How to harmonize relations between groups of people in an era of globalization? An overview of the *intergroup contact theory*

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Abstract

The paper first highlights the importance of dealing with the methods of prejudice reduction in Central Europe in an era of globalization. Then, it summarizes the most important findings of the intergroup contact research, which shows that contact between groups of people improves intergroup attitudes. The paper reviews the history of the development of the Contact Hypothesis and the research separately on direct and indirect intergroup contact. Direct intergroup contact is a face-to-face interaction with an outgroup member. Indirect intergroup contact improves attitudes by having, observing or imagining an ingroup friend who meets with an outgroup friend. Indirect contact includes a) extended contact: learning that an ingroup member has a friend from the outgroup, b) vicarious contact: observing an ingroup member interacting with an outgroup member, c) parasocial contact: observing an interaction between an ingroup and outgroup member through different kinds of media d) imagined contact: imagining oneself interacting with an outgroup member. Finally, the article presents the examples of successful application of the contact theory in multicultural settings.

Key words: intergroup contact, prejudice reduction, globalization

Globalization has increased the movement of people across borders around the world with no exception for the borders of the Central European countries. Taking the Czech Republic as an example, in 2014 approximately 450 000 foreigners were staying in the country legally (Ministry of the Interior, 2014) and according to estimates, several thousand of other foreigners illegally. The number of immigrants started to grow in 2001 and has culminated since 2008 with the onset of the global financial crisis. Among Visegrad Four countries, the Czech Republic hosts the largest number of immigrants. Contact between different status groups and the challenge of managing diversity are very pressing issues (not only in the Czech Republic) in an era of globalization. The largest ethnic minorities in the country are Ukrainians, Slovaks, Poles, Vietnamese and Roma. Considering all distinct minorities, the worst mutual relations exist between Czechs and Roma (Lelíková, 2010). 83% of Czechs consider Roma asocial and 45% of Czechs would like to expel

them out of the Czech Republic (STEM, 2014). The unemployment of the Roma minority is very high, reaching 100% in some regions. Czechs feel threatened by Roma (Žingora & Graf, 2014), on the other hand, Roma are discriminated against. According to a 2010 survey, negative views on Roma are often based on stereotypes and prejudice (STEM, 2010).

Problematic relations between groups of people who differ in ethnicity or other aspects (e.g. language, gender, religion) can be easily found throughout the whole Central Europe. Besides the Roma issue, which is common to all Visegrad Four countries, plenty of other examples of strained relations between groups are present in the region. These include intolerance towards people with alternative sexual orientation in Slovakia; concerns about the Muslim minority in Poland; anti-Semitic views in Hungary; a long-term conflict between Hungary and Slovakia regarding Hungarian minority living in southern Slovakia etc. As mentioned earlier, Central Europe is becoming a region of increasing diversity. This diversity should be approached the right way, not to become the source of social clashes. In the coming lines I would like to introduce the intergroup contact theory that offers suggestion how to challenge prejudice and thus harmonize the relations between social groups. Prejudice reduction is of great importance to Central Europe because only tolerant and integrated society is the key to successful cross-cultural coexistence in an era of globalization.

Direct intergroup contact, i.e. having an outgroup friend yourself

One of the first studies introducing the idea that contact between groups of people can reduce prejudice were published after World War II (Singer, 1948; Stouffer, 1949). Despite the formal segregation policy of the United States Army, combat conditions often required white and black soldiers to be a part of the same army units. The results of the studies showed that white soldiers serving in integrated units had more positive attitudes towards people with Afro-American origin than those who did not have any contact with black soldiers. Researchers then continued studying intergroup contact in such environments as public housing (Deutsch & Collins, 1951) and university settings (Allport & Kramer, 1946), confirming that contact between groups improves intergroup attitudes.

In 1954, inspired by previous studies, Gordon Allport introduced the so-called Contact Hypothesis in his book The Nature of Prejudice. The hypothesis suggested that under certain conditions contact with outgroup members can lead to prejudice reduction. He hypothesized:

"To be maximally effective, contact and acquaintance programs should lead to a sense of equality

in social status, should occur in ordinary purposeful pursuits, avoid artificiality, and if possible enjoy the sanction of the community in which they occur. The deeper and more genuine the association, the greater its effect. While it may help somewhat to place members of different ethnic groups side by side on a job, the gain is greater if these members regard themselves as part of a team." (Allport, 1958, p. 454)

According to Allport, four prerequisite features of the successful contact situation included: a) equal status of the groups; b) common goals of the group members; c) intergroup cooperation; d) support by authorities, law, social norms, or customs. Under these conditions, meeting people from different social groups helps one to realize that the negative stereotypes of other groups are not based on reality, which then results in more positive attitudes. Allport's work has inspired further extensive research. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) analyzed 515 different studies conducted during a time period of over 50 years, comprising 713 independent samples, and confirmed that intergroup contact improves intergroup attitudes. The meta-analysis also showed that optimal conditions suggested by Allport are not necessary for prejudice reduction. However, if they are present, even greater reduction in prejudice usually occurs.

After some time since the introduction of the contact hypothesis, the attention of researchers has shifted from investigating the features of contact situation to examining how contact affects attitudes. Several mediating mechanisms, which help to reduce prejudice, have been proposed. Contact works primarily by affective (i.e. diminishing negative and inducing positive affect) and cognitive means (i.e. learning about the outgroup). Contact theory has been extended in various other directions. It has been proven that contact effects are stronger for majorities than they are for minorities (Tropp, 2007). Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) showed in their meta-analysis that contact works also for groups other than those based on ethnicity, race or culture, for which contact theory was originally developed. The other groups include stigmatized outgroups such as overweight people (Alperin, Hornsey, Hayward, Diedrichs & Barlow, 2014), the homeless (Lee, Farrell, & Link, 2004), homosexuals (Herek & Capitanio, 1996), or disabled people (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Recent research has confirmed that negative intergroup contact is more influential in shaping outgroup attitudes than positive contact (Barlow et al., 2012; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009). However, positive contact is more frequent, which translates in mostly beneficial effects of contact experiences (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014). The other important factor reducing bias towards the outgroup turned out to be contact in a form of intimate relationships, particularly friendship. Friendship exerts influence over a longer time period and is especially effective in prejudice reduction. Studies have found that friendship is negatively related to prejudice (Hamberger &

Hewstone, 1997; Wagner, Christ, Pettigrew, Stellmacher, & Wolf, 2007).

Within the research of conditions supporting or inhibiting the influence of intergroup contact on attitudes, more attention has been paid to situational factors than to individual differences among people engaging in contact. As for personality characteristics, extraversion has been proven to affect intergroup attitudes through the tendency of extroverted people to make friends with outgroup members easily. However, intergroup friendship as a type of contact improved prejudicial attitudes more in people scoring low in extraversion (Turner, Dhont, Hewstone, Prestwich, & Vonofakou, 2013).

Other studies dealing with inter-individual personality differences focused specifically on the ideological variables such as right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation. Among people high in right-wing authoritarianism are those obeying authorities, complying with social norms and those having unfriendly attitudes towards minority groups, when influential people approve of having unfriendly attitudes (Altemeyer, 1981; Asbrock, Christ, Duckitt, & Sibley, 2012). They tend to be prejudiced, mainly with respect to race (Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005). People scoring high in social dominance orientation accept superiority of one group over other in a society (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994). Unlike Allport's assumption (1954) that contact as a situational variable cannot overcome prejudice rooted in personality, recent studies have shown contact being especially beneficial for people scoring high in both, right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (Hodson, 2008; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009).

Indirect intergroup contact, i.e. having, observing, or imagining an ingroup friend who has an outgroup friend

Extended contact

Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Ropp (1997) introduced another important extension to the intergroup contact theory. They proposed a process of "extended" intergroup contact. According to the extended contact hypothesis, the mere knowledge that an ingroup member has a close outgroup friend improves intergroup attitudes (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). This process occurs through the referent informational influence of the ingroup member mediating a message about the positive social norms of the ingroup about the outgroup (Haslam, McGarty, & Turner, 1996; Liebkind, & McAlister, 1999). A change in perception of social norms within the ingroup has a consequent influence on the attitudes of the ingroup members towards the outgroup.

Wright et al. (1997) include the involvement of the ingroup and outgroup members in the

self and the outgroup's perception of positive social norms of the ingroup among enabling effects of extended intergroup contact. As for the first mentioned mechanism, intergroup contact is effective to the extent to which the outgroup becomes a part of one's cognitive self-scheme. This happens first by the inclusion of ingroup members in the self and consequently, through the interaction between the ingroup and outgroup members, also by inclusion of outgroup in the self. Overlapping one's self with the ingroup and outgroup results in expressing more positive emotions and attitudes towards members of the ingroup and outgroup (Turner et al., 2008). The perception of positive outgroup norms and thus the perception of positive behaviour of outgroup members towards the ingroup serves as a base for the change of the negative perspective on the outgroup (Turner et al., 2008).

The number of studies dealing with extended intergroup contact has been rising recently. Researchers are trying to clarify the principles and conditions under which extended contact reduces prejudice. It has been found that the relation between extended contact and attitudes towards outgroup explain mediators such as perceived collective threat (Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007), perceived trust towards outgroup (Dhont & Van Hiel, 2011), self-disclosure (Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007), empathy towards outgroup (Tam, Hewstone, Harwood, Voci, & Kenworthy, 2006) and perceived similarity of outgroup (Turner et al., 2007). Also important is the fact that extended contact affects intergroup relations primarily in an environment with a high level of segregation, in conflicts between groups (Christ et al., 2010) and in places where opportunities for contact are rare (Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007). When extended contact occurs, the group salience becomes heightened. Since a person aware of the interaction between ingroup and outgroup members does not perceive the members of the outgroup as individuals, but as a part of the group, it is very probable that the attitude change resulting from contact will generalize from the individual to the whole outgroup (Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Another advantage of the extended contact compared with face-to-face contact is a lower degree of intergroup anxiety present during the interaction (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004). Paolini, Hewstone and Cairns (2007) found that extended intergroup contact works better for people, whose attitudes are based more on thinking and reflecting than on feelings and emotions. Similar principles have been revealed at a group level. Extended contact is a more effective tool of prejudice reduction for outgroups evoking more cognitive reactions (e.g. engineering students, vegetarians), than for outgroups evoking more affective reactions (e.g. seniors, older students).

Hodson, Harry and Mitchel (2009) have demonstrated that extended contact is, like direct contact, more effective for people scoring high on the right-wing authoritarianism scale than for those scoring low on the scale. Recent meta-analysis has proven that there is a positive correlation

between right-wing ideologies and prejudice (Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). We can therefore say that not only direct, but also extended contact is an effective method for reducing prejudice in those who need an intervention the most.

Vicarious contact

The extended contact effect shows that the knowledge about ingroup members having outgroup members as friends promotes positive attitudes towards the outgroup (Wright et al., 1997). Research on vicarious contact builds on the work of Wright and his colleagues and suggests that observation of contact between the ingroup and outgroup members is also influential. Ingroup members who successfully meet and communicate with outgroup members show that interaction between groups is possible and also how such interaction may occur (Mazziota, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011). According to the social cognitive theory, it is observation of others that shapes human attitudes, values and behavior (Bandura, 1986).

Mazziota et al. (2011) confirmed the assumption of improving intergroup relations by contact observation experimentally. They recruited German university students to participate in the research, where the participants were asked to rate videos presenting the life of students at a university. Participants' task was to select a video that would best represent the university on its official website. However, the true aim of the video was to present a contact situation between a German and a Chinese student, and thus contact between an ingroup and outgroup member. The control group videos were the same; only the actors were not of different ethnic background, instead both were German. After watching the videos, participants were asked to take part in another study, seemingly unrelated to the first research experiment. This time the students were asked to interview two members from different ethnic groups, and finally describe their feelings and intentions to behave in a certain way towards the ethnic groups from which interviewees came from. One of the ethnic groups present at the interview were the Chinese. Observing contact between ingroup and outgroup members led to more positive attitudes and greater openness to future face-to-face interactions with outgroup members as compared to observing contact between two ingroup members (Mazziota et al., 2011).

Parasocial contact

Researchers have also focused on studying contact between ingroup and outgroup members through different kinds of media (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005; Browne Graves, 1999; Mutz & Goldman, 2010; Maziotta et al., 2011). Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes (2005) formulated the so-called parasocial contact hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, parasocial, or more precisely one-sided

form of intergroup contact, improves intergroup attitudes in similar way as a direct form of contact. Schiappa et al. (2005) had participants watch either a TV series starring homosexual men, a reality show starring homosexual men, or a comedy show starring a transvestite. Observing parasocial contact with the protagonists led to reduction in the participants' prejudices towards homosexuals and transvestites.

Ortiz and Harwood (2007) focused on the relationships of TV series characters. Prerequisite for the influence of the parasocial contact on the attitudes of TV viewers is that they can identify with the TV characters, who they consider as ingroup members and who meet with outgroup members. The authors suggest that the improvement of attitudes through parasocial contact occurs in a similar way as in vicarious contact – by imitation (Bandura, 1986). The perception of positive intergroup relations allows viewers to identify themselves with a popular protagonist, whose friendship with an outgroup member improves the viewers' attitudes towards the whole outgroup.

Parasocial contact turned out to be effective also in radio broadcasting. Paluck (2009) conducted a field experiment in Rwanda, a country that experienced a civil war and genocide in the nineties. For a year, the Rwandan participants included in the experimental group listened to a radio series offering educational messages about prejudice, violence and trauma reduction, which were depicted through two fictitious communities. The control group listened to a radio series dealing with health. Radio mediated pattern of behavior between communities in the experimental group had a positive effect on the perceived social norms and the actual behavior of the listeners. In comparison with the control group, the Rwandan participants who listened to the series on prejudice reduction were more willing to express their views on sensitive topics, embark on open discussions, and were more active in negotiating and cooperating with outgroup members.

The perception of outgroups via media does not necessarily improve intergroup attitudes. There is evidence that negative or limited depiction of minorities in the media results in strengthening negative stereotypes and attitudes towards the minorities (Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005; Mastro, 2009). For example Pagotto and Voci (2013) found that the greatest impact on the deterioration of attitudes towards immigrants in Italy had negative newspaper and TV news.

Imagined intergroup contact

Another form of indirect intergroup contact is imagined contact. Crisp and Turner (2009) define imagined contact as *"mental simulation of social interaction with one or more outgroup members"* (p. 234). There is evidence that imagining contact improves intergroup attitudes by reducing intergroup anxiety (Turner et al., 2007; Turner & Crisp, 2010; Husnu & Crisp, 2010).

Imagining contact with outgroup members is a suitable method of prejudice reduction particularly in situations where conflicts are present and where face-to-face contact is unlikely or impossible. It serves as a kind of a preparation for future interactions with outgroup members and at the same time it builds up motivation for future meetings. Crisp and Turner (2012) also point out that already Allport (1954) considered the potential of contact at "imaginative level" as an important first step in promoting tolerance and positive intergroup relations.

The imagined intergroup contact reduces prejudice towards outgroups characterized by race or ethnicity, but also towards outgroups that are targets of prejudice for example due to sexual orientation, mental illness, physical disability, religion, age, or weight (Miles & Crisp, 2014). Recent findings indicated that imagined contact with outgroup members significantly improves intergroup attitudes in adults, but also in children (Cameron, Rutland, Hossain, & Petley, 2011; Vezzali, Capozza, Stathi & Giovannini, 2012); the effect is actually even stronger for children (Miles & Crisp, 2014). An important variable affecting intergroup relations when meeting face to face is the quality of contact (Eller & Abrams, 2004; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). The same applies to imagined contact. Imagining a slightly positive interaction has the same effects as imagining a neutral interaction, while imagining a negative contact experience increases prejudice. Another variable determining the influence of imagined contact on attitudes is the degree of elaborative instructions accompanying the process. The more detailed the instruction describing the contact situation is, the more accessible and stimulating is the help it offers for the future behaviour (Husnu & Crisp, 2010). Therefore, imagining a concrete place, time and course of interaction has a more significant influence on attitudes and behavior towards outgroups than not imagining an elaborated context for the interaction.

Research confirms that imagined intergroup contact improves both explicit and implicit intergroup attitudes (e.g. Turner & Crisp, 2010; Turner, Crisp, & Lambert, 2007; Miles & Crisp, 2014). However, more than attitudes, imagined contact affects the intention to behave in a certain way. This finding is consistent with other findings according to which mental simulation is directly related to the neurological architecture of the part of the brain responsible for embarking on activities (e.g. Kosslyn et al., 2001).

Application of the intergroup contact theory

Challenges of globalization related to intergroup relations require an action solving minority-majority problems stemming from prejudice. The idea of intergroup contact is enshrined in several political strategies around the world. For example UNESCO claims that contact between

members of different groups is key to ameliorate social relations. Concrete steps to improve relations between ethnic, racial or religious groups have been successfully applied in the development of special measures for example in the United States, Northern Ireland, Israel, and South Africa. These include educational programs, negotiating techniques, student exchange programs and parenting courses.

An example of successfully applied intergroup contact research-based educational technique is the jigsaw classrooms. It is a method of organizing classroom activities to make students depend on one another in order to succeed. Students are divided into expert groups, which are each assigned a topic or part of a lesson. Students first learn their topic and then assemble into jigsaw groups to teach their fellow classmates. The technique reduces racial conflict and increases educational outcomes in a multi-cultural world; it has been successfully applied in about 1500 elementary, high schools and colleges across the US (Jigsaw classroom, n.d.).

Another example of a successful application of the contact theory is an intergroup contact program developed in Israel (Kelman, 2008). The program consists of a series of workshops that involve interactions under optimal contact conditions (Allport, 1954) between influential officials from conflicting sides. Neutral academic facilitators facilitate the interaction. Political representatives should also be present at the meeting to ensure the institutional support for participants and to witness the effects of intergroup contact**. The meetings do not involve a commitment to any particular outcome; they are informal, framed as an opportunity for creativity and inventiveness. Workshops hold the possibility of changing intergroup attitudes of participants but also the possibility of changing ideologies regarding intergroup relations. The Declaration of principles from 1993 signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization has been considered a big success of this program (Kelman, 1998).

The third program I would like to mention was developed in order to promote reconciliation between Protestant and Catholic parents of young children across Northern Ireland. The project recently run in Belfast worked with hundreds of parents and school staff. Parenting was used as a tool for promoting reconciliation since the pre-school stage of education provides a good opportunity to influence parental attitudes and behaviors and having a positive effect on children in their formative years. Targeted schools were paired on a cross-community basis; emphasis throughout the course was put on communication, empathy, and conflict management. Positive progress has been reported by both parents as well as school based staff (Positive parenting programme report, 2013).

Research-based interventions are in general cost-effective and efficacious instruments for improvement of intergroup relations. They represent an example of the real life applications that

psychology can offer the world. If implemented successfully, they can pave the way for the design of successful public policies like mixed schooling and housing. By setting up such policies, governments send a signal to people that they agree with and support cross-group mixing. In such settings, people are likely to integrate with one another, thus, staving off social clashes. Intergroup contact may therefore represent one of the possible answers to the question how to combine different ethnic, cultural, and religious identities in a single space of globalizing Central Europe.

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