014a) draw on a theory of cultural evolution proposed by D. S. Wilson (2002, see also Sober / Wilson 1998, Richerson / Boyd 2005).³ According to Wilson as well as Richerson and Boyd, certain ideological systems such as religion or culture constitute the non-biological or cultural heritage of social groups that evolved in the course of history because it helped to safeguard the survival and reproduction of cultural groups by allowing them to behave as adaptive units. Every culture is an adaptation of a social group to its specific ecological, economic and socio-cultural conditions.

In the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, this evolutionary approach is used, among other things, to explain the *existence* of the postulated culture-transmission motive: It is assumed that this motive is a product of cultural evolution (for details, see Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a). In addition, Wilson's theory of cultural evolution allows to explain, in part, the *contents* of the culture-transmission motive: it suggests that the culture-transmission motive should focus on those elements of culture (understood in a broad, evolutionary sense as "the totality of socially transmitted information", Richerson / Boyd 2005:5) that are particularly important for the functioning of cultural groups as adaptive units. These core elements of culture comprise, on the one hand, the values and behavioral norms of the group and

the ideology that supports them, such as beliefs about a common origin and a shared destiny (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a); and on the other hand, group characteristics that are reliable outward signs of cultural identity and thereby allow group members – the carriers of the same cultural norms and values – to recognize each other. These group characteristics include, importantly, the group's language or sociolect (see also Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2013, and for empirical evidence Rakić / Stefens / Mummendey 2010).⁴ In addition, language is of fundamental importance for cultural transmission also because it is the central channel for the transmission of cultural information.

2.3. Some General Implications for the Analysis of Intercultural Interactions

Before discussing how the theory of cultural transmission in minorities explains empirical findings on intercultural interaction in the areas of education and the economy, several general implications of the theory for the analysis of intercultural interactions, regardless of their specific content, will be pointed out.

The first implication concerns the *focus of theoretical analysis*: The theory makes salient that, to understand intercultural phenomena, one must not – different from what is still common practice in the social sciences (especially sociological and social-psychological migration research) – focus one-sidedly on an actor who enters a foreign culture (e. g. a migrant), but on the *interaction* between the representatives of different cultures. This implication (which agrees with corresponding proposals by several intercultural communication researchers, e. g. Bolten 1995:25, Rathje 2003:2f., Stüdlein 1997:394) means that both parties to an intercultural interaction situation should be considered equally in the analysis, each with its particular goals, its beliefs about the feasibility of attaining these goals, its particular strategies, and its situational constraints. Likewise, one must take into account the fact that the actions of

the two interaction partners mutually influence each other (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a, see also Mchitarjan 2012).

A second implication of the theory of cultural transmission in minorities for the analysis of intercultural interactions is *sensitivity to power differences*: The theory suggests that when analyzing the interaction between representatives of different cultures, one should be aware that the relationship between them is often characterized by unequal power. Hence, intercultural interactions often take the form of interactions between a minority (less powerful) and a majority (more powerful).

A third important implication of the theory of cultural transmission in minorities for the analysis of intercultural interactions concerns the *basic psychological mechanisms, in particular the basic motive structure*, of the interactants. Although the participants to an intercultural interaction differ (per assumption) in their cultures, as well as in their concrete goals and beliefs, and often also in their power, the theory assumes that they do *not* differ fundamentally in their basic psychological mechanisms, including their basic motives. In particular, the theory assumes that all parties to an intercultural interaction have a culture-transmission motive that (a) focuses on the system of values and norms of their own culture, the ideologies that support this system, and reliable external signs of cultural identity, especially language; and that (b) when activated, motivates actions designed to counter perceived threats to cultural transmission. Nevertheless, in the latter respect, there is an important difference between the majority (the more powerful) and the minority (the less powerful) interaction partner: Whereas the culture-transmission motive of the majority is typically only a latent concern, that of the minority is typically in an activated state. That is, different from the members of the majority, those of the minority are typically conscious of belonging to a different culture and the importance of preserving it (for supporting empirical

evidence, see Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2013).

The importance of these implications of the present theory will become apparent in the following section, where the theory is used to explain central findings of research on intercultural interaction in the areas of education and the economy.

3. Intercultural Interaction in Education and the Economy

I first describe how the theory of cultural transmission in minorities helps to understand findings of empirical studies on intercultural interaction in the area of education. The studies are divided into those that focus on the educational activities of minorities, and those that focus on the educational policies of majorities for them. Subsequently, I explore how the theory can aid the understanding of intercultural interaction in the economy, specifically the management of cultural diversity in international and multinational companies.

3.1. Intercultural Interaction in the Educational Domain

3.1.1. Acculturation in Immigrant Families

Studies of acculturation processes in immigrant families support, among others, the following empirical generalizations (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014b): (1) The transmission of cultural norms and values in immigrant families works as well and often better than in non-immigrant families. (2) Immigrants, even those in the second and third generation, typically still have a strong identification with their culture of origin. (3) Successful integration of immigrants into the majority society, at least its job market and educational system, does not require abandonment of the culture of origin.

Seen from the perspective of the mainstream theoretical approaches in the field of migration and acculturation research – in particular the perspective of classical assimilation theory (e. g.

Park 1950, Esser 1980, see also Alba / Nee 1999) – these findings constitute anomalies in the sense of Kuhn’s (1962) philosophy of science (cf. Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2013).⁵ According to Kuhn, anomalies are discrepancies between new knowledge and the dominant explanatory model – the established paradigm (see also Mchitarjan 2007). Indeed, these findings (in particular the first two, which indicate a high resilience of cultural traits; see also Bisin / Verdier 2011, for additional evidence) can be explained only with difficulty by the mainstream theories. This is particularly evident for *classical assimilation theory*, which predicts extensive acculturation of immigrants in the second, at the latest the third generation. However, this outcome of the acculturation process is only found in exceptional cases. Typically, immigrants and their descendants do not strive for complete acculturation into the majority society, even if there are strong economic and social incentives for doing so. The more recent, alternative perspective of *transnationalism* (e. g. Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Pries 2010), that emerged in part as a critical response to assimilation theory, acknowledges that immigrants frequently have bicultural identities; however, like assimilation theory, it fails to provide an explanation of *why* migrants and their descendants hold on so tenaciously to their culture of origin (see Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014a, 2013). By contrast, the described anomalies can be consistently explained by the theory of cultural transmission in minorities.

Finding 1. The transmission of cultural norms and values in immigrant families works as well and often better than in non-immigrant families. This conclusion is supported by studies of cultural transmission in immigrant and non-immigrant families from many different countries (e. g. Knafo / Schwartz 2001, Kwast-Welfel et al. 2007, Sam / Virta 2003, Vedder et al. 2009, see Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014b).

According to the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, the effectiveness of cultural transmission in

immigrants is the result of the culture-transmission motive postulated by the theory (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014a, 2014b). According to the theory, the culture-transmission motive is typically activated in the migration situation and then mobilizes efforts to defend against the perceived threat of cultural loss. A main reason why migration is a threat to cultural transmission is the scarcity of cultural transmission channels. In non-immigrant families (families from the majority society), the task of cultural transmission is carried, in addition to the family, by many other socialization agents, including the public education system, media, relatives and neighbors, and peer groups. In contrast, for immigrants, these extra-familial socialization agents are typically not available, at least not to the same extent. To compensate for this, immigrant parents try to safeguard cultural transmission by means of special educational efforts – especially in the family (e. g. teaching the language of origin at home), but sometimes also in the public sector (e. g. founding a private school).

Finding 2. Immigrants, even those in the second and third generation, typically still have a strong identification with their culture of origin. This finding is the typical result of studies on the ethnic self-identification of immigrants. For example, in an international survey involving approximately 5.300 adolescents of different ethnic backgrounds in thirteen countries around the world, Berry et al. (2006) found that even after twelve to 18 years of residence in the host country, about 20% of the youth regarded themselves primarily as members of their culture of origin, and another 45% as belonging to both their home culture and the culture of the host society. Parallel findings were reported by Boos-Nünning and Karakaşoğlu (2006) in a survey of girls and young women with immigrant background in Germany. In the authors’ words, it was “striking...how few of the young women, most of whom had grown up in Germany, regard themselves as Germans, and how many regard themselves (also) as members of their group of origin” (Boos-Nünning / Karakaşoğlu

2006:307).⁶ Similarly, Mchitarjan and Reizenzein (2013) found that 1.5 generation immigrants to Germany (mostly of Russian background) typically categorized themselves as bicultural, with the focus being on the culture of origin.

Identification with a cultural group can usually be taken as an indicator of a high regard for the group, which according to the theory of cultural transmission in minorities is a component of, or at least closely associated with, the culture-transmission motive. According to the theory, the culture-transmission motive is itself part of the culture and is transmitted as such to the next generation. The relative stability of the culture-transmission motive, and hence of cultural identification, can thus be partly attributed to the above-mentioned defenses against the danger of cultural loss in the migration situation. However, a second important reason for the relative stability of the culture-transmission motive is the very structure of this motive: The theory assumes that the culture-transmission motive is acquired through social learning processes that firmly anchor this motive in a multiplicity of more fundamental motives. That is, individuals are explicitly and implicitly taught, as part of the socialization process, that adherence to the cultural system of the group offers cognitive guidance, security, and the appreciation and support of the group members (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014a, 2013).

Finding 3. Successful integration of immigrants into the majority society, at least its job market and educational system, does not require abandonment of the culture of origin. The compatibility of immigrants' integration into the majority society and their continued affiliation with their culture of origin is suggested by several survey studies (see Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2014b). For example, in a survey of young migrants in Austria, Weiss (2007:199f.) found that the majority of them "carry on ethnic practices [of their culture of origin] and yet do not live in isolated sociocultural spaces".⁷ Similarly, a study of German adolescents of immigrant background

found that adherence to the culture of origin did not hinder integration into the educational sector and job market of the majority society (Skrobanek 2007).

According to the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, it is entirely possible for members of a minority to adopt certain elements of the majority culture without losing their primary identification with the culture of origin. Elements of the majority culture that appear useful or attractive to immigrants can be, and in fact often are, readily adopted if they do not conflict with the core of the migrant culture – in particular its system of norms of values. For example, learning the majority language is compatible with retaining the language of origin; technical know-how is in large part neutral with respect to cultural norms; and even situation-specific behavior norms (e. g. in the work place, norms related to safety; see Rathje 2004, 2010) can be readily adopted – at least in the sense of being behaviorally adhered to – as long as they do not conflict with central cultural norms (e. g. religious prohibitions). For these reasons, the *complete* acculturation of a minority – which also requires the replacement of its system of core values and norms by that of the majority, and identification with the majority group – is not necessary for the integration of the minority into the majority society; at least its job market and educational system. In addition, given the existence of the culture-transmission motive, the complete acculturation of a minority is not easy to achieve, at least in the short run. In particular, open attempts by the majority to change the values and norms of the minority culture threaten the core of this culture and are therefore likely to provoke strong defense. Increasing the pressure on immigrants to assimilate can therefore, at least in the short term, have the opposite of the desired effect: the retreat of the immigrants into the own ethnic group, instead of the desired integration into the majority society (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a).

3.1.2. Educational Policies for Sociocultural Minorities

Most theoretical approaches in the field of acculturation and migration research focus on the actions of the minority (the immigrants) and neglect the actions of the majority (the receiving society) towards them. In contrast, the theory of cultural transmission in minorities pays equal attention to the actions of the majority – in the educational domain, the educational policies of a majority for minorities. Again, the theory allows to explain major empirical findings in this domain (see also Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, Mchitarjan 2014).

Studies of historical and contemporary examples of the educational policies of majorities (typically represented by state governments) for minorities reveal, at first sight, a bewildering picture. First, practically every conceivable educational policy towards minorities has been used at some time during history, ranging from extensive support of the cultural transmission of a minority, to its tolerance, to its active obstruction (usually as part of an attempt to assimilate the minority) (see e. g. Mchitarjan 2006). Furthermore, different educational policies are often pursued by a state for different minorities (Mchitarjan 2006, 2011, 2014). For example, towards the end of the 19th century, at the heyday of Russian nationalism, the Russian state adopted a hard line of assimilation politics towards the culturally close non-Russian peoples (e. g. the Poles and Ukrainians), while at the same time pursuing a more lenient, cautious policy towards the non-Christian, in particular the Muslim population in the Volga region, the Urals, in Siberia and in central Asia (Mchitarjan 2011, 2014, see also Bendrikov 1960, Kappeler 2008, Rozhdestvenskiy 1902, other historical cases are described in Mchitarjan 2006 and Hansen / Wenning 2003).

How can the differing educational policies for minorities at different historical times, and even at the same time for different minorities, be explained? According to the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, the cultural transmission of the majority is usually

safeguarded and is therefore not one of its current concerns. As a consequence, the majority's educational policies for minorities are typically motivated by other group interests, in particular the goal to maintain and increase the economic and political resources and power of the state. However, to achieve this goal in a multicultural state, it is necessary to achieve the cooperation of the different ethnic groups (Kymlicka 2005). It appears that, depending on historical circumstances, majorities try to achieve this goal in one of two main ways: Either they attempt to unite the different ethnic groups under a common, super-ethnic identity (state citizenship; loyalty to a king etc.) while respecting their differences; or they try to solve the ethnicity-related coordination problems by attempting to assimilate the minorities (Mchitarjan 2014, see also Kymlicka 2005). Hence, the two main educational policies of majorities for minorities – support for or at least tolerance of the minority, versus the attempt to assimilate it – typically seem to have, despite their opposing direction, the same superordinate goal: to increase the economic prosperity and power of the majority (see Mchitarjan 2014, also see Bendrikov 1960, Hansen / Wenning 2003, Kymlicka 2005).

Nevertheless, the theory of cultural transmission in minorities suggests that the educational policies of majorities towards minorities *can* also be influenced by the majority's culture-transmission motive (Mchitarjan 2014). In particular, the majority's culture-transmission motive can be an (additional) motive behind some cases of assimilation politics. The reason is that the successful assimilation of a minority by the majority achieves not only the solution of the coordination problems in multi-ethnic states, but also an increase of the majority group and the transformation of minority resources in those of the majority (whose part the minority becomes in the transformation process), as well as the end to possible threats that emanate from the minority (e. g. separatism). In addition, the culture-transmission motive of the majority may also hide behind certain seemingly tolerant forms

of minority policy. In particular, the policy of trying to establish a super-ethnic identity in a multicultural state often leads, in practice, to the further strengthening of the majority culture. An example is the attempt to establish a super-ethnic identity (the Soviet citizen) in the later Soviet Union, which further increased the dominance of the Russian culture (Mchitarjan 2014, see also, Kappeler 2008:312, Mchitarjan 2011, for other examples see Kymlicka 2005).⁸

Given this motive structure of majorities, differing educational policies for minorities during different historical times, as well as different policies for different minorities at the same time, can be explained by differences in the expected benefits relative to the costs of these policies, and their estimated realizability. The potential benefits of *assimilation* have already been mentioned. As to the costs, the most important factor is that direct attempts at assimilation – because they maximally threaten the minority's culture transmission motive – usually trigger strong opposition from the minority, including protests, overt or covert resistance, and appeals to third parties (e.g., other countries or international organizations; for historical evidence see e. g. Mchitarjan 2006). In addition, at least in modern democratic societies, the forced assimilation of minorities by a majority is considered ethically unacceptable; hence attempts at assimilation also have moral costs (Mchitarjan 2014). The possible benefits of a *tolerant/supportive minority policy* include the avoidance of the material and moral costs of assimilation attempts (which often remain unsuccessful) mentioned above, fostering a loyal attitude of the minority, and the provision by the minority of desired goods such as manpower, technical knowledge, or the establishment of favorable relations to other countries (see Mchitarjan 2006). Its possible costs include problems arising from intercultural differences (e. g. communication problems, value clashes) and the expenditure of majority resources to support the minority.

3.2. Intercultural Interaction in the Economy

Although the theory of cultural transmission in minorities was originally developed to explain minority-majority interactions in the educational domain, I believe it can also be useful for explaining intercultural interactions and their outcomes in the economy. In particular, the theory can help to explain empirical findings on the profit-maximizing utilization of cultural diversity in international and multinational companies.

Research on the management of cultural diversity in international and multinational companies points to the existence of what, at first sight, appears to be a paradoxical phenomenon: On the one hand, under the pressure of global capitalism, recent years have seen an increasing intercultural opening of international and multinational companies: Cultural diversity seems to be increasingly desired and purposefully created, in particular by hiring employees from the local cultures. The main goal of this striving for cultural diversity is the maximization of profit (e. g. Aretz / Hansen 2003, Blazejewski / Dorow 2005, Juch / Rathje / Köppel 2007, Krislin / Köppel, 2008, Rathje 2010, see also Charta der Vielfalt [Diversity Charter] 2006). On the other hand, there is a trend to minimize cultural differences in the communication and work processes *within* inter- and multinational companies, by imposing on their multicultural staff a common corporate culture, typically derived from the ethnic culture of the parent company (e. g. Krislin / Köppel 2008, Blazejewski / Dorow 2005, Morgan / Kristensen 2006, Rathje 2003, 2004, see also Schreyögg 2000). One can summarize these two opposing trends of diversity management in inter- and multinational companies by saying: To be effective *outwardly*, i.e. when competing with other companies, the companies strive for cultural diversity (by recruiting members of the local culture); whereas to be effective *inwardly*, i. e. to maximize efficiency within the company, they strive for cultural homogeneity (by trying to establish a common corporate culture).

However, other research suggests an important qualification of the latter conclusion: There is evidence that an even better way to increase efficiency within multinational companies than to attempt strict cultural homogenization and standardization is to use a mix of strategies that promote homogenization, and strategies that tolerate or even encourage cultural differences (Rathje 2010, see also Rathje 2004, Juch et al. 2007, Leitl 2003). More precisely, this *flexible diversity management strategy* tries to attain homogenization of the patterns of thought and action of employees in areas of company life that are decisive for the company's economic success, while tolerating culture-specific practices in other areas, particularly where doing so promotes the well-being of the employees (e. g. allowing local religious practices) and is therefore, indirectly, again advantageous for the functioning of the company (see Rathje 2010:24).

From the perspective of the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, these findings can be interpreted as follows: The for-profit use of cultural diversity in international companies is a special case of how a sociocultural majority (the more powerful group in an intercultural interaction; cf. section 2), which in this case is represented by the company management, interacts with cultural minorities (employees from other cultures). The main goal of international and multinational companies is profit maximization; the company's policies towards minorities are subordinated to this goal. That is, multinational companies promote cultural diversity among its staff if, and where, it promises to increase the company's economic success. Specifically, employees from local cultures are recruited with the aim of helping the company – by virtue of their language skills and their inside knowledge of the local culture (e. g. ways of establishing and maintaining contacts to customers; knowledge about local market requirements and peculiarities; see e. g. Krislin / Köppel 2008) – to enter new international markets and to establish cooperation with partners abroad, in order to compete more

successfully with other multinationals as well as with local companies in the foreign countries. The most important qualification of these employees, in addition to their vocational qualifications, is their inside knowledge of the local culture; it is in large part because of this cultural qualification that they are being employed and appreciated.

The living of other cultures *within* inter- and multinational companies that might result from their cultural opening is, however, usually not desirable for the companies. The styles of workflow, communication and leadership practiced in these companies are – as a consequence of their historical origin – usually characterized by the work-related norms and values of Western industrialized societies, such as rationality, efficiency, reliability, and punctuality. Similar to ethnic cultures, these norms and values constitute the core of the corporate culture of the company to which employees from non-Western cultures are expected to adapt. In addition, again analogous to ethnic cultures, companies often demand of their employees to use a particular language (e. g. English) and to adhere to a particular dress code at the workplace. These features (norms, language, reliable symbols) mimic corresponding features of culture as understood in the theory of cultural transmission in minorities (Mchitarjan / Reizenzein 2010, 2014a). Hence, this theory provides some theoretical justification for speaking of corporate *cultures* (e. g. Schein 1995, Smircich 1983). Nevertheless, corporate cultures differ importantly from ethnic cultures: They are restricted to the work domain (which, it can be argued, is not central to ethnic cultures); and the carriers of company cultures – the staff and the leadership – do not constitute a complete reproductive group with all the necessary roles and institutions. For these reasons, the culture of a company is only a very shallow version of an ethnic culture, and it can therefore usually be combined (at least with some effort) with the ethnic cultural systems of its employees.

As mentioned in the discussion of educational policies for minorities (section 3.1.2), the preservation of culture is typically a current concern of minorities living in a multicultural state. The fulfillment of this desire therefore has the potential to contribute significantly to the well-being of minorities, whereas its frustration is apt to cause dissatisfaction and to increase the potential for majority-minority conflict. Minority dissatisfaction and intergroup conflict, in turn, weaken the cohesion and efficacy of the multicultural state, its ability to act as an adaptive unit. Partly for these reasons, a strategy of tolerance of cultural differences by the majority, or a mixed strategy of unitizing and difference-preserving strategies is often better suited to achieve the majority's goals of maximizing resources and power than a strategy of cultural homogenization. This is presumably why historically, the strategy of tolerance rather than that of forced assimilation seems to have dominated the policies of majority societies towards minorities (Mchitarjan 2014). For parallel reasons, a mixed strategy of internal homogenization and cultural diversity tolerance (and even maintenance) appears to be most successful for multinational companies.

4. Bibliography

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Endnotes

1. In the typical case, the minority is also the numerically smaller group; however, sometimes the numerically larger group can be inferior in power (e. g. in the apartheid regime of South Africa). In this case, the numerical majority is treated as the conceptual minority in the theory.

2. This methodological assumption is commonly made in historiography. Although it is clearly a simplification and idealization, systematic considerations and historical examples suggest that it is adequate for the analysis of many cases of minority-majority interactions. First, in many historical cases, the minority and the majority groups have a high degree of organization and, as a result, actually interact as individual agents (through their representatives). For example, a pedagogical emigrant organization negotiates with a state authority about the founding of a school (Mchitarjan 2006). In other cases, group actions are the result of parallel decisions of many group members reached individually. A possible example is the decision of migrant families to organize language instruction in the mother tongue for their children. In this second case, the term *the group stands for most members of the group or the typical group member* (see e. g. Tuomela 2000).

3. In recent years, evolutionary theorizing has found increasing interest in several fields of social science including anthropology, psychology, educational science, sociology, and economics (e. g. Henrich 2004, Kappelhoff 2004, Landa 2008, Scheunpflug / Wulf 2006, Treml 2004, Vromen 2002, Wilson et al. 2008). However, the theory of cultural transmission in minorities seems to be the first attempt to apply Wilson's evolutionary approach to the field of cultural transmission.

4. From the evolutionary perspective, this prediction is not self-evident, as it is not implied by the evolutionary definition of culture as "the totality of socially transmitted information" (Richerson / Boyd 2005:5). However, the theory of cultural transmission in minorities makes understandable why sociological definitions of culture often list norms, values and language as central features of culture (e. g. Kroeber / Kluckhohn 1952, Thomas 2005, see also Bolten 2009): Sociological reflection on the central features of cultures has, in retrospect, discovered those features of groups that are particularly important for their functioning

as adaptive units and on which, therefore, the culture-transmission motive focusses.

5. I emphasize that this interpretation of the data is consistent with that of the authors of the respective empirical studies, who – working within the mainstream paradigms – describe their findings as “surprising”, “unexpected”, or “contrary to assumptions” (e. g. Boos-Nünning / Karakaşoğlu 2006:307, Knafo / Schwartz 2001:222, Kwast-Welfel et al. 2007:199, Sam / Virta 2003:226, Skrobanek 2007:41f.).

6. Translation by the author.

7. Translation by the author.

8. However, as Kymlicka (2005) points out, increasing the dominance of the majority culture may often be an unintended side-effect rather than the goal of trying to establish a super-ethnic identity.

