

CULTURAL IDENTITY, COLLECTIVE SELF-IMAGE AND RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS IN ECUADOR

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ABSTRACT— *The study of the Ecuadorian cultural identity, presented in this paper, is based on interviews of 1000 people in the coastal area of Ecuador. The results of the interviews show that the Ecuadorian people ground their national pride predominantly on the uniqueness of the Ecuadorian nature. Thus, the paper discusses the main constituents of the Ecuadorian cultural identity, which contribute to its specificity and uniqueness and which differentiate it from the other Latin American identities. Also, the research is focused on the level of ethnocentric consumerism in Ecuador and on its relation to the Ecuadorian national identity. An important finding of this paper is that the Ecuadorian people are rather religious and that religiousness has a special importance in both the Ecuadorian private lives and in the public sphere. This is why also the paper claims that religious feelings form the core of the Ecuadorian cultural identity, although not all the individuals might be aware of this fact. Finally, the paper discusses the relationship between national and civilizational identities in the Ecuadorian case, or between the 'Ecuadorianness' and the 'Latin Americanness' of the Ecuadorian people. In most of the cases the two identities are seen as a pair, where each one of the two compliments the other, rather than suppressing or competing with it. Thus, on the basis of the interviews a model of the Ecuadorian cultural identity is outlined.*

Keywords: cultural identity, Ecuador, Latin American culture, religiousness, self-image, self-perceptions

THE QUESTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY REVISITED

Cultural identity has been a subject of many academic debates during the last two decades. It is defined as differences in the ethnic background, race or physical traits and characteristics (O'Hair et al. 1995) or as a set of specific cultural values and norms (Rothwell 2000: 62). Cultural identity can be described as the identity of any group, such as, for example, national, ethnic, racial or even civilizational group. It is believed that cultural identity can be measured empirically with a selection of basic cultural characteristics: high / low context; monochromic/ polychromic time; (Hall 1989); high / low power distance, collectivism / individualism, female / male culture; high / low level of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede 2010); universalism / particularism (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2011), etc. The authors claim that one of the two characteristics in the dichotomies given above is always prevalent in a given cultural community. For example, in this classification Ecuador is presented as a culture with a relatively lower context, which means that communication is explicit and externalized in the speech in opposition to high-context cultures, such as Japan and China, where communication is implicit and more information is carried on the non-verbal than on the verbal level. All the Latin American cultures are believed to be polychromic too (Hall 1989). In polychromic societies several activities can be done simultaneously and time is perceived as a flexible category, while in comparison in monochromic cultures, such as the Western European or the North American ones, the accent is put on the sequence of events and on the importance of schedule, punctuality and

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preciseness. Also, in the classification of Hofstede (2010) Ecuador is shown as a highly collectivistic and masculine country with high power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Thus, according to the intercultural approach to identity, in order to describe the characteristics of a given culture it has to be compared to other cultures. The authors believe that only in the process of comparison the specific cultural traits can be outlined accurately and objectively. Otherwise researchers might be trapped in their own cultural assumptions and they might be unable to read the signs of the culture-in-question (Samovar & Porter 1998).

Self-perception, or the image, which a collective holds of itself, is responsible for the moulding of both individual and collective identity (Ashmore et al 2004). Perceptions of 'self' and 'others' form the core of cultural identity. Simultaneously, images of oneself and the 'other' are reflections and constructions of social reality and do not necessarily coincide with the reality itself. However, 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) and 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm et al. 1983) should not be exaggerated to the point where even a common ethnic origin or racial differences are denied for the sake of the socially constructed myths and beliefs (Eller, 1999). The idea of the nation as an image is emphasised by the adherents of both the constructivist and discourse approaches, according to whom the nation is a text and a message to be conveyed (Bhabha 1990: 1-2). Moreover, some empirical studies show that claims about oneself and one's own community can change within time and space (Bechhoffer et al).

In this respect cultural identity is defined by some scholars as a situational construct of the communication system of the community, which becomes evident when messages are communicated between individuals (Collier 1994: 39). These authors also state that cultural identity is grounded not only on articulated statements by individuals but also on the fact how these statements are accepted, approved or disapproved by important 'others' (Bechhofer et al. 1999). Thus, the feedback in communication has also been pointed out as an important mechanism for the construction of both individual and collective identities. This is why Carbaugh (1996: 23-24) proposes the cultural pragmatics approach, according to which social life can be seen as different social scenes where the identities have a particular social dynamics. According to the author such an approach gives the possibility to see that 'men' and 'women' in certain scenes can act as 'friends' or as 'colleagues'. Thus, it is also believed that the self is relative: it is either strongly dependent on the social roles which individuals play in different social groups or it is determined by the specific context and different discourses (Marcussen et al. 1999: 616). For example, one can be simultaneously an American, father, child, relative, employee and boss, etc. (Biddle 1979; Jardley & Hones 1987).

The national and ethnic self-perceptions are often articulated in statements, such as 'We, the Ecuadorians, are talented', or 'We are hospitable', 'We are hard-working', etc. People maintain their identity in relation to how they perceive themselves in regards to their personal talents, capacities, traits of character, as well as to their feelings and thoughts as members of a particular collective. In such a way cultural identity is as much self-concept as stereotypical assumptions about the individual and the community in comparison with other individuals and communities (Petkova & Lehtonen 2005). In other words, cultural stereotyping is believed to be an important mechanism of human individual and collective identification (Lehtonen 2005). Hence, cultural identity is a collection and reflection of collective images, thoughts, ideas and feelings. It is a psychological phenomenon of identification, which can be analyzed both on individual and on collective level (Petkova 2005). To put it shortly, the self-perceptions and self-images of individuals create their social world too.

According to Vergara et al. (2010) there are four main hypotheses for the cultural identities of the Latin American nations: the Indianist, the Hispanic-Catholic, the West-centered, and the mestizo. However, the theory of the 'mestizo nation' has become the most popular one in contemporary social sciences. The concept of 'mestizaje' has been broadly used to outline the basic characteristics of the Latin American culture. José Vasconcelos is believed to be the first to designate with this term the

mixed ethnic nature of the Latin American society. According to some authors the Mexican philosopher is also a proponent of the idea of the 'cosmic race', or 'la raza cósmica' (Horcaditas 2002) of the Latin American nations.

However, most of the contemporary researchers claim that in the past the concept of 'mestizo' nation was applied mostly to the prevalent component of people with mixed local and Spanish origin, while at the same time native Indians and Afro Latinos were practically excluded from it and marginalized (Hooker 2005). With the raise of the ethnic consciousness in the second part of the 20th century these ethnic components are nowadays considered to be equally important for the mestizo nation. Thus, in the study of the Latin American identities the emphasis is also put on the colonial heritage. The scholars state that the legacy of colonialism continue to exercise influence on the cultural awareness of the Latin American nations even in present-day life (Gareis 2005). In such a way, Latino identities are seen as heterogeneous identities (Hale, 1997). In the modern interpretation of the mestizo nation, mestizaje is believed to continually reconstruct the categories of ethnicity, race and culture. According to Wade (2001) blackness, whiteness and indigenosity are constantly being recreated as 'racial absolutes with primordial origins'. This also means that the ethnic and racial consciousness have nowadays become important ingredients of the Latin American cultural identities. However, despite the sharpened awareness of ethnicity and race Miller (2006) states that the Latin American countries have long been regarded as incomplete nations due to their lack of linguistic and ethnic distinctions.

Although there is a voluminous literature dedicated to the Latino culture as a whole and to the Latino diaspora in the USA, there are few studies of the Ecuadorian cultural identity in particular. However, contemporary research focuses on the mental image of the mestizo nation in Ecuador. Castillo and Carou (2002) claim that the Ecuadorian ethnic movements have changed considerably the cultural landscape of the country in contributing to the recognition of its ethnic and cultural diversity. Moreover, according to the authors in the process of promoting identity politics the self-image of the Ecuadorians has shifted from a class-based to an ethnically diverse society (Castillo, Carou 2002). Thus, the idea of 'Ecuadorianness' has also been elaborated in a search of a distinctive Ecuadorian identity and in a close relation to the ideas of hybridity and multiculturalism.

The aim of this study is to discuss the concept of cultural/ national identity on the basis of empirical data collected in Ecuador. An investigation of the social and cultural processes in the country, as well as of the Ecuadorian collective self-image and social beliefs, may result in outlining a particular model of identity on the Latin American continent. Thus, the research aims to find out the basic elements of the Ecuadorian cultural identity, as well as the specific cultural characteristics which differentiate Ecuador from the other Latin American cultures.

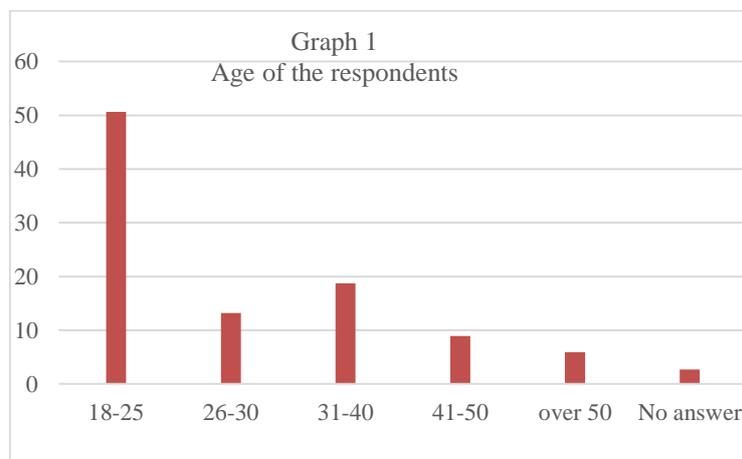
THE ECUADORIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY: BASIC PARAMETERS

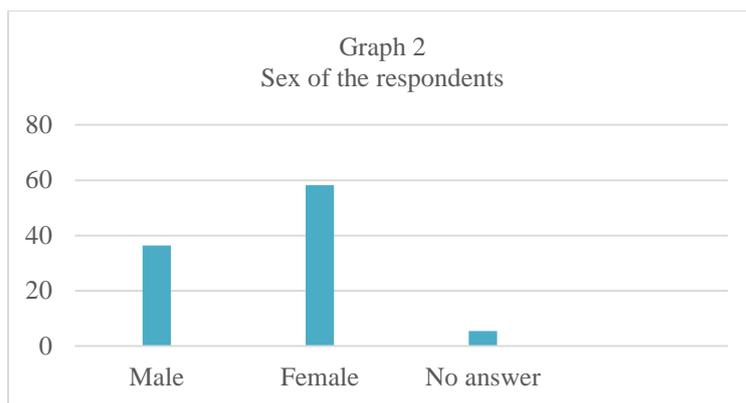
In the period March-August 2014 1000 Ecuadorians were interviewed by means of a questionnaire written in Spanish. As any method in the social sciences the research by means of a questionnaire has both advantages and disadvantages. One of the weaknesses of paper-and-pencil questioning is the so-called 'social desirability bias': informants report on their attitudes, for instance, according to what they know is politically correct but not according to their honest and free opinion. Second, in a self-report it is easy to report idealized opinions because reporting is behaviour without consequences. What people write in a questionnaire may not correspond to what they would say or do in a real social situation.

The use of structured and unstructured questions has both advantages and disadvantages too. Multiple-choice questions are easy to code and carry a lower risk of misinterpretation of the answers by the analyst. On the other hand, the multiple-choice question anticipates the possible results by restricting the alternatives for those to whom the question is posed. Applied to questioning about cultural/ national attitudes this methodology might produce a rather simplistic and sometimes distorted picture. When the informants are forced to choose between two or more given options, they do not have the possibility to express their attitude or opinion, if it differs from the options given by the researcher. For this aim in most of the structured questions of the questionnaire together with the structured options, the option ‘other’ was introduced too where the informants were free to write down different choices.

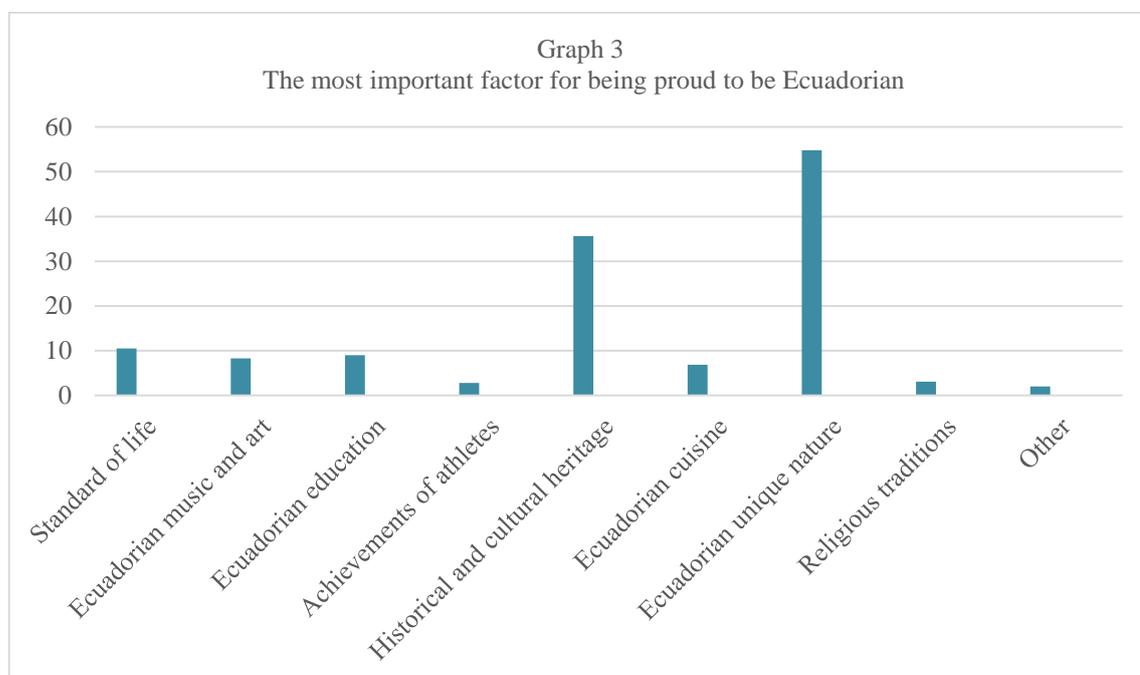
However, the use of more sophisticated methods, such as multidimensional scaling, or the use of various projective methods, was not adopted in this study because of the laboriousness of the analytical procedure. The method of questioning applied was the simple “check list” method. Thus, finding out people’s attitudes, impressions, images, and emotions is challenging for many reasons. First, because people may not be aware of their unconscious attitudes; second, because they may not be willing to reveal their private, maybe repressed feelings and attitudes; and third, because they may not be able to verbalize and communicate them. Hence, there are some limitations of the data collection procedure applied in this study. However, despite some methodological challenges, with the interviews of 1000 people some of the most important attitudes and collective self-perceptions in Ecuador can be outlined, studied and analysed. Moreover, the interviews can show some of the specific characteristics of the Ecuadorian cultural identity, which differentiate it from the other cultural identities in Latin America.

The interviews were conducted in different cities but mostly in the coastal region of Ecuador. About 400 people came from Universidad Estatal de Milagro. The other respondents were interviewed in shopping malls, markets, squares and cafeterias in Milagro, Guayaquil, Santa Elena and Salinas, as well as in one of the offices of the Ecuadorian mobile company, ‘Claro’ in Milagro, where both the personnel and the clients were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The majority of the interviewees (23,4%) were aged between 18 and 25; 13,2% were in the age group 26-30; 18,7 % were between 31-40 years old; and 8,9% were between 41-50 years old. 5,9% belonged to the age group over 50 and 2,7% of the interviewees did not give any data regarding their age (Graph 1). 36,4% of the interviewees participating in this study were male and 58,2% were female. 5,4% of the respondents did not leave any answer in the questionnaire regarding their sex (Graph 2).



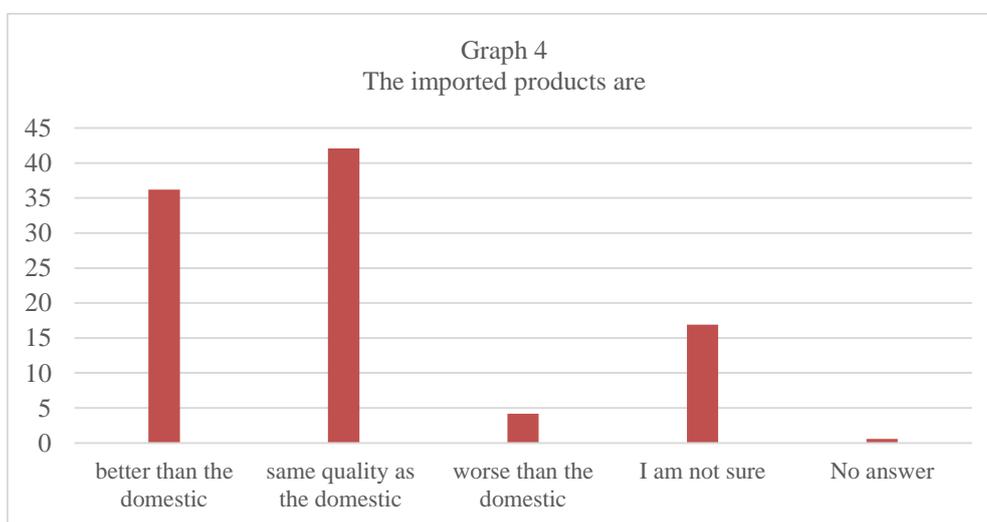


Question 1 of the questionnaire was designed to find out what the most important elements of the Ecuadorian cultural identity are. It asked the informants what according to them the most important factor for being proud to be Ecuadorian is. The majority of the interviewees (54,8%) answered that they were proud of the unique Ecuadorian nature and 35,6% thought that the historical and cultural heritage of Ecuador was the most important factor for their national pride. 10,5% believed that it was the standard of life, 9 % showed preference for the Ecuadorian education, 8,3% ticked the Ecuadorian music and art, 6,9% were proud of the Ecuadorian cuisine and 3,1% of the respondents underlined the importance of the religious traditions in the country. Only 2,8% of the interviewed Ecuadorians were proud of the achievements of the athletes in their country. Simultaneously 2% of the informants emphasized on other factors, such as: ‘the democracy’ and ‘the freedom of speech’, ‘the very reason you were born in the country’, etc. The total sum of answers is higher than 100% because some of the informants ticked two and sometimes even three options. (Graph 3)



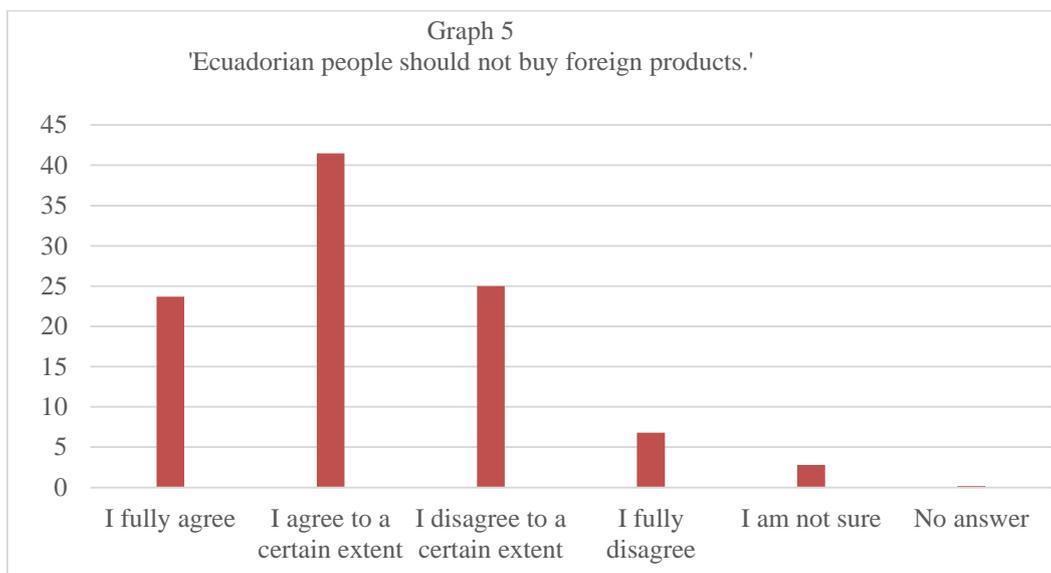
The second and the third questions of the questionnaire were designed with the particular aim to study the so-called in literature ‘ethnocentric consumerism’. According to Keilor et al. (1999) ethnocentric consumerism is a very important element of national identity in some countries. The authors claim that the strength of ethnocentric consumerism is often indicative of the strength of the national identity too. The researchers have studied the cultural identities of five countries – the USA, Mexico, Japan, Hong Kong and Sweden, representing different continents and cultural zones – North America, Latin America, Asia and Northern Europe. Out of the five countries investigated Sweden has scored the lowest and Hong Kong – the highest ethnocentric consumerism. Countries with high ethnocentric consumerism show preference for national products while societies with low ethnocentric consumerism do not rely so much on them. However, if higher ethnocentric consumerism indicate strong national consciousness (as it is in the case of Hong Kong), lower ethnocentric consumerism does not necessarily mean that cultural identity is weak, as it is in the case of Sweden. Rather, lower ethnocentric consumerism is indicative of the openness of the given country and its people to foreign products, technologies and goods. Thus, the second and the third question actually aim to measure ethnocentric consumerism in Ecuador.

Question 2 asked the informants to evaluate the quality of the imported goods in comparison with the domestic ones. This question was borrowed from the study of Petkova & Lehtonen (2005) where the Finnish respondents showed a high preference for domestic products, and thus - a high level of ethnocentric consumerism, while the Bulgarian interviewees, in the opposite, demonstrated much higher tolerance to imported goods, and thus – lower ethnocentric consumerism. In the present study the majority of the interviewed Ecuadorians (42,1%) reported that the imported products were the same quality as the domestic. 36,2% claimed that the imported products were better quality than the domestic ones and only 4,2% of the respondents believed that the domestic products were better than the imported ones. A relatively high percentage (16,9%) felt uncertain to give any particular answer and 0,6% did not answer this question (Graph 4).



Question 3 included a statement: ‘Ecuadorian people should not buy foreign products because it hurts the local economy and causes unemployment’. The respondents were asked to evaluate the statement according to their opinion with several optional answers. This question was borrowed by the study of Keilor et al.(1999), where it is suggested by the authors as a possible measurement tool of ethnocentric consumerism. In the Ecuadorian study the majority of the informants (41,5%) agreed

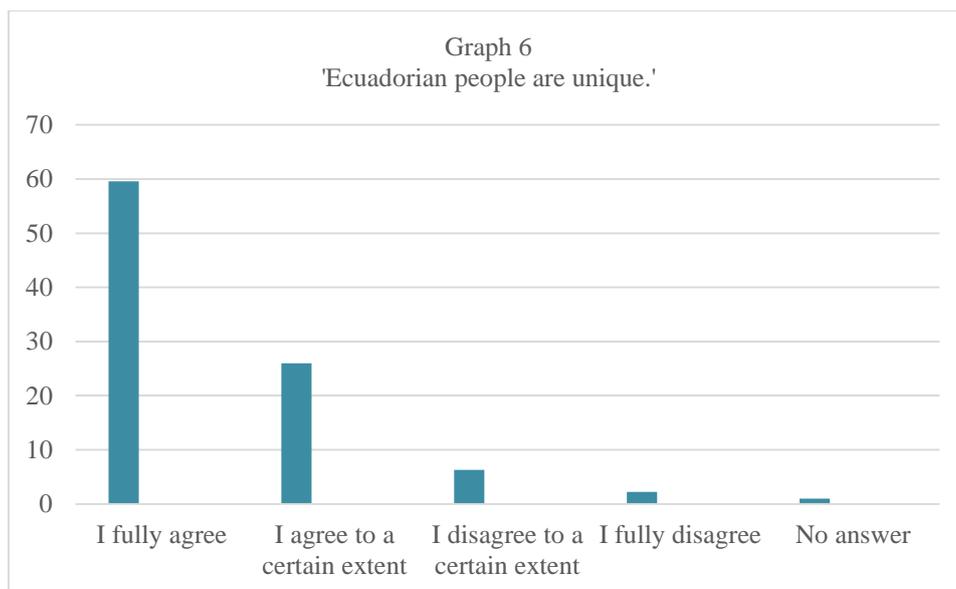
to a certain extent with the statement, 25 % disagreed to a certain extent with it, 23,7 % fully agreed and 6,8% fully disagreed with it. 2,8% felt uncertain and 0,2% did not answer this question (Graph 5).



Thus, the answers to these two questions show ethnocentric consumerism in Ecuador, which varies from a low to a moderate level.

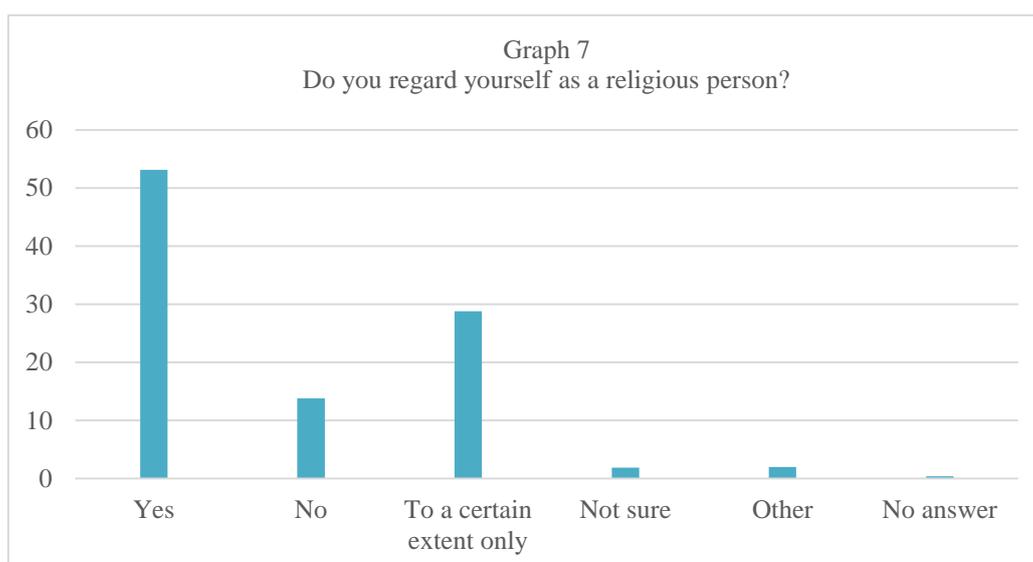
Question 4 in the questionnaire was open-ended and it targeted to reveal the self-image of the Ecuadorian respondents, often expressed in stereotypes. The informants were asked to describe in two or three words what according to them the typical Ecuadorians are. The words written by the interviewees were classified in semantic fields and the exact number a particular word appeared in all the questionnaires was counted. The informants wrote that the Ecuadorians are: ‘talented’ (talentosos 281); ‘friendly’, ‘pleasant’ (‘amistosos’, ‘amables’, ‘amigables’ 251); ‘hard-working’ (‘trabajadoras’ 146); ‘cheerful’, (‘alegres’ 117); ‘happy’ (‘felices’ 103); ‘solidarious’ and ‘collaborating’ (‘solidarios’; ‘colaboradores’ 65); entrepreneurs (‘emprededoras’ 52); ‘sincere’ and ‘honest’ (‘sinceras’, ‘honestas’ 44); ‘respectful’ (‘respetuosos’ – 47); ‘humble’ (‘humildes’ – 42); good-hearted, good people (‘de buen corazon’, ‘buenas’, ‘buenas personas’ 35); generous (‘generosos’ 35); proud (‘orguillosos’ – 32); fighters (‘luchadoras’ – 29); diverse, multiethnic (‘divertidos’, ‘multiétnica’ 25). These are the most often repeated characteristics by the Ecuadorian respondents and the figures above indicate the frequency of appearance of a particular word in the questionnaires. Although negative attributes were also pointed out by some of the informants, in general they appeared very rarely in the questionnaires. This means that the predominant self-image of the Ecuadorian people is positive. The Ecuadorian self-stereotypes listed above vary from positive to neutral.

Question 5 was structured and it aimed to outline the self-perceptions of the Ecuadorian people too. It measured the feelings of uniqueness and distinctness from the other Latin American nations. It asked the respondents to evaluate a statement according to their opinion. The statement was: ‘Ecuadorian people are unique and they are different from all the other people in the world.’ The majority of the respondents (59, 6%) fully agreed with it, 26% agreed to a certain extent, 4,9% disagreed to a certain extent and 2,2% totally disagreed. 1 % of the informants did not give any answer to this question (Graph 6).

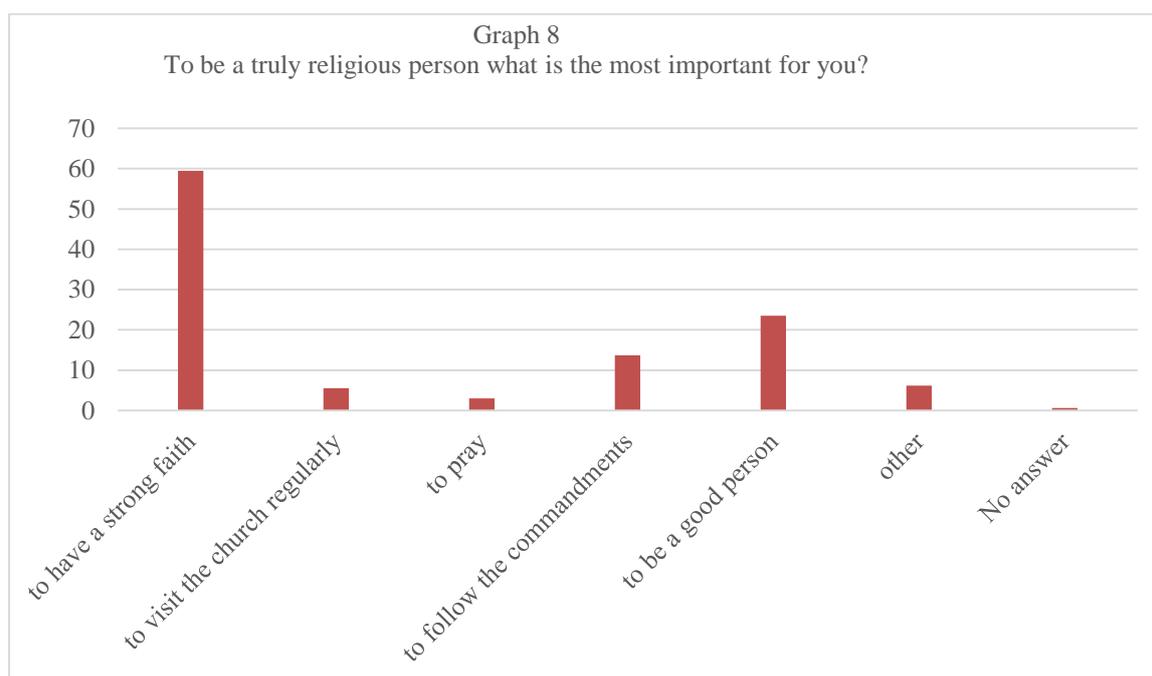


Despite the claim of some researchers that the Latin American nations lack distinct national identities because of their common colonial heritage and their common language (Miller 2006) the results from the present study clearly indicate that, on the contrary, the Ecuadorians have developed a sense of uniqueness and distinctness from their neighboring nationalities.

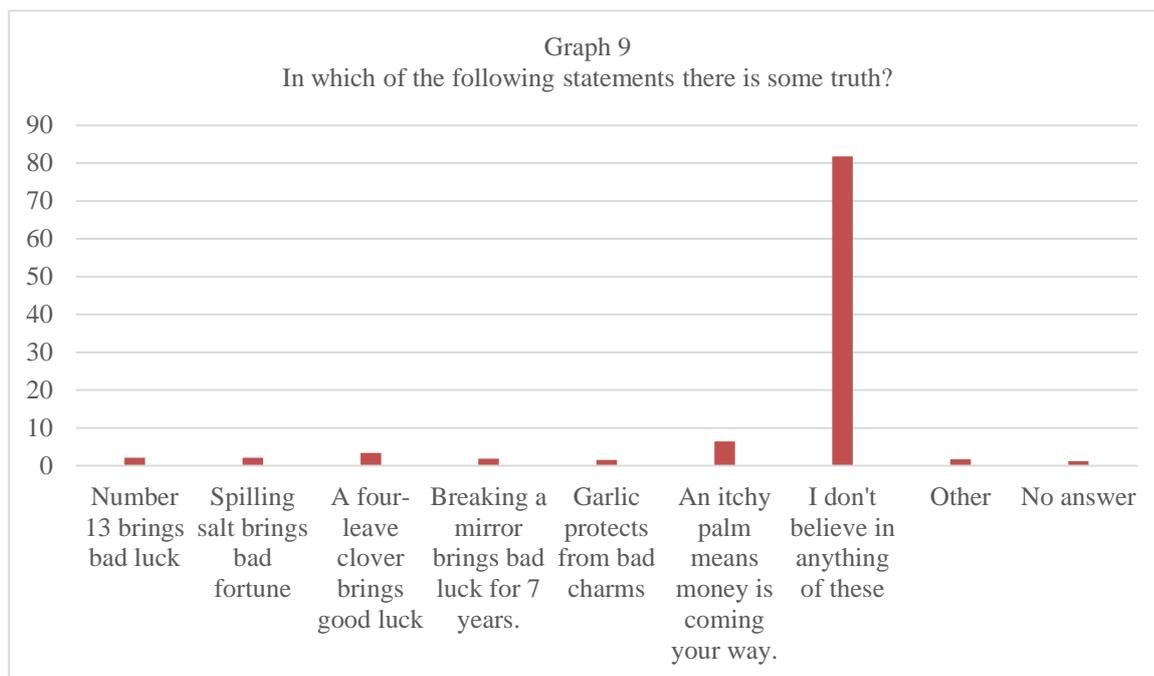
Questions 6 and 7 were designed with the intention to study the religious beliefs of the Ecuadorian informants. Also, they aimed to find out whether religiousness is an important element of Ecuadorians' cultural awareness. The preliminary hypothesis of this study was that religious consciousness is inseparable part of the Ecuadorian cultural identity. Question 6 asked the informants whether they perceived themselves as religious. More than half of the respondents (53,1%) stated that they were religious, 28,8% claimed that they were religious to a certain extent only, 13,8% did not perceive themselves as religious and 1,9% felt uncertain in their religious self-identification. 2% of the informants wrote down in the questionnaire some statements, such as: 'I am evangelical', 'I am spiritual', etc. 0,4 % did not give any answer to this question (Graph 7).



Question 7 asked the respondents what is the most important to be truly religious. The majority of the respondents (59,5%) replied that the most important for them was the strong faith. 23,5 % underlined the importance to be a good person. 13,7% put the emphasis on the 10 religious commandments. 6,2% chose the option ‘other’, where they wrote different statements. Some of these statements were, for example: ‘to read every day the Bible’, ‘to believe in the Bible’, ‘to believe in Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity’, ‘to be baptized’, etc. 5,5% related religiousness to the regular visits of the church and only 3% of the informants underlined the importance of prayers. 0,6% did not leave any answer to this question. The total sum of answers is higher than 100% because some of the informants chose two and even three options. (Graph 8).



Question 8 aimed to reveal whether, if religious, the Ecuadorians are also superstitious. Superstitions are known to be part of the cultural traditions in many countries and regions of the world, such as the Balkans, India and China, for example. They might be found even in the USA where in some skyscrapers floor 13 does not exist because of the belief that number 13 brings bad luck. For this end question 8 included some widely spread superstitions. The respondents were asked in which of the following statements there was some truth. Among all the listed superstitions the most popular was ‘An itchy palm means that money is coming your way’ with 6,4% of the respondents who believed in it. Second in popularity turned out to be the belief that the four-leaf clover brings good luck with 3,4% of the informants who ticked this option. Beliefs, such as ‘Number 13 brings bad luck’ (2,1%), ‘Spilling salt brings bad fortune’ (2,1%), ‘Breaking a mirror brings bad luck for 7 years’ (1,9%) and ‘Garlic protects from bad energies’ (1,5%) turned out to be not enough popular with only few people opting for them. 1,7% of the interviewed Ecuadorians wrote down other superstitions, in which they believed (for example, ‘Passing under stairs brings bad luck’) and 1,2% of the respondents did not leave any answer to this question. However, the vast majority of the informants (81,8%) stated that they did not believe in any superstitions (Graph 9).



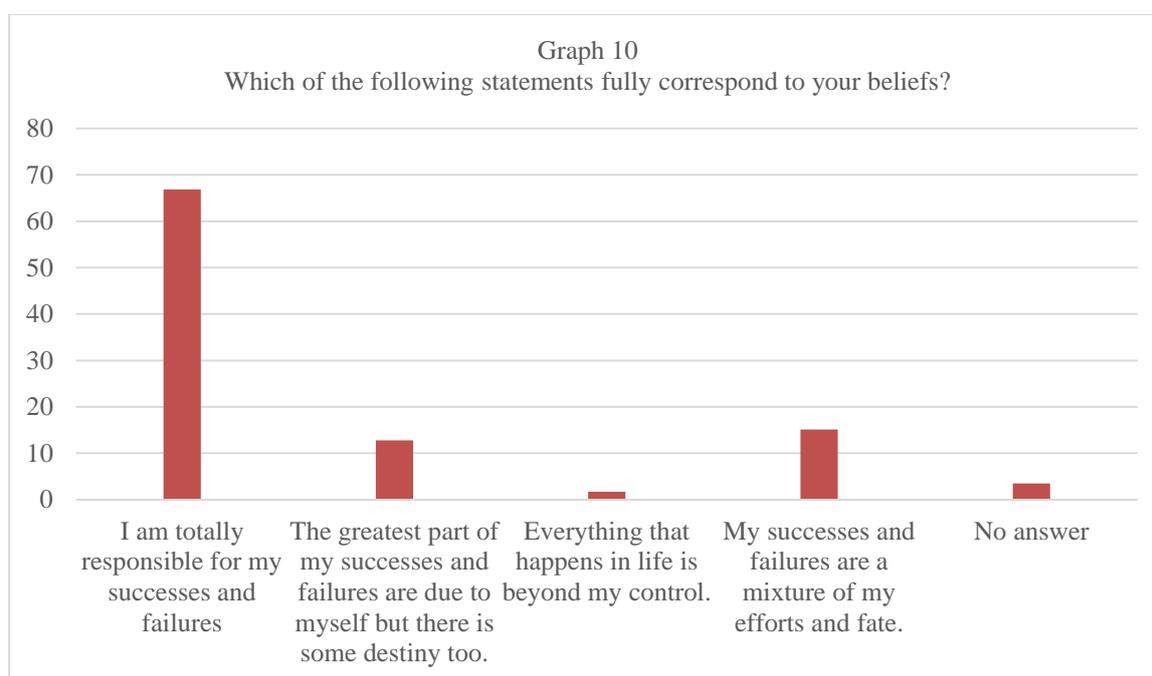
Thus, from the answers to the last three questions it is evident that Ecuadorians are rather religious people but most of them are not superstitious.

Question 9 was open-ended and it aimed to study the religious consciousness of the informants too. They were asked to write down in a few words what they personally believed in. Out of the 1000 people interviewed 920 (92%) claimed that they believed in God. Some of the respondents also wrote down that they believed in: ‘the Holy Trinity’; ‘Jesus Christ’; ‘virgin Maria’; ‘Jehova’; ‘angels’; ‘saints’, etc. Here are just a few examples of the many similar statements: ‘I believe that God exists and that we are all one unique being’ (‘Yo creo que Dios existe y que todos somos una sola persona’); ‘I believe in God and in the positive and negative energy’ (‘Creo en Dios y en energía positiva y negativa’); ‘I believe in the divine and in the devil, as well as in the hell and in the paradise’ (‘Creo en el divino y en el diablo y en el infierno y el paraíso’); ‘I believe in God and that he is the universe’ (‘Creo en dios, que el soy universo’), etc. 8 % of the informants did not write that they believed in God. Here are some of their statements: ‘The good triumphs over bad’ (‘El bien triumpha en mal’); ‘I believe in life’ (‘Creo en la vida’); ‘I believe in love’ (‘Creo en la amor’); ‘I believe in my actions’ (‘Creo en mis acciones’); ‘I believe in myself’ (‘Creo en mi mismo’); ‘There is only matter’ (‘Ai solo materia’). Some of the respondents also wrote that they believed in: ‘friendship’, (‘amistad’), human will (‘voluntad humana’), as well as in ‘that, which can be demonstrated’ (‘en la demostrable’); etc. The answers to the open-ended question clearly confirm that the majority of the interviewed Ecuadorians are actually strong believers.

Question 10 was designed with the aim to outline the locus of control of the Ecuadorian respondents. The term ‘locus of control’ has been introduced in social psychology in order to designate with it the individuals’ belief to what extent they are able to control the events in their life (Lefcourt 1982). A high interior locus of control indicates that individuals believe they can control the outside world while a high exterior locus of control, in the opposite, refers to individuals’ assumption that they are totally dependent by exterior forces. In some cases people can also show a mixed locus of control, which means that it is neither high interior, nor high exterior. Although locus of control has been studied mostly in relation to separate individuals, this paper claims that it is also

culturally embedded. Higher interior locus of control, for example, is typical of the Western cultures, where individuals believe that they are responsible for the events in their life. By contrast, individuals from Muslim communities are often inclined to perceive themselves as dependent by outside forces. Thus, although there might be some individual differences and peculiarities, locus of control is also culturally predisposed. This is why question 10 of the questionnaire aimed to reveal what locus of control is typical of the Ecuadorian culture.

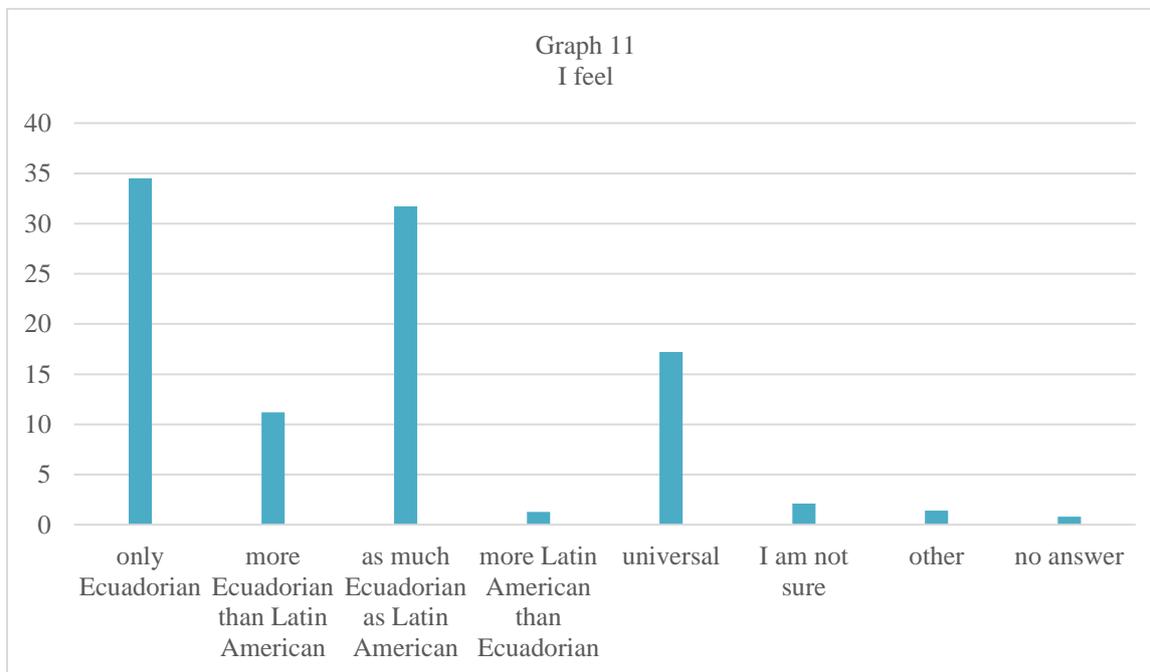
The informants were asked which one of the following statements fully corresponded to their beliefs. They had to choose between several options. 66,9% of the interviewees stated that they were fully responsible for their successes and failures in life. 15,1% thought that their successes and failures were mixture of both their own efforts and their fate. 12,8 % believed that the greatest part of their successes and failures were due to themselves but that there was some destiny too. And 1,7% claimed that everything that happened in their life was beyond their control. 3,5 % of the respondents did not answer this question (Graph 10).



Thus, on the basis of the empirical data collected, it can be concluded that most of the Ecuadorian informants demonstrate interior locus of control, which varies from very high to moderate.

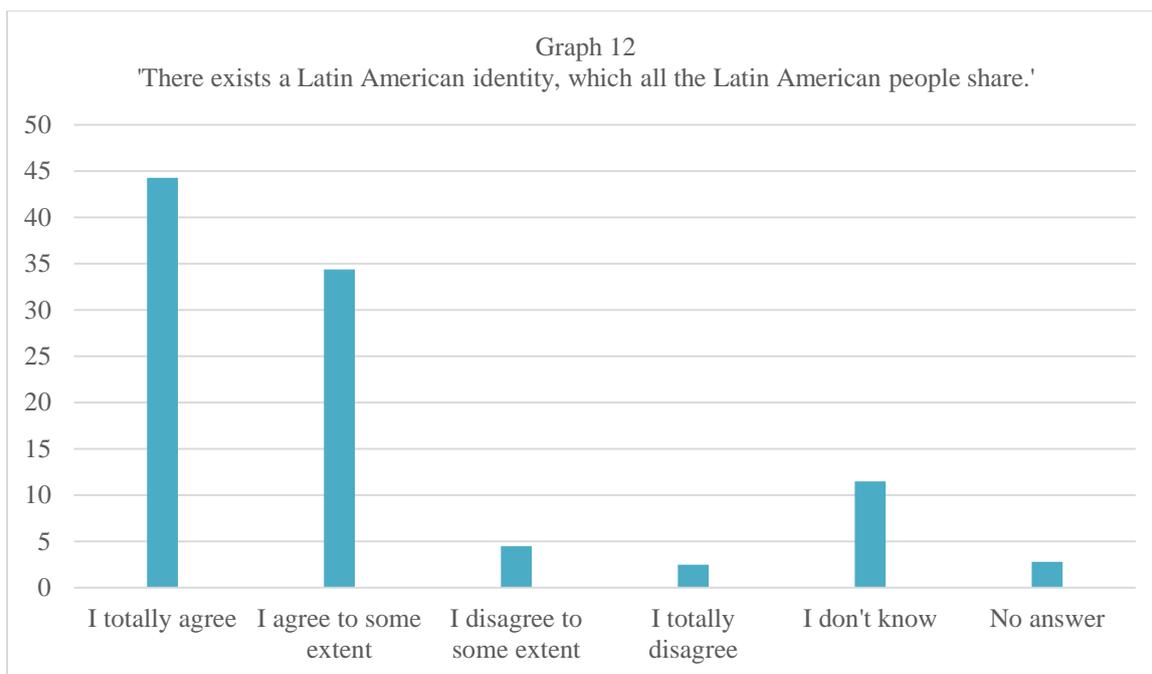
Question 11 was designed with the aim to find out what the relationships between Ecuadorian and Latin American identities are and how national and civilizational identities are expressed in the case of the Ecuadorian nation. This question was borrowed from the study of Petkova and Lehtonen (2005) where the Bulgarian and Finnish respondents were asked about their national and European feelings. In Ecuador the informants had to choose between different options. 34,5% of the respondents claimed that they were only Ecuadorian, 31,7% stated that they were as much Ecuadorian as Latin American. 17,2 % answered that they felt themselves universal and 11,2% described themselves as ‘more Ecuadorian than Latin American’. 2,1% felt uncertain in their identification and only 1,3% claimed that they were ‘more Latin American than Ecuadorian’. 1,4 %

of the respondents chose the option ‘other’, where they wrote some different statements, such as, for example: ‘I am half Ecuadorian, half American’, ‘I am Chinese Ecuadorian’, ‘I am Afro-Ecuadorian’, ‘I am Christian’. 0,8% of the informants did not answer this question. The total sum of answers is higher than 100% because several people chose ‘I feel as much Ecuadorian as Latin American’ together with the option ‘I feel universal’ (Graph 11).



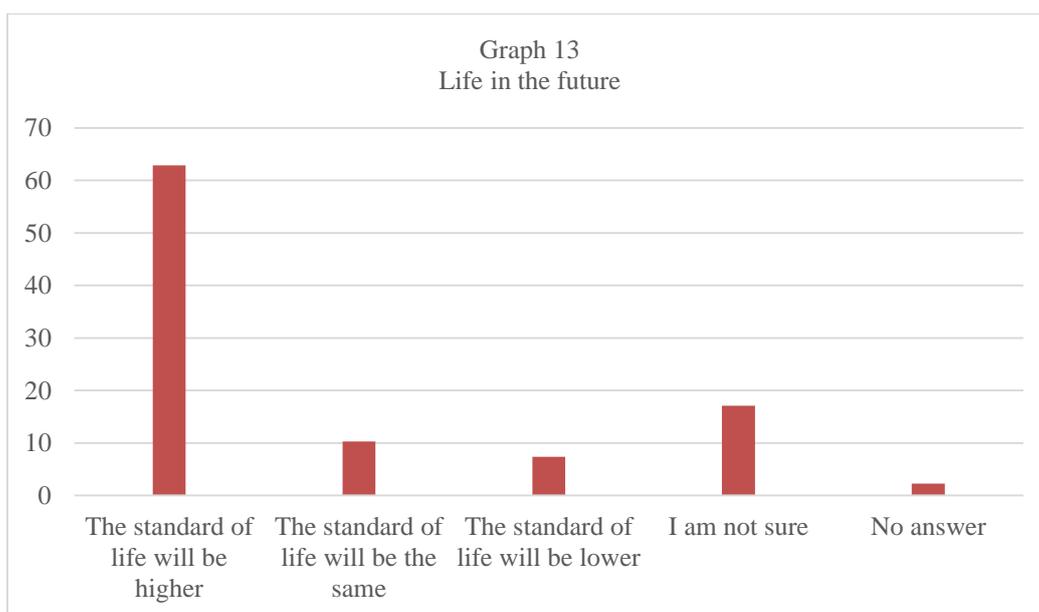
The results indicate a moderately strong national identity which is often duplicated by the civilizational identity too.

Question 12 was dedicated to the Latin American identity, which in the case of the Ecuadorian respondents can be described as both civilizational and regional identity. The informants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: ‘There exists a Latin American identity, which all the Latin American people share’. This question, as the previous one, was borrowed from the study of Petkova & Lehtonen (2005) where the informants were asked whether they believed in the existence of a common European identity. In the Ecuadorian study 44,3% of the respondents totally agreed with the statement that a common Latin American identity exists, 34,4% agreed with it to a certain extent and 11,5% were not sure about it. 4,5% disagreed with the statement to a certain extent and only 2,5% totally disagreed with it. 2,8% of the informants did not answer this question (Graph 12).



On the basis of the results received it can be concluded that civilizational identity is quite strong in the case of the Ecuadorian respondents.

Question 13 was designed in order to study the expectations for the national future. In the psychological literature memories of the past together with expectations for the future are believed to shape the nucleus of the identities of both individuals and groups (Baron et al. 2009). This is why the Ecuadorian respondents were asked what they thought life in Ecuador would be after 10 years. The majority of the interviewees (62,9) believed that the standard of life in their country would be higher after 10 years. 17,1% were not sure and 10,3% claimed that the standard of life would be the same. 7,4% stated that it would be lower and 2,3% of the respondents did not answer this question. (Graph 13).



Thus, although some uncertainty exists too, the answers show predominantly positive expectations for the future of the nation.

DISCUSSION

All the data, presented above, justifies the conclusion that at each moment of its development cultural identity is a product of the concrete social and cultural situation and of the nation's collective memory. The weight of each constituent of the collective identity varies in time and from country to country. The same elements of national identity are not salient in the same way in different nations and at different historical moments. For example, in the study of Petkova & Lehtonen (2005) Finnish people form their sense of national belongingness mostly on the basis of the living standard, economy, and education. By comparison, the Bulgarian national feeling is shaped in relation to the cultural heritage and the achievements of sportsmen of the country. The data shows that the Ecuadorian national attachment is based on the Ecuadorian nature. Second in importance is considered the cultural and historic heritage of the country. So, to a great extent these elements of national identity are a situational construct that varies according to the economic, cultural, political and social circumstances in different countries and in their social environment.

To be proud or disappointed/ dissatisfied with something, in which one does not have any or almost any personal contribution, may seem strange but it affects considerably the self-belief and self-reliance of the individual. Every individual needs to belong to some collective, which explains why national/cultural identity is an integral constituent of the 'self'. Positive perception of the nation or cultural group which the individual is a member of corresponds directly with a high self-esteem. This is why quite unconsciously the individuals look for grounds on which to sustain a positive cultural identity. This is from where the variability of the elements of national identity comes. In different social and cultural situations individuals tend to stress different factors in order to support their sense of national and cultural belonging. This fact also means that in a given political, economic or social setting some elements of national identity are amplified, while others are ignored, undervalued or even denied. Thus, national identity is a social-psychological phenomenon that is being continuously constructed, shaped and reshaped in relation to the social setting and the historical processes.

This also explains why ethnocentric consumerism is so strong in some countries, while in others it is not the dominant tendency of consumer behaviour. The results from the study in Ecuador clearly indicate that most of the Ecuadorians are not ethnocentric consumers. Although many of them might be aware that buying domestic products helps the local economy, at the same time they are not inclined to believe that the Ecuadorian products are the best quality, as for example, Finns, Austrians or Hong Kong people believe for their national products (Petkova & Lehtonen 2005; Keilor et al. 1999). This finding implies that foreign goods and foreign marketers have good chances to succeed on the Ecuadorian market. The best marketing strategy for managers would be to promote the foreign product on the background of a typical Ecuadorian landscape. In such a way the imported product would correlate to the sense of 'home land' of the Ecuadorian people. The same is valid also for the domestic goods. In promoting national products on the background of a particular Ecuadorian landscape, such as the Pacific coast, the Andes or the Amazon, marketers can create associations with the deepest feelings of uniqueness of the Ecuadorian people.

To some extent the answers of the respondents can reflect the real economic and social situation in the country. But at the same time the comparison of foreign and domestic products, as well as the evaluation of the standard of living, the music and art, the education and the sporting

achievements of the home country in comparison with the other countries in the world are related mostly to the picture, which the Ecuadorians have created for themselves and for their own country. The same is also valid for the evaluation of the 'typical traits' of the Ecuadorian character. The Ecuadorians believe that they are 'talented', 'friendly', 'hard-working', 'cheerful' and 'happy.' Although many of these characteristics mentioned above might be true, they also represent the self-image of the Ecuadorian people, which does not necessarily coincide totally with the social reality. However, the self-stereotypes of the Ecuadorian respondents are predominantly positive, which also means that they have positive expectations from the national collective. This further translates into a strong sense of uniqueness and distinctness from the rest of the Latin American community and of the other nations in the world. Thus, this paper rejects the statement that most of the Latin American countries are incomplete nations because of the historical, cultural and language commonness with the other Latin American peoples. In the opposite, the results of this study clearly show that the Ecuadorians have developed a rather strong sense of uniqueness and differentiation from their neighbours.

One of the preliminary hypotheses of this study was that the Ecuadorian people are strongly religious. The answers in the questionnaire actually confirm this hypothesis. Only about half of the respondents (53,1%) claimed that they were religious and 28,8% stated that they were religious to a certain extent only. However, when they were asked to explain what they personally believed in, 92% of the informants wrote down that they believed in God (or in Jesus Christ). This also means that faith and religiousness are not perceived to be equal by some of the respondents. Many of them depict themselves as 'religious to a certain extent only' or they even state that they are not religious at all, yet they stick to the supernatural. This means that most of the Ecuadorian people are believers but many of them also do not perceive their beliefs as 'religious'. This conclusion is also supported by the statements of some informants written as answers to the open-ended question in the questionnaire: 'I am spiritual' ('Mui espiritual'); 'Faith is life, it is not a religion' ('Fe es vida, no es religion'); 'Faith and religiousness are two different things' ('La fe y la religion son dos cosas diferentes'), etc... Simultaneously, when asked what according to them the true religious individual is like, the majority of the respondents (59,5%) stated that a true religious person has a strong faith. 23,5 % underlined the importance for them to be a good person. 13,7% put the emphasis on following the religious commandments. These results confirm once again that religious beliefs and religiousness are perceived by many of the informants in a more general sense as certain human values, rather than as strictly religious activities, such as praying or visiting regularly the church and the masses, reading the Bible and the Holy scriptures, etc. Another interesting fact is that only 3,1% of the respondents underlined the religious traditions in the country as an important factor for being proud to be Ecuadorian. This means that although in reality the Ecuadorians are rather religious and spiritual, they do not perceive their religiousness as a basis for their cultural identity. Religious beliefs are seen more as a part of the individual private universe, rather than as an important element of the national behavior. Also, in some cases religiousness is even not acknowledged but it is often recognized as a general belief in the supernatural or as a set of universal human values. However, this paper states that religiousness and religious and spiritual beliefs are so prevalent in Ecuadorian society that they actually build the core of the Ecuadorian cultural identity.

At the end of the 20th century many famous social scientists claimed that religious identity would totally fail and that it would be replaced by national identity. Hobsbawm (1992), for example, defines nationalism as a secular religion. According to the scholar, nationalism has national heroes, calendars, emblems, symbols, hymns and myths, in the same way as the religions and churches in the past had their saints, religious calendars, emblems, symbols and myths. Thus Hobsbawm (1992) concludes that nationalism would totally suppress the religious ideology in the future. The famous British sociologist Anthony D. Smith (1991) does not include religion and religiousness in his

classification of the elements of national identity either. He firmly believes that religious identity is not typical of the Western secular model of nation. Thus, at the end of the 20th century it is believed that national identity is a social psychological phenomenon, predominantly related to the ideology of secularism. However, at the beginning of the 21st century it is obvious that religious attachment cannot be excluded from the national or cultural feelings. Nor can nationalism replace religiousness. On the contrary, it is also evident that religious senses have been sharpened as part of the intensification of the individual and collective cultural awareness. In the case of the Ecuadorian nation religious beliefs are not only strong and prevalent in society but they also form the core of the self-consciousness of both individuals and national community.

The results of the empirical study show that although they are religious, the Ecuadorian people are not superstitious. To a great extent this fact is related to the strong influence of the Christian churches (predominately Catholic but also Protestant and evangelical churches), which put the emphasis on the individuals' connections with the divine and on their personal responsibility. This also explains why most of the Ecuadorian respondents have high interior locus of control too. At first sight it might seem paradoxical. On the one hand, most of the informants are strongly religious and many of them also declare in the answers to the open-ended question that 'God is almighty' and that their life is totally dependent on him. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents also tick the option that they themselves are totally responsible for their successes and failures in life. Thus, the social reality in Ecuador is different from the one in some Muslim societies, for example, where the strong religiousness is accompanied by a high exterior locus of control too. Many Muslims believe that God is totally responsible for the events in individuals' lives. Thus, in Muslim culture everything happening on the Earth is perceived as a predestined reality. The Ecuadorians strongly believe that God exists and that he is 'almighty' ('todos poderosos'), yet the majority of them also think that they themselves hold full responsibility for what happens in their life. Such statements might seem contradictory but in reality it is not so. High individual awareness is one of the basic values of Christianity. Both Catholicism and Protestantism put the accent on the personal responsibility and the free will of individuals. This also means that the social and cultural beliefs of the Ecuadorian respondents are strongly embedded in the traditions of Christianity.

Thus, although many Ecuadorians might not be fully aware of the importance of their religious beliefs for the cultural specificity of their national collective, the Ecuadorian cultural identity is built on the grounds of the Christian religion. These results also confirm the major role which religion plays in contemporary society, even in the cases when it is not consciously perceived as a factor of cultural identity. This also means that the importance of religion for human individual and collective identification should be reconsidered in the social sciences.

Although the Ecuadorian people have developed a sense for national uniqueness and distinctness, most of them also possess a rather strong feeling for cultural commonness, expressed in a solidarity with the other Latin American nations too. A considerable part of the informants (34,5%) claimed that they were only Ecuadorian and an almost equal group (31,7%) stated that they were as much Ecuadorian as Latin American. And a relatively high percentage (17,2 %) answered that they felt universal. In comparison, in the study of Petkova & Lehtonen (2005) both Bulgarian and Finnish respondents felt much less commonness with the other European nations. European feelings and European identity scored much lower percentages in the Bulgarian and especially in the Finnish answers in comparison with the Ecuadorian study where much more people claimed that they felt at least to a certain extent Latin American too. The majority of the respondents also either fully agreed or agreed to a certain extent that a common Latin American identity exists and that it is shared by all the Latin American people. This result is not a surprise. In Europe even nowadays the civilizational feelings are often vague and unclear due to the lack of a common language and historical past. In

Latin America, in the opposite, the colonial legacy and the common language create a sense of cultural closeness and similarity between the nations of the Central and South American continent.

However, in Latin America regional and civilizational identity does not rival national identity, nor does it substitute or replace it. The study in Ecuador shows that in some cases national identity is perceived as the stronger and the more important affiliation. In other cases, national and civilizational identities are thought to be equally important for the individual. However, this fact does not mean that civilizational identity can replace national identity. Rather, the two affiliations are seen as a yoked pair. Thus, civilizational identity can even strengthen and reinforce national identity. In this respect one of the results of the study in Ecuador deserves special attention. A relatively high percentage of the interviewees identified themselves as 'universal'. One possible explanation of this fact is the strong religious sense in the Ecuadorian society. Christianity nurtures humanness, compassion and relatedness to all human beings. All these characteristics contribute to the feeling of universality, rather than to the sense of uniqueness and separateness.

This observation is confirmed by some informants' answers in the questionnaire. When choosing the option 'I feel universal' they also wrote down a citation from the Bible: 'Love the other as you love yourself'. This fact is another proof that religious feelings are one of the most important pillars of the Ecuadorian society and that they determine the foundations of both individual and collective identification in the country.

The predominately positive self-image of the Ecuadorian respondents is also related to the positive expectations for the future of their nation. Although some uncertainty exists too, the majority of the informants envisage that the standard of life in their country would be higher in the future. As it is outlined in the social psychology, positive expectations, together with positive hopes and wishes for the future, are important assets for both social groups and individuals. Positive expectations also indicate that even in a case when the community experiences some crisis the cohesion of the group is stronger than the challenges of the social circumstances. Thus, as a whole the Ecuadorian people show active optimism for the future of their nation.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the interviews of 1000 people a particular model of the Ecuadorian cultural identity has been outlined. The Ecuadorians ground their national pride mostly on the uniqueness of the Ecuadorian nature. Second in importance are considered by them the cultural traditions and the historical heritage of the country. Low ethnocentric consumerism is typical for Ecuador, which means that Ecuadorian people are open for foreign products, technologies and services. The self-image of the Ecuadorians is predominantly positive and this fact is also related to the positive expectations for the future development of the nation. Despite the claim of some authors that the Latin American peoples are incomplete nations because of the commonness between them, on the contrary, the Ecuadorians have developed a rather strong sense for uniqueness and distinctness from their neighbors. An important discovery of this study is that the Ecuadorian people are rather religious, although not all of them are fully aware of this fact. However, in the Ecuadorian case religiousness is perceived not as a strictly religious behavior, but rather as a faith in broad terms together with a set of universal human values. Thus, this paper states that the core of the Ecuadorian cultural identity is the religiousness and the religious beliefs. The strong influence of Christianity can also be seen in the high interior locus of control, which most of the Ecuadorians possess. The latter originates in Christianity, where the emphasis is put on the individuals' personal efforts, free will and responsibility. Together with the sense of national uniqueness the Ecuadorians have a strong sense of commonness with the other Latin American people too. However, Ecuadorian and Latin American

identities are in the most cases seen as a pair, where each one of the two identities compliments the other, rather than suppresses or competes with it. Thus, Ecuador is simultaneously open to the world and its Latin American neighbors and it sticks to its native cultural traditions. With these characteristics the Ecuadorian cultural identity might be a model of a Latin American nation successfully participating in the process of globalization.

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