

## **THE ROLE OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN ESTABLISHING A POZITIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN STUDENTS FROM DIFFRENT CULTURES**

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*Abstract: People tend to reject what they do not know or they do not understand. Teaching them about the methods of knowing different cultures – using exemples from anthropology methods and theories and applying this knowledgement to the reality they know, we can offer them the necessary tools in order to achive a positive communication attitudes with fellow students with different cultural background. This study is based on an experiment conducted during the course of Introduction to Anthropology where the students where from Romania – urban/rural, romanian/rroma ethnicity - Moldova and Serbia.*

*Keywords: social cultral anthropology, communication, cultures, cultural backgrounds, multicultural dialogue*

The anthropological research of cultures can offer us the tools to build the necessary bridges between cultures, societies and people because most of the time a conflict or a misunderstanding arise from fear - fear of unknown, fear of not understanding – all that leading to intolerance and/or lack of communication.

The world we are living in today is based, more than ever on cultural interaction. And often, this cultural interaction is the one that decides the evolution of different aspects such as politics, status-quo, technology, industry, science, economics etc. A culture – at large scale or not – is no longer an isolate element in humans' life, in social evolution. Since globalization has emerged as a defining aspect for our society today, cultures have interacted and spread almost as fast as a blink of an eye. Another important aspect of today's, besides globalization, is migration. If by globalization, cultural interactions may have a positive aspect in giving birth to new cultures, or helping developing the one's that exists, the migration phenomenon may cause differences and tensions. Two people from opposite sides of the planet are today, closest from each other than two neighbours might've been 100 years ago. And yet, this closeness is what can apart the same two people in a face to face situation. And this paradox happens because the whole international arena is influenced by the cultural dynamics. Even if

we talk about national/international aspects or social/economical politics or communication/human interactions it's all coming down to culture.

Giving the large masses of people relocating today and the imminent interaction between cultures that are unknown on a solid knowledge base for either of the groups involved, we need to seek solution for understanding the basics of the cultures that we don't know, to facilitate a better communication. And that is a condition that applies both to the receiving society and the incoming community.

Today, more than ever the theory of Franz Boas<sup>1</sup> is probably more alive than it was in the beginning. Boas believed that culture is what defines people, and not biology; that we become what/who we are by developing in a specific cultural environment, we are not born with a cultural "predetermination"; and that race, sex and age are cultural constructs and not natural conditions itself.<sup>2</sup>

As important as his vision is Margaret Mead's<sup>3</sup> research that focuses on the way that the "alternative" societies saw the western societies. This reaffirms Boas' idea that societies must be seen in a horizontal way, not a hierarchical one.

In order to see if Anthropology can change the way a culture and its representatives are perceived, we've conducted a study among the students from Communication and Public Relations from University of Craiova during the Introduction to Anthropology class. The study was conducted on 140 students – 47 students from first year of 2016-2017 academic year, 43 students from first year from 2015-2016 academic year and 50 students from first year 2014-2015 academic year. Before discussing the methods of knowing different cultures and why we have so many cultures with common or different elements around the world, we've asked our students three questions.

The elements we have focused on are the one related to primarily aspects that we perceive when we think to a culture. The first three questions were addressed at the beginning of the first semester, before giving to the students any elements related to the anthropology. The second questionnaire was presented to the students at the end of the first semester and we've tried to see how the information they received during class have influenced their perception. After all it Durkheim that said: "„... the evolution of the common conscience... progresses less than individual consciences. In any case, it becomes feebler and vaguer in its entirety. The collective type loses its background, its forms become more abstract and more indecisive. [...] however, that the common conscience is threatened with total disappearance. Only, it more and more comes to consist of very general and very indeterminate ways of thinking and feeling, which leave an open place for a growing multitude of individual differences.”"<sup>4</sup>

First question was: What is the first holiday you are thinking at? (Care este prima sarbatoare la care va ganditi?). 59 students choose to indicate as answer Christmas, 28 students Easter, 19 St. Mary, 19 Halloween and 15 St. Valentine as show in the graphic below:

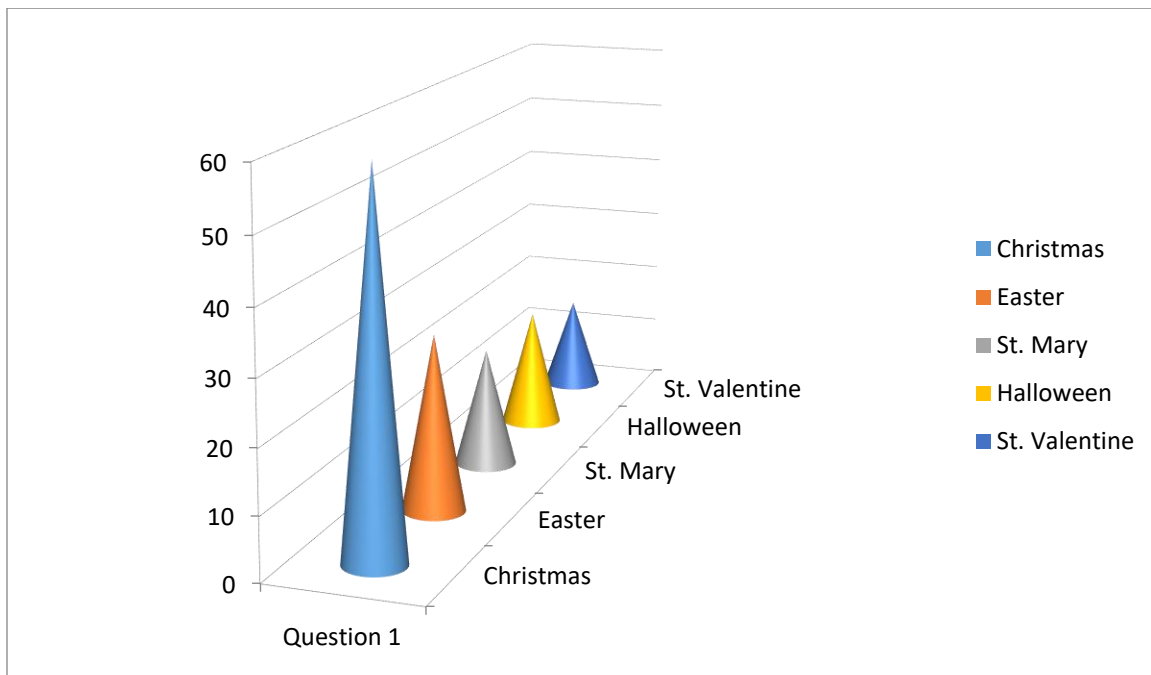
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<sup>1</sup> Robert Deliege, *O istorie a antropologiei*, Ed. Cartier, Chisinau, 2007, p 127

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

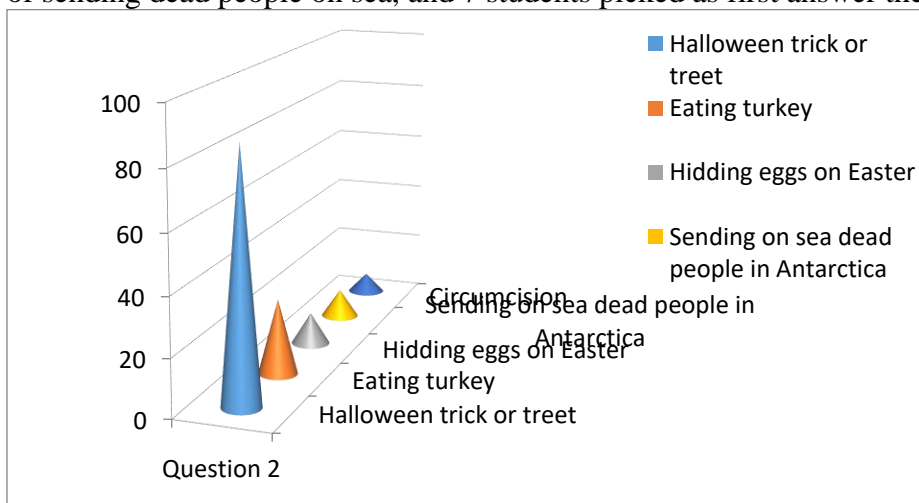
<sup>3</sup> Harris, Marvin, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory. A History of Theories of Culture*, New York, Editura Thomas Crowell, p.408.

<sup>4</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Division of Labour in society*, New York, The Free Press, 1933 ,p171-172



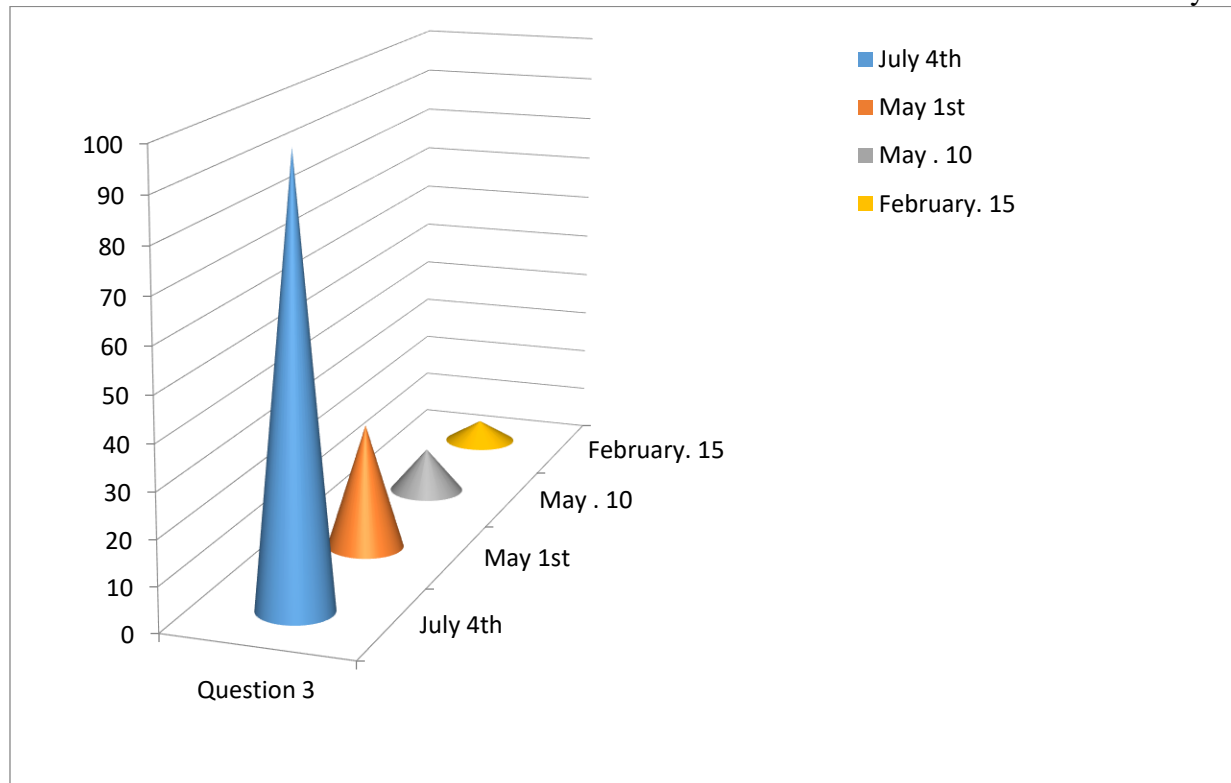
We can observe that their first choice when asked about a holiday is in close relation with the level of media promotion of those holidays. It is also interesting that, among holidays specific to our country (or universally encountered) we have in their option holidays from abroad, more specifically from United States of America. Another interesting aspect is that, even though among the respondents we had students from Serbia, Republic of Moldova or students with different ethnic background, specific holidays of those cultures are not among their first choice.

The second question we asked was: What customs from other cultures than yours do you know? (Ce alte obiceiuri din alte culturi diferite de ale dvs. cunoaşteţi?). 86 students picked as answer Halloween custom of trick and treat, 26 answered eating turkey, hiding eggs on Easter was picked by 11 students, 10 students said they knew about a custom in Antarctica of sending dead people on sea, and 7 students picked as first answer the circumcision.



We notice that the answers to this question also manifest an important influence from media, due to the fact that most of the answers are related with customs and traditions they saw on TV, social media, movies etc.

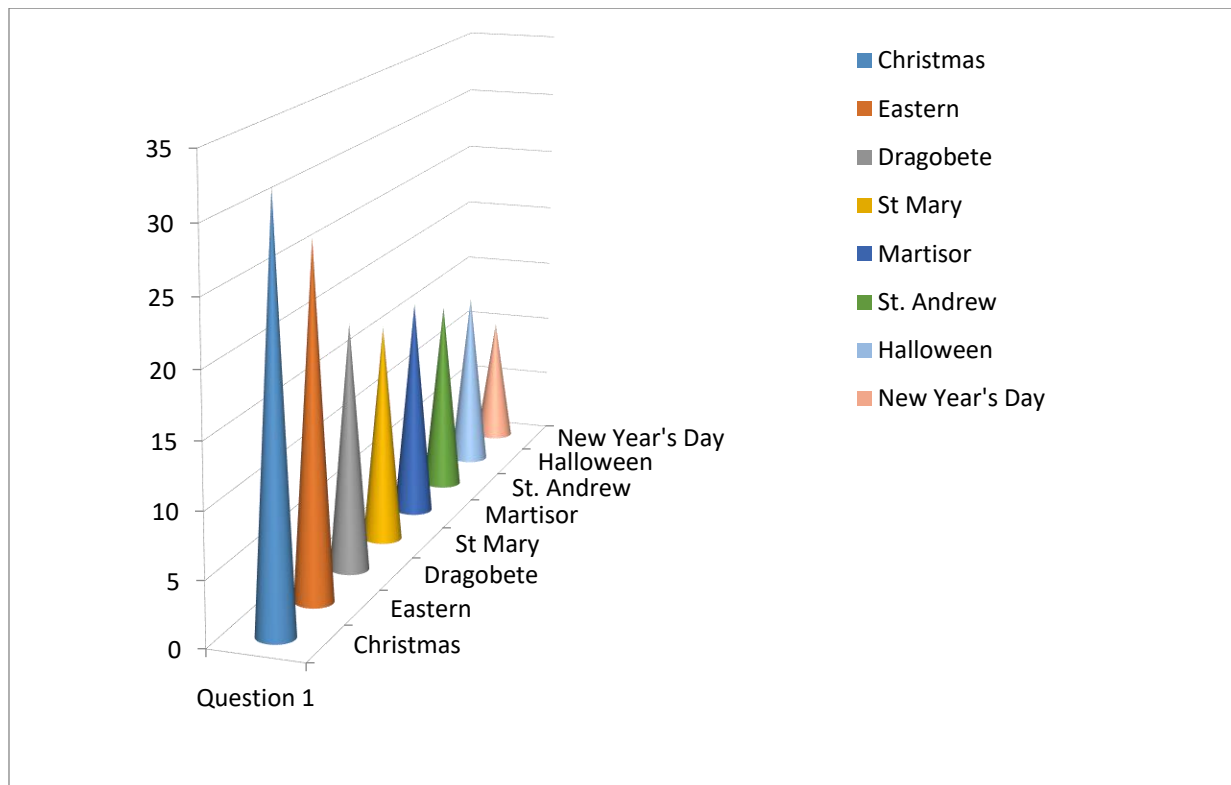
The third question we asked was: What important days do you know that marked a certain event, besides the ones related with a tradition? 97 students answered 4<sup>th</sup> of July, may first was the option chosen by 28 students, May 10 was picked by 10 students and February 15 was the answer given by 5 students. We observe that most of them indicated the national day of the United States of America and none of them thought to the National day of Romania. Also we observe that 5 of the students from Serbia have chosen their statehood day.



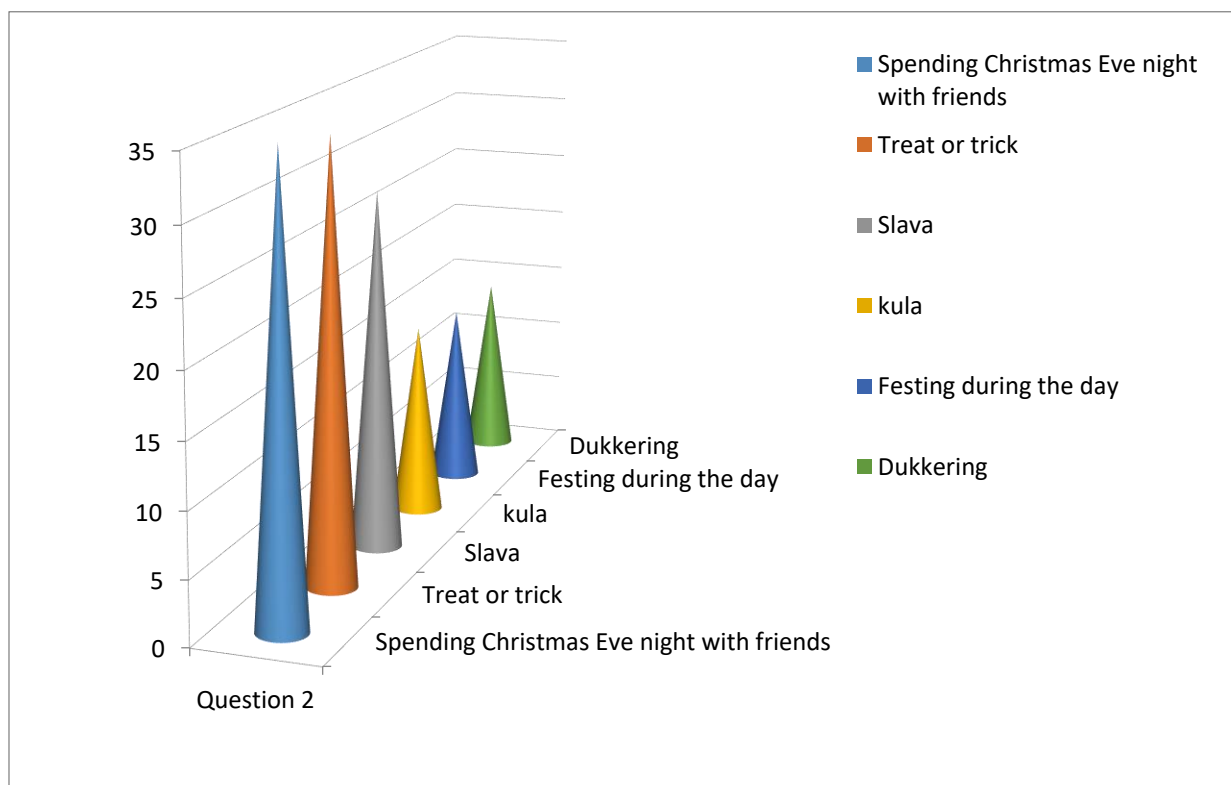
At the end of the first semester, after we explain to the students what cultures are, what are the anthropological methods of studying cultures, what defines a culture, how an individual is influenced by its own culture and what is the roll of customs, traditions in defining a person perception over the day by day reality, we've retaken the three questions.

The answers were the following:

For the first question, we observe that the answers have varied more, Romanian holydays have appeared among the answers – Dragobete has outplaced the Halloween holyday among students' preference as well as Martisor day.

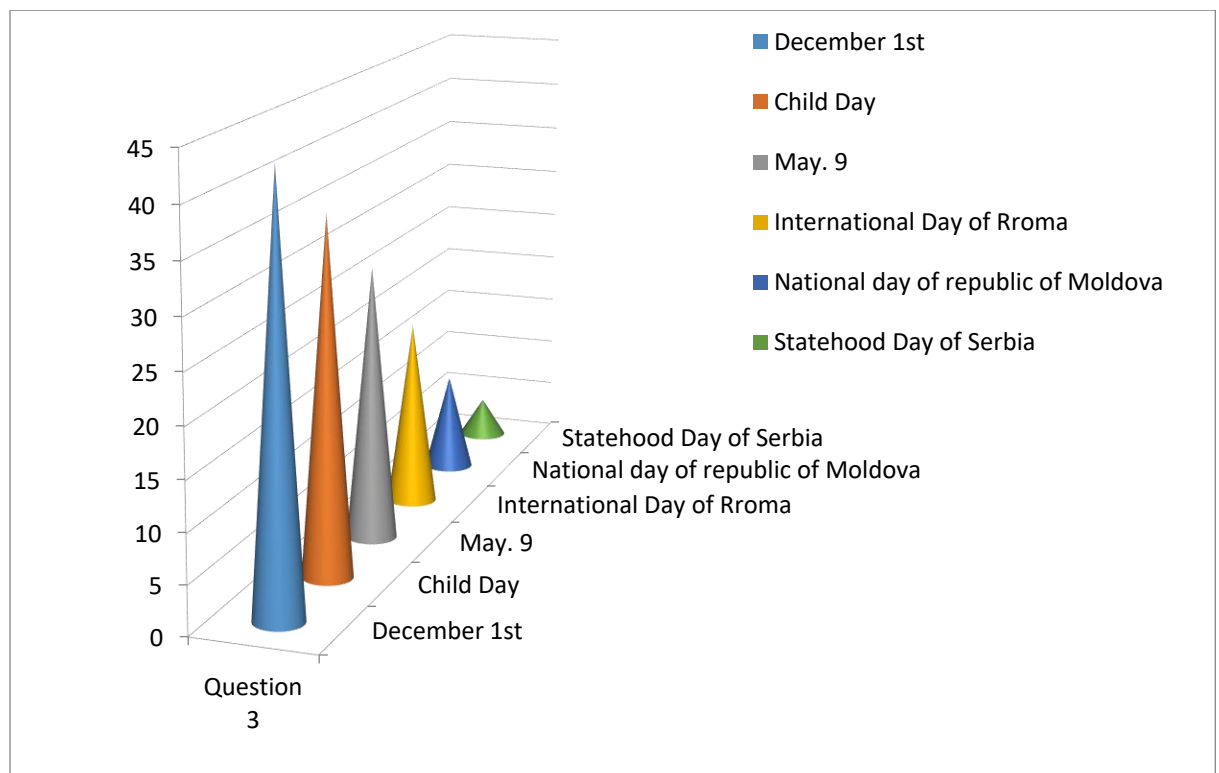


For the second question, we got the following answers:



Here we can observe some major changes in the way of perceiving other cultures. First of all it is interesting the most popular answer, spending Christmas Eve with friends, which can be explained by the fact that most of the students were from rural areas and for them to acknowledge that in the city usually people go out with friends was probably an impact factor. Also this answer acknowledges the fact that they understood that we can classified cultures through urban/rural characteristics not only in concordance with the nationality of its members. Also we observe that they acknowledge the culture of their fellow students from roma culture, giving the fact we have 14 students that indicated as answer Dukerring custom. This can be a real bridge in communication between representatives of cultures with different ethnic background, living in the same geographical area. Also it is interesting that this question reveals the fact that the students have retained information from the class giving the fact they mentioned among their answers the kula custom of exchanging gifts they've learned about when we talk about Malinowky and kula tradition at Trobriand trib<sup>5</sup>.

The answers for the third question were the following:



Regarding these question, we can also observe an evolution. Probably following the seminars related to the course were they had presentations on different topics related to aspects from different cultures, including a presentation on the importance of the national days – with emphasize on Romanian National Day – the answers students have given to this question had a major change in option. Besides the December first that is the favourite answer now faces to no answer at the previous study, we also have answers that are related with the cultural background of their colleagues.

<sup>5</sup> Deliege, Robert, *O istorie a antropologiei. Şcoli. Autori. Teorii*, Editura Cartier, 2007, p.192-198

After applying these questionnaires we can conclude that techniques and methods of anthropology can help improving the communication and perception among people from different cultures.

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