EXAMINING CITIZENS' ATTITUDES TOWARD MULTICULTURALISM IN CROATIA

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of the paper is to examine the attitudes of citizens of the Republic of Croatia towards multiculturalism and to analyze the connection between the key dimensions of multiculturalism (personal contact, openness, social relations, and perception of social effects) and the general attitude towards multiculturalism. Special emphasis is placed on understanding the factors that shape the perception of cultural diversity in contemporary Croatian society.
Methodology/Design/Approach – The research was conducted using a quantitative approach with a structured survey questionnaire distributed online in May and June 2024. Respondents' attitudes were measured on a Likert scale across four dimensions of multiculturalism and general attitude. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis.
Findings – The results show that respondents have moderate attitudes toward individual dimensions of multiculturalism, while the general attitude and perception of multiculturalism are predominantly negative. The highest level of agreement was recorded in the dimension of personal contact, and the lowest in the perception of the social effects of multiculturalism. Regression analysis confirms that all analyzed dimensions have a statistically significant and positive impact on the general attitude, with the perception of social effects being the strongest predictor. The model explains a significant portion of the variance in the general attitude, thus confirming the hypothesis.
Originality of the research – The paper contributes to the existing literature by providing an empirical analysis of Croatian citizens' attitudes toward multiculturalism, an area that remains insufficiently systematically researched in the national context. The value of the paper lies in integrating multiple dimensions of multiculturalism into a single analytical model and identifying key determinants of attitudes, which can serve as a basis for shaping public policies and guiding further research.
Keywords multiculturalism, citizens' attitudes, cultural diversity, social cohesion, threat perception, Croatia

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism (Lat. multus – many/multiple + culture) is defined as a normative-political concept and a public policy framework aimed at the institutional recognition, protection, and promotion of cultural diversity within a society. As a public policy framework, multiculturalism is primarily operationalized through the education system and the media, which play a key role in fostering intercultural competencies, disseminating knowledge about diverse cultural traditions, and promoting the principles of equality and mutual respect.

Cultural diversity is a richness for humanity (Cifrić, 2018). It represents a unique historical heritage worthy of human admiration and respect, as each culture, in and of itself, provides answers to fundamental questions of life (Ward et al., 2025). We can appreciate cultural diversity only if we understand it, and understanding is possible only if there is a genuine willingness to do so. Therefore, mutual understanding among cultures requires knowledge of them, which is then followed by mutual respect (Ivaniš, 2015).

Globalization processes particularly in tourism context exert a strong influence on the cultural structure of contemporary societies, making them increasingly diverse and thereby placing new demands on understanding cultural dimensions, barriers, and social constraints (Avhad, 2025). Intensified migration flows, driven by social inequalities, limited or inadequate education, environmental crises, climate change, and armed conflicts, underscore the need to analyse transformations of identity and belonging among migrant populations. These dynamics call for the systematic study, interpretation, and management of cultural diversity, as individuals in multicultural societies navigate between host and migrant cultures, different languages, religions, values, and customs often in tourism related interactions.

Multiculturalism is conceptualized as a framework in which diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities not only coexist, but are also actively understood, recognized, tolerated, and included within social structures (Gotynyan-Zhuravlova, 2022). The ultimate goal of this approach is to promote societies that foster coexistence, equality, and social cohesion, thereby positioning multiculturalism as a key component of sustainable social development in conditions of increasing global mobility and cultural complexity.

The concept of multiculturalism refers to the presence and coexistence of multiple cultures within the same environment, emphasizing cultural diversity as a fundamental characteristic of contemporary societies (Gasimova, 2025). The terminology associated with multiculturalism, including derivatives such as "multiculturalist" or "multicultural," is relatively recent and has emerged primarily within academic circles, as well as in political and economic debates that examine the nature, identity,

and dynamics of modern society. Multiculturalism is also described as the presence of individuals from two or more cultural backgrounds within a single organization (Pekerti, 2019). In practical terms, multiculturalism is reflected in the demographic structure of a given area, city, or country, while in the political context the concept is applied in various ways. On the one hand, the emphasis is placed on ensuring equality among different cultural groups within society; on the other, on promoting the preservation and valorisation of cultural diversity as a key element of social cohesion and identity. Multiculturalism is thus increasingly gaining the status of a key imperative of contemporary society, with intercultural understanding becoming a necessary precondition for effective communication among diverse cultures and traditions (Ivaniš, 2015).

Multiculturalism must therefore be normatively and institutionally grounded in policies of equality, economic redistribution, and social restructuring, as argued by Fraser (1995). Such an approach implies moving beyond the mere cultural recognition of differences and incorporating structural interventions aimed at reducing socioeconomic inequalities and transforming existing patterns of social stratification. This conception is also complementary to the core objectives of integration policies, which seek to ensure equal civic status for immigrants and to foster their social inclusion. In this context, integration is not limited to the formal-legal acquisition of rights, but also involves the development of a sense of shared belonging and the establishment of social cohesion between immigrant populations and the majority society.

In this sense, multiculturalism goes beyond the mere descriptive fact of cultural plurality and entails the active shaping of social institutions and public discourse in order to ensure the equal status and visibility of diverse cultural groups (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2026).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Conceptualizing Multiculturalism: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

The growing body of scholarly literature on multiculturalism reflects the contemporary socio-political climate, with research increasingly focusing on issues such as social inclusion, social cohesion, discrimination, racism, minority rights, and human rights (Loh, 2022). These domains not only provide an empirical basis for the critical assessment of existing policies but also encourage the development of practical solutions, particularly in light of the rise of populism and xenophobia. Moreover, digitalization and the expansion of virtual spaces further intensify the visibility of cultural differences and potential conflicts, positioning social media as a significant arena for the expression and negotiation of cultural identities (Kurt, 2025).

Detailed and nuanced insights into multiculturalism contribute to strengthening and stabilizing social cohesion, as an understanding of differences among cultural groups helps prevent conflicts and minimize prejudices, thereby directly supporting the development of tolerance within communities. Insights into multiculturalism also enable the timely identification of social inequalities, discrimination, and institutional barriers affecting marginalized groups, creating the preconditions for greater fairness and inclusion within the economy, as well as for the design and implementation of new integration policies, particularly within educational systems. In the social sciences, the concept of culture is considered one of the most theoretically demanding and significant constructs. Despite its conceptual complexity, culture occupies a central position in theoretical discussions on multiculturalism, as the level of social diversity and structural complexity directly shapes the need for its systematic theoretical and practical examination. The more heterogeneous societies become, the greater the need for analytical frameworks that facilitate the understanding and management of multicultural processes.

In the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in scholarly articles and publications dedicated to analyzing the role and significance of multiculturalism across different national contexts. Contemporary research indicates that perceptions of multiculturalism are increasingly shaped by subjective social norms and everyday interactions among cultural groups (Ward et al., 2025). Multicultural policies in the 2020s are evolving toward a model of pluralistic governance of diversity, emphasizing active intercultural dialogue rather than mere passive tolerance (Ivaniš, 2015). In educational systems, multicultural values have been associated with higher levels of social cohesion and a reduction in stereotypes.

In contemporary migration studies, there is an increasing need for integrative approaches that move beyond viewing migrants merely as objects of research and instead position them within a dynamic relationship with research processes and the broader social environment. In this context, Gulin Zrnić (2025) develops an analytical framework that examines the interdependence of epistemological foundations, methodological choices, and the social conditions within which migration processes unfold. The author starts from the premise that research methods are not neutral instruments but active participants in the production of knowledge about migration, just as migrants themselves contribute to the constitution of the research field. Particular attention is given to the concept of conviviality, which is approached as a theoretical and analytical tool for interpreting everyday interactions and social practices in multicultural settings. Conviviality is not treated solely as a normative ideal of coexistence, but as an empirically grounded category that enables a deeper understanding of how differences are negotiated, reinterpreted, and integrated into everyday life. Such an approach opens space for the analysis of micro-level social relations, where multiculturalism is examined through concrete experiences, adaptation strategies, and forms of cooperation between migrants and the host population. By applying the concept of conviviality in the Croatian context, the author demonstrates that multicultural processes do not unfold in a linear or uniform manner, but rather emerge from complex interactions between institutional frameworks, social expectations, and individual practices. Empirical findings indicate that migrants' experiences

are shaped through everyday encounters, negotiations, and adaptations, thereby confirming multiculturalism as a processual and relational category. In doing so, the study contributes both to the theoretical advancement of migration research and to methodological reflections on how these phenomena are studied.

Findings from a European Parliament study (2024) conducted within the framework of the Eurobarometer public opinion survey, although primarily focused on broader political and social attitudes of citizens, provide a relevant empirical basis for analyzing contemporary multicultural processes. Although the study is not designed as a specialized scientific investigation of multiculturalism, its results offer insight into value orientations that indirectly shape the social dynamics of cultural diversity. The data indicate a pronounced inclination among young people in Croatia toward universalistic democratic principles. Solidarity, tolerance, and respect for diversity are identified as key normative values structuring their social and political attitudes. Such a configuration of values points to the potential for the development of inclusive social practices and suggests a generational shift toward the affirmation of pluralism as an integral component of the democratic order. At the same time, the results show that citizens of European countries expect the European Union to play a protective and cohesive role, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of preserving national culture and identity. This duality, between support for supranational integration and the affirmation of national distinctiveness, opens space for further research into the relationship between European political integration and local cultural identities. In this sense, the findings provide an important starting point for both theoretical and empirical reflections on multiculturalism in the context of contemporary European societies.

In a study conducted by Župarić-Iljić and Lalić (2024), citizens' attitudes in Croatia toward foreigners and minority groups were analyzed, highlighting their multidimensionality and contextual conditioning. The findings indicate that these perceptions are shaped through the interplay of perceived threat, experiences of intergroup contact, and everyday practices of coexistence. The authors demonstrate that respondents interpret issues of cultural identity, migration, access to rights, and interactions with diverse social groups within a broader political and social discourse characteristic of the Croatian context in 2024. Attitudes are not formed in isolation but are embedded in public debates, media narratives, and institutional policies that structure the understanding of diversity. The empirical analysis further confirms that evaluations of migrants and minorities are differentiated and influenced by sociodemographic characteristics, as well as by personal experiences of contact. Positive and negative evaluations coexist within the same social space, suggesting that perceptions of multicultural groups are neither homogeneous nor linear. This opens space for deeper theoretical reflection on the relationship between social structure, individual experience, and the formation of attitudes toward cultural diversity.

The growing number of studies within the global academic community can be attributed to the interplay of interconnected social, political, and economic processes. Several key factors explain this trend. Parekh (2002) interprets multiculturalism not as a threat to social order, but as a foundation of legitimate pluralism that supports the development of inclusive policies. Such policies go beyond the passive recognition of cultural differences and actively protect, value, and affirm diverse cultural identities within society. A similar perspective is advocated by the Council of Europe (2008), which emphasizes the importance of a multicultural framework in promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, and social cohesion in pluralistic societies. According to the Council of Europe (2008), intercultural dialogue contributes to strengthening respect for human rights and democratic values, while reducing marginalization and potential conflict. Mansouri and Elias (2025) advocate an interculturalist approach that reinforces contemporary multicultural policies by actively encouraging intergroup interaction and cooperation, moving beyond passive tolerance of cultural differences. They highlight that, in the context of intensified migration flows, more flexible pluralistic frameworks are required, ones that integrate cultural diversity with social cohesion by linking normative ideals with practical action. In their view, multiculturalism should not remain merely a theoretical concept, but must be operationalized through policies and practices that promote solidarity, mutual understanding, and inclusive engagement within social communities.

Such a trend is not equally present in Croatia, particularly in the period from 2020 to 2025. Existing studies are often partial (i.e., thematic studies) or qualitative in nature, while large-scale national surveys on multiculturalism have not been published as standalone data sources during this period. In the Croatian context, empirical research points to the heterogeneity of attitudes toward multiculturalism (Župarić-Iljić & Lalić, 2024). Studies indicate that the media, the education system, and public policies play a key role in shaping perceptions of cultural diversity (Ivaniš, 2015). Studies from 2024 confirm that attitudes toward foreigners and minority groups simultaneously encompass dimensions of acceptance, coexistence, and perceived threat (Župarić-Iljić & Lalić, 2024). Nevertheless, a shift in research focus is observable in Croatia: empirical studies of multiculturalism are gradually moving beyond predominantly theoretical discussions toward the analysis of concrete integration processes, including refugee integration and the experiences of foreign workers. Findings from existing research suggest that the level of social contact and everyday interaction significantly influences both the degree of integration and the formation of perceptions of multicultural phenomena (Ivaniš, 2015). This has led to the establishment of an initial empirical body of data on migrants' experiences in Croatia, providing an important foundation for the further development of public policies and theoretical models. At the same time, current findings indicate that social integration is still, in many cases, characterized by neutral or reserved attitudes, which opens space for the improvement of public policies, educational programs, and institutional mechanisms aimed at promoting understanding and the affirmation of multiculturalism (Kiralj Lacković & Ajduković, 2024).
Mesić (2004), in Minorities in Croatia and Challenges of Multiculturalism, analyzes the position of ethnic minorities in Croatia and examines the challenges of implementing normative multiculturalism in a post-transitional context. The aim of the study was to assess how Croatian society, as structurally multicultural, treats ethnic minorities at both institutional and normative levels, and to what extent it is prepared to accept multiculturalism as a coherent public policy. The findings point

to a discrepancy between the formal legal framework and its practical implementation. Although minorities possess relatively extensive legal rights, their actual social inclusion remains limited due to a lack of political will and institutional support. Multiculturalism is thereby reduced to the demographic fact of ethnic diversity, while normative multiculturalism understood as the active integration of differences into the social structure and collective consciousness, remains insufficiently developed. The author concludes that minority rights largely derive from international obligations rather than from an internally consolidated commitment to pluralism, emphasizing the need to transform dominant perceptions of minorities and ensure their systematic inclusion across all spheres of social life.

Čačić-Kumpes (2004), in Multiculturality in Croatian Education, explores the historical development, institutional frameworks, and contemporary challenges of multiculturalism in the Croatian education system. The analysis shows that the concept of multiculturalism has been present across different political and state formations, including the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and socialist Yugoslavia. Normative and legislative frameworks regulating minority education have served as key mechanisms for institutionalizing cultural diversity. Particular emphasis is placed on the socialist Yugoslav period, during which significant progress was made toward an intercultural model of education, including the right to education in one's mother tongue and the development of bilingual educational programs. The author concludes that, despite discontinuities caused by political changes, there is a certain continuity in efforts to integrate cultural differences within the education system. These historical experiences may serve as a relevant foundation for shaping contemporary pluralistic cultural policies in both national and European contexts.

Zidarić (2004), in Multiculturalism/Interculturalism – the Challenging Issues and Dilemmas of the Democratic Transition, examines the challenges of implementing multicultural and intercultural principles in post-communist societies, with particular reference to Croatia. The author argues that the integration of these principles represents a key indicator of the success of democratic transition, especially through reforms of the education system. Although former socialist states were formally multinational and multiethnic, such characteristics were often declarative and lacked consistent institutional operationalization. During the transition period, the need emerged for the genuine acceptance of pluralism and the development of intercultural awareness. In the Croatian case, this process has been further complicated by the legacy of war and experiences of ethnic conflict, which hinder the establishment of stable political consensus. The author concludes that the adoption of multiculturalism and interculturalism is a long-term and complex process requiring comprehensive legislative, institutional, and educational reforms, as well as continuous theoretical and empirical engagement.

Mesić and Bagić (2011), in The Attitudes of Croatian Citizens toward Cultural Diversities, demonstrate that Croatian society exhibits a relatively open attitude toward cultural differences in a context where national and religious communities form part of everyday life, while also highlighting differences across sociodemographic groups. In terms of perceptions of the European Union, Croatian citizens expressed moderate optimism regarding multicultural dynamics within society. Only a small proportion of respondents expressed concern that EU integration might threaten national identity, indicating a relatively positive attitude toward supranational integration alongside the preservation of local cultural and identity-specific features.

Gregurović (2016) approaches multiculturalism through the lens of European policies of cultural recognition and minority integration. The author emphasizes that the heterogeneity of theoretical and practical approaches demonstrates that no single strategy can fully address the challenges of integrating diverse cultural groups into society. Consequently, national policies should aim to ensure equal treatment and a sense of belonging for all members of society, although such objectives are often met with criticism, disagreements, and institutional constraints in practice.

Kiralj Lacković and Ajduković (2024), in Differences in Indicators of Socio-Psychological Integration Between Refugees from Syria and the Receiving Community in Croatia, examine perceptions of threat and attitudes toward the integration of refugees and foreigners, which are closely linked to the foundations of multiculturalism in society. Their study shows that perceptions of realistic and symbolic threat (e.g., the belief that foreigners endanger resources or cultural norms) significantly influence attitudes toward cultural diversity. This suggests that feelings of threat or insecurity toward "others" may be an important factor in shaping attitudes toward multiculturalism in Croatia.

A clear lack of continuity in research on citizens' attitudes toward multiculturalism is evident within the academic tradition. While several isolated studies exist (e.g., Župarić-Iljić & Lalić, 2024; Gulin Zrnić, 2025), there are no institutionalized research programs that systematically monitor public attitudes toward multiculturalism, resulting in fragmented and non-comparable data.

This study is therefore particularly important, as it does not rely on purely declarative theoretical claims but instead analyzes concrete dimensions of attitudes, such as the acceptance of diversity, perceived threat, tolerance, and experiences of intergroup contact. Through the interpretation of empirical findings, it demonstrates the heterogeneity and complexity of attitudes, which is essential for understanding multicultural dynamics within society.

1.2 De Facto Pluralism, De Jure Multiculturalism: The Croatian Model

In the context of globalization and increased population mobility, multiculturalism emerges as a key concept for understanding and managing contemporary social transformations. In the case of Croatia, the development and implementation of public policies aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue, equality, and social inclusion may have significant implications for both social and economic development. Systematic support for multicultural practices has the potential to enhance international competitiveness, social stability, and the long-term sustainability of development (Mansouri & Elias, 2025).

Although Croatia is constitutionally and legally defined as a state that recognizes and protects the rights of national minorities, the full normative acceptance of multiculturalism remains a subject of scholarly debate. According to the 2021 population census, 22 national minorities are officially recognized in Croatia (DZS, 2022), and they are guaranteed the right to preserve their language, culture, and identity with institutional support from the state. Within the framework of cultural autonomy, minorities exercise a range of collective rights, including guaranteed representation in the Croatian Parliament, where eight seats are reserved for minority representatives, representing a relatively high standard in a regional comparative context.

However, an analysis of political and legal developments indicates that the normative framework for minority protection has been shaped to a significant extent by international obligations and processes of Euro-Atlantic integration, rather than as a result of a domestically generated political consensus. In the post-communist period, shifts in patterns of linguistic identification among the population have been observed. While earlier censuses indicated that approximately 82% of citizens reported Croatian as their mother tongue, the 2021 census records a share of 96.12% (DZS, 2022). This change may be interpreted through the lens of linguistic homogenization, social conformity, and processes of national consolidation following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The institutional protection of minorities in Croatia is structured across three levels: (1) international legal protection of minority rights, (2) bilateral agreements with the kin-states of specific minority groups, and (3) the national constitutional and legislative framework. Although such a multilayered system formally ensures a high level of legal protection, the implementation of specific rights in practice often depends on the political context and the strategic interests of governing actors. This creates space for the instrumentalization of minority rights in fulfilling international standards, while simultaneously exerting a limited impact on the transformation of the dominant nation-state model.

From a sociological perspective, national minorities in Croatia occupy a specific position: they are integrated into the dominant social framework, while simultaneously maintaining their own ethnic institutions and organizational autonomy. In theoretical terms, their position can be analyzed in relation to the typology developed by Kymlicka (1996), whereby Croatian minorities exhibit characteristics of national minorities, while also displaying certain features that distinguish them from typical immigrant groups. They are not the result of recent economic migration and enjoy a broader scope of collective rights than most immigrant communities in Western European countries.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that Croatia represents a de facto multicultural society in both demographic and institutional terms; however, multiculturalism as a normative and political doctrine has not yet been fully internalized within public discourse and political practice. Minorities are often perceived through the lens of challenges to the homogenizing model of nation-building, rather than as a constitutive and enduring element of social pluralism. Such ambivalence between formal protection and societal perception remains a key analytical framework for understanding both the limitations and the potential of multiculturalism in the contemporary Croatian context.

Strengthening a multicultural identity in Croatia requires the implementation of a set of coordinated measures encompassing the education system, public policies, the media sphere, and political participation (Piljek, 2024). In the field of education, it is essential to actively integrate multicultural values into curricula and promote intercultural projects, as educational institutions play a central role in shaping young people's attitudes toward different cultures. At the same time, the development and implementation of clear minority integration policies, including equal access to education, employment, and social services constitute a fundamental basis for building an inclusive social framework. The media also play a significant role in promoting multiculturalism, primarily through the presentation of positive examples of cultural diversity and the encouragement of dialogue among different ethnic groups. Furthermore, the active inclusion of minorities in political life and decision-making processes enables adequate representation and ensures that their interests and voices are incorporated into societal decisions. The implementation of these approaches contributes to the creation of a harmonious and inclusive society in which cultural diversity is perceived as a value and an asset, rather than as a barrier.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The empirical study was conducted with the aim of examining Croatian citizens' attitudes toward multiculturalism, employing an analytical-experimental approach. For the purposes of the research, a structured questionnaire was developed and distributed to respondents in electronic form via online platforms and social media. The study was carried out at the national level, including 160 respondents from both urban and rural areas, thereby enabling insights into regional differences in the perception of multiculturalism, regardless of industry classification (NACE). 61.3% of respondents were male and 38.7% were female. Predominantly, 40.6% were aged between 25 and 30, while 30% were under the age of 24. The majority of respondents were university educated

(42.5%), while 23.7% had a college degree and 22.5% had completed secondary education. Data collection took place during May and June 2024. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 33 questions organized into several thematic sections.

Based on a review of the literature, attitudes toward multiculturalism were adapted and measured as individual attributes (items) grouped into dimensions, as well as through an overall attitude and general perception of multiculturalism. Personal Contact and Experience with Different Cultures adapted from Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) are operationalized through: (1) opportunity to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, (2) frequency of communication with people from different cultural backgrounds, (3) friendship from different cultural backgrounds, (4) desirable to have friends from different cultural backgrounds. Personal Openness and Willingness for Close Relationships adapted from Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) and Župarić-Iljić and Lalić (2024) includes: (1) openness to learning about and accepting new cultures, (2) willingness to form friendships with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, (3) willingness to engage in a romantic relationship with a person from a different cultural background, and (4) willingness to marry a person from a different cultural background. Attitudes toward Social and Professional Relationships adapted from Esses et al. (2001) includes: (1) comfort with having a colleague from a different cultural background, (2) comfort with having a superior from a different cultural background, and (3) general attitudes toward immigrants from different cultural backgrounds. Perceived social effects and benefits of multiculturalism, adapted from prior Verkuyten (2005) are operationalized through: (1) the contribution of multiculturalism to overall societal development, (2) its role in promoting cultural diversity and social enrichment, (3) its potential to enhance social cohesion, and (4) its capacity to reduce discrimination. Overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism adapted from Mlinar and Krammer (2021) includes: (1) general attitudes toward multiculturalism, (2) the perceived importance of multiculturalism for the future development of Croatia, and (3) the perception of Croatia as a multicultural society. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 5 indicates "strongly agree."

According to the aim of the study, which is to examine the relationship between individual dimensions of multiculturalism and the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism, the following hypothesis was formulated: individual dimensions of multiculturalism have a significant and positive effect on the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism (H1).

The research model consists of independent and dependent variables. In the model, the independent variables are represented by the individual concepts (dimensions) of multiculturalism, namely: personal contact and experience with different cultures, personal openness and willingness for close relationships, attitudes toward social and professional relationships, and perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism. The dependent variable is the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism.

To test the proposed hypothesis, a series of analytical procedures were applied. The reliability and validity of the constructs were first assessed, followed by descriptive statistical analysis of the sample and key variables. Finally, multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the impact of individual dimensions of multiculturalism on the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism.

The reliability of the measurement instrument was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: **Results of reliability analysis**

Construct/Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Personal contact and experience with different cultures	0.763	4
Personal openness and willingness for close relationships	0.906	4
Attitudes toward social and professional relationships	0.872	3
Perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism	0.948	4
Overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism	0.756	3

Source: Authors

According to the results presented in Table 1, the values of Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from 0.756 (for the construct "overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism") to 0.948 (for the construct "perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism"). These values indicate a high level of internal consistency and reliability. All coefficients exceed the threshold of 0.70 recommended by Hair et al. (2010), suggesting that the measurement instrument is highly reliable.

The validity of the measurement instrument was assessed in two ways. First, content validity was ensured through the use of dimensions and variables conceptually grounded in the literature on multiculturalism. Second, construct validity was examined empirically using correlation analysis.

Correlation coefficients among variables within the dimension "personal contact and experience with different cultures" range from 0.489 to 0.850 ($p < 0.01$). For the dimension "personal openness and willingness for close relationships," coefficients range from 0.621 to 0.924 ($p < 0.01$). In the dimension "attitudes toward social and professional relationships," correlation coefficients range from 0.582 to 0.901 ($p < 0.01$). Within the dimension "perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism,"

coefficients range from 0.775 to 0.870 ($p < 0.01$). Finally, for the construct "overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism," correlation coefficients range from 0.476 to 0.777 ($p < 0.01$). Overall, the correlation coefficients within each dimension indicate moderate to strong relationships among variables, supporting the internal coherence of the constructs.

Accordingly, the measurement instrument meets the criteria of validity and reliability.

3. RESULTS: ASSESSMENT OF CROATIAN CITIZENS' ATTITUDES TOWARD MULTICULTURALISM

Attitudes toward specific elements of multiculturalism were measured across four dimensions: personal contact and experience with different cultures, personal openness and willingness for close relationships, attitudes toward social and professional relationships, and perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism. Mean scores for each dimension and the corresponding items are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: **Descriptive Statistics for Attitudes toward Individual Elements of Multiculturalism**

Dimensions and Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Personal contact and experience with different cultures	*3,25*	*1,005*
Opportunity to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds	3,27	1,288
Frequency of communication with people from different cultural backgrounds	3,02	1,281
It is desirable to have friends from different cultural backgrounds	3,44	1,267
I have friends from different cultural backgrounds	3,29	1,416
Personal openness and willingness for close relationships	*3,20*	*1,222*
Personal openness to learning about and accepting new cultures	3,46	1,228
I am willing to form new friendships with people from different cultural backgrounds	3,73	1,277
I would be in a relationship with a person from a different cultural background	2,89	1,492
I would marry a person from a different cultural background	2,73	1,516
Attitudes toward social and professional relationships	*3,20*	*1,151*
I am comfortable having a colleague at work from a different cultural background	3,72	1,347
I am comfortable having a superior at work from a different cultural background	3,50	1,449
Attitudes toward immigrants from different cultural backgrounds	2,38	1,039
Perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism	*2,64*	*1,347*
Multiculturalism contributes to overall societal development	2,59	1,407
Multiculturalism contributes to cultural diversity and social enrichment	2,73	1,487
Multiculturalism enhances social cohesion	2,49	1,392
Multiculturalism can help reduce discrimination	2,76	1,507

Source: Authors

The mean scores for the individual dimensions range from 2.64 to 3.25, indicating moderately expressed attitudes of respondents toward specific elements of multiculturalism. The highest level of agreement was observed for the dimension "personal contact and experience with different cultures," followed by "personal openness and willingness for close relationships," "attitudes toward social and professional relationships," and "perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism."

The following section presents the mean scores for the construct "overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism."

Table 3: **Descriptive statistics for the construct "overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism"**

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attitude toward multiculturalism	2,73	1,287
Multiculturalism is crucial for the future development of Croatia	2,15	1,304
Croatia is a multicultural country	2,29	1,206
Overall mean score for the construct	2,39	1,038

Source: Authors

The results indicate a low level of agreement with the individual statements, suggesting that respondents tend to hold a more negative overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism. To examine the impact of individual dimensions of multiculturalism on the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism, and to test the corresponding hypothesis, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. In this model, the individual dimensions of multiculturalism (personal contact and experience with different cultures, personal openness and willingness for close relationships, attitudes toward social and professional relationships, and perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism) were treated as independent variables, while the construct "overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism" served as the dependent variable.

Prior to the regression analysis, correlation coefficients between the variables (constructs) were calculated in order to assess potential multicollinearity within the model. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: **Correlation Matrix in the Initial Regression Model**

Variable (Construct)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Personal contact and experience with different cultures	1.000				
2. Personal openness and willingness for close relationships	0.572	1.000			
3. Attitudes toward social and professional relationships	0.517	0.843	1.000		
4. Perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism	0.258	0.586	0.677	1.000	
5. Overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism	0.286	0.594	0.633	0.648	1.000

Note. All correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level.
Source: Authors

As shown in Table 4, most correlation coefficients are below 0.80; only one coefficient exceeds this threshold, indicating a high correlation between variables 2 and 3, i.e., between the dimensions "personal openness and willingness for close relationships" and "attitudes toward social and professional relationships." According to Bryman and Cramer (2009), coefficients above 0.80 may indicate a potential multicollinearity issue. To address this, these two variables were combined into a new composite variable. As noted by Leech et al. (2005), variables may be combined when such an approach is conceptually justified, which was the case in this study. This resulted in the creation of a new variable, "personal openness and relational attitudes" (alternatively: "interpersonal and social openness", which may sound more natural in an academic context). This variable integrates aspects of close personal relationships as well as social and professional interactions. The new variable has a mean score of 3.20 (SD = 1.139), while the corresponding Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.937) indicates strong internal consistency and a high level of reliability.

Accordingly, the revised regression model includes three independent variables, and the multicollinearity analysis was repeated. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: **Correlation Analysis in the Revised Regression Model**

Variable (Construct)	1	2	3	4
1. Personal contact and experience with different cultures	1.000			
2. Personal openness and relational attitudes	0.568	1.000		
3. Perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism	0.258	0.656	1.000	
4. Overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism	0.286	0.639	0.768	1.000

Note. All correlation coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level.
Source: Authors

According to the results presented in Table 5, the correlation coefficients do not exceed the recommended threshold of 0.80 (Bryman & Cramer, 2009), indicating that there is no issue of multicollinearity in this regression model.

Table 6 provides a summary of the results of the multiple regression analysis and the testing of hypothesis H1.

Table 6: **Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis**

Independent variables	b	Beta	t	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0,471		2,541	0,012*		
Personal contact and experience with different cultures	0,111	0,191	2,173	0,043*	0,654	1,528
Personal openness and relational attitudes	0,223	0,244	3,133	0,002**	0,399	2,504
Perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism	0,471	0,610	9,191	0,000**	0,550	1,818
$F(3,156) = 35,523$, $p < 0,01$; $R = 0,788$, $R^2 = 0,622$						

Note. The dependent variable is overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism; * significant at the 0.05 level; ** significant at the 0.01 level
Source: Authors

The results presented in Table 6 indicate a significant, positive, and strong relationship between the individual dimensions of multiculturalism and the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism ($R = 0.788$, $p < 0.01$). Based on the statistically significant F-value, the independent variables in the model represent significant predictors of the dependent variable. Furthermore, the dimensions of multiculturalism explain 62.2% of the variance in the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism. The strongest individual significant effect on the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism is observed for the dimension "perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism" ($\beta = 0.610$; $p < 0.01$). This is followed by the dimension "personal openness and relational attitudes" ($\beta = 0.244$; $p < 0.01$). The weakest, yet still significant, effect is found for the dimension "personal contact and experience with different cultures" ($\beta = 0.191$; $p < 0.05$). In addition, Table 6 includes collinearity diagnostics used to assess the validity of the regression model. According to Leech et al. (2005), tolerance values should exceed the threshold of $1 - R^2$. In this case, the threshold is 0.378. As shown in Table 6, all tolerance values are above this criterion, indicating that multicollinearity is not present in the model and that the tested model is both significant and valid.

Overall, the results of the multiple regression analysis demonstrate that the dimensions of multiculturalism significantly and positively predict the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism, thereby confirming hypothesis H1. Specifically, more frequent personal contact and experience with different cultures, greater personal openness and more positive attitudes toward relationships in a multicultural environment, as well as a more positive perception of the societal effects and benefits of multiculturalism, lead to more favorable overall attitudes and perceptions of multiculturalism.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of the empirical study indicate the complex and multidimensional nature of Croatian citizens' attitudes toward multiculturalism, revealing a clear discrepancy between declarative openness to cultural diversity and more reserved underlying value orientations. This finding is consistent with previous research in the Croatian context, which points to the coexistence of both positive and negative evaluations of cultural diversity within the same social space.

Descriptive analysis shows that respondents' attitudes toward individual dimensions of multiculturalism are moderate, with mean values not exceeding the neutral level of agreement. The highest level of agreement is observed in the dimension of personal contact and experience with different cultures, suggesting that respondents engage in everyday interactions with members of other cultural groups or at least express normative acceptance of such contact. However, lower scores in the dimension of personal openness to close relationships, particularly in the context of intimate and marital relationships, indicate the presence of latent social distance. In other words, acceptance of "others" is evident at the level of surface social interaction, but declines as relationships become more intimate and personally significant.

The findings are also relevant in the context of tourism, particularly for key stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, employees, and the local population. In Croatia, the tourism sector increasingly relies on an international workforce, especially during the high season, which further intensifies everyday intercultural interactions. The relatively low perception of the sociocultural benefits of multiculturalism identified in this study may therefore have broader implications for tourism development, particularly in terms of hospitality, service quality, and communication. If cultural differences are not widely perceived as a positive social value, this may negatively affect host and guest relationships as well as the integration of foreign workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors. More positive perceptions of multiculturalism could contribute to strengthening destination image, inclusiveness, and long-term sustainability.

In this context, the results confirm that the overall attitude and perception of multiculturalism among respondents is relatively negative, with a mean value below the neutral level. The particularly low level of agreement with the statement that multiculturalism is crucial for the future development of Croatia indicates a limited internalization of multiculturalism as a developmental paradigm. This finding further supports the notion of "de facto" multiculturalism without full normative and societal affirmation of the concept.

Despite relatively reserved overall attitudes, the results of the regression analysis provide important insight into the mechanisms underlying attitude formation. All analyzed dimensions of multiculturalism were found to have a statistically significant and positive effect on overall attitudes, thereby confirming the proposed hypothesis. The strongest predictor is the perceived social effects/benefits of multiculturalism, implying that the way individuals interpret the societal costs and benefits of cultural diversity plays a crucial role in shaping their overall attitudes. This finding has important implications, as it suggests that changes in societal narratives and increased awareness of the positive impacts of multiculturalism may directly contribute to its broader social acceptance.

The dimension of personal openness and relational attitudes also emerged as a significant predictor, confirming the importance of interpersonal and social experiences in shaping attitudes. Although personal contact with members of other cultures has a statistically significant effect, its impact is weaker compared to other dimensions. This suggests that the frequency of contact alone is insufficient for fostering positive attitudes; rather, the quality of these interactions, as well as the broader social context in which they occur, is of greater importance.

These findings can also be interpreted within a broader theoretical framework emphasizing the role of intercultural dialogue, education, and institutional support in the development of inclusive societies. The moderate and often ambivalent perceptions observed among respondents point to the need for more systematic interventions in the domain of public policy, particularly through the education system and the media, in order to strengthen awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity and reduce prejudice.

In conclusion, the study confirms that attitudes toward multiculturalism in Croatia are heterogeneous and multilayered, shaped by a combination of personal experiences, value orientations, and perceptions of societal effects. Although a certain level of openness and acceptance exists, it is not sufficiently strong to result in a clearly positive overall attitude toward multiculturalism. Therefore, future policies and research should focus on strengthening positive perceptions of the societal benefits of multiculturalism and fostering meaningful intercultural interactions, in order to enhance social cohesion and ensure sustainable development in the context of increasing cultural diversity.

CONCLUSION

The conducted study provides an empirically grounded insight into Croatian citizens' attitudes toward multiculturalism and confirms its complex, multidimensional, and often ambivalent nature. Although contemporary Croatian society is characterized by the presence of cultural diversity, the findings indicate that multiculturalism has not yet been fully internalized as a societal value nor recognized as a key developmental paradigm.

Descriptive results show that respondents express moderate attitudes toward individual dimensions of multiculturalism, with the highest level of acceptance observed in everyday contacts and surface-level social interactions. At the same time, lower levels of openness toward closer and more intimate relationships, as well as more negative perceptions of the societal effects of multiculturalism, point to the existence of latent social distance and a certain degree of mistrust. Particularly concerning is the finding of a relatively negative overall attitude toward multiculturalism, including a weak perception of its importance for Croatia's future development. Despite this, the results of inferential analysis confirm that personal contact, openness toward others, and the perceived societal benefits of multiculturalism are significant predictors of overall attitudes. The strongest effect is observed for the perception of societal impacts, clearly highlighting the importance of public discourse, education, and media representation in shaping social attitudes. This confirms that attitudes are not static, but are subject to change through experience, information, and social interaction.

The findings have important theoretical and practical implications. At the theoretical level, they support the need for integrative approaches that conceptualize multiculturalism as a dynamic process shaped by the interaction between individual experiences and structural factors. At the practical level, the results point to the necessity of strengthening public policies aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue, reducing prejudice, and affirming the positive societal effects of cultural diversity. These findings are relevant for the tourism industry, where positive perceptions of cultural diversity may influence destination image, service quality, and the long-term sustainability of tourism.

The paper has several limitations, including a relatively small sample and a focus on general attitudes towards multiculturalism, without distinguishing attitudes towards national minorities, immigrants, or specific cultural and ethnic groups. Future research could use a stratified sample and examine demographic characteristics between urban and rural local populations.

In conclusion, although Croatia represents a de facto multicultural society, the further development of an inclusive and cohesive social framework requires systematic efforts in the areas of education, media, and public policy. Strengthening intercultural competencies, fostering meaningful intercultural interactions, and promoting positive narratives about multiculturalism are key prerequisites for its deeper societal acceptance and long-term sustainability.

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