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Creating Transnational Social Spaces: The Descendants of Bosnian Immigrants in Slovenia

Abstract

The article addresses the topic of transnational social spaces through a study of the activities of migrants' descendants. In this qualitative research, we conducted interviews with the descendants of the immigrant community from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Slovenia to examine how they maintain transnational ties with extended kinship and leverage the benefits of these networks. Through interview excerpts, we present the mechanism of reciprocity, descendants' involvement in institutional, organisational, and business cooperation within broader transnational networks, and their modes of communication with the transnational kinship group.

Keywords

Transnational social spaces, immigrants, descendants, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia

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1. Introduction

Political entities in the Balkans have repeatedly united and divided people, with borders frequently changing. Consequently, the status of inhabitant has quickly transformed to immigrant. Patterns of mobility were established already during internal migrations within Yugoslavia. In the 1960s and 1970s, a major migration flow from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) came to Slovenia, especially to the developing industrial centres (Malačič 2008). Living in the pluri-local spaces between Slovenia and BIH, these internal immigrants paved the way for activities that would later become transnational. In 1991, Slovenia gained independence, and with new national borders, terminology changed. Internal immigrants became international immigrants, and their mental maps had to adjust to the new politics of belonging, citizenship, and borders. Kinship groups took on a transnational character, a trend that has only become more explicit with the advent of new communication technologies.

First-generation migrants typically have direct, personal experience of life in their country of origin, and their communication with the homeland often reflects a deep and intimate understanding of its intricacies. In contrast, descendants of migrants may have limited or no direct experience of living in their country of origin, making their connection to the homeland more mediated and filtered through the experiences and narratives of their migrant ancestors. However, descendants still use the network of the "transnational kinship group" (Faist 2000) to access social and economic capital.

In this qualitative research, we conducted interviews with descendants of the immigrant community from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Slovenia, examining how they maintain transnational ties with extended kinship in Bosnia and Herzegovina and whether they cooperate through institutions and organisations. The goal of our research was to uncover the nature of the connections descendants maintain with the wider network of migrants and those who stayed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and whether migrant descendants participate in the creation of transnational social spaces. We used the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews and literature review. Through the excerpts from these interviews, we present the "mechanism of reciprocity" (Faist 2000), descendants' involvement in institutional, organisational, and business cooperation with kinship groups, and modes of long-distance communication. Hence, the paper aims to contribute to the research

on transnational social spaces of immigrant descendants, focusing on Bosnian descendants in Slovenia.

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Overview

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In the first part of this section, we present the main concepts and theoretical framework used in our research and in the interpretation of our findings. Our main conceptual framework builds on the work of Thomas Faist (2000), a leading theorist of transnational social spaces. In the second part, we provide a brief overview of Slovene academic research on migration from former Yugoslavia to Slovenia.

With the emergence of globalisation studies, the theory of transnational migration and transnationalism, introducing the concept of transnational social spaces, developed based on the theory of network migration and the systemic migration theory (Kurekova 2010, 5–6). For a long time, the main assumption in theory was that maintaining ties with one's community in the country of origin was an obstacle to immigrants' opportunities in the country of immigration by supposedly hindering integration into the immigrant society. At that time, patterns of migration were seen as immigration – accommodation – integration, as merely a shift from one stable community to another (Morokvasić 2008, 8). However, a new perspective began to form in theories of transnationalism, viewing these ties as valuable for creating a space for exchange, social innovation, and transformation (Morokvasić 2008, 8). Initially, theorists struggled to find a proper term. Basch et al. (1994, 8) define

> transnationalism as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders [...]. An essential element [...] is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies. We are still groping for a language to describe these social locations.

In 1996, Manuel Castells observed that "since our societies are undergoing structural transformation, it is a reasonable hypothesis to suggest that new spatial forms and processes are currently emerging" (1996, 410). The concept of transnational social spaces addresses these transformations. Thomas Faist (2000, 191) defines transnational social

spaces as "combinations of ties, positions in networks, and organizations that reach across the borders of multiple states".[1] They can often be maintained and sustained through various means, including technology, travel, and cultural exchange. Faist (2000, 195) identifies three main mechanisms that drive transnationalisation: a) reciprocity in small groups, b) exchange in circuits, and c) solidarity in communities. Based on these mechanisms, he categorises transnational social spaces into three types: a) transnational kinship groups, b) transnational circuits, and c) transnational communities[2] (Faist 2000, 195). Transnational social spaces can provide immigrants and their descendants with a sense of belonging and identity, as well as opportunities for social and cultural exchange and collaboration. "These spaces denote dynamic social processes, not static notions of ties and positions" (Faist 2000, 191).

Today, most research on migration highlights the continuity of the migration experience. As Božić and Kuti (2016) observe, migrant networks were neglected in social science research in the former Yugoslavia, with the focus instead on migration flows and problems of postsocialist transition. Several authors (Ćudić et al. 2023; Savić-Bojanić & Jevtić 2022; Dimova & Wolff 2015; Babić 2013) have covered migrations from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past years. Emirhafizović et al. (2013) published a book featuring various authors who examine migration from Bosnia and Herzegovina to different countries, including the USA, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Slovenia.

Research on Bosnian immigrants and their descendants in Slovenia includes Silva Mežnarić's (1986) study *Bosanci: A kuda idu Slovenci nedeljom* [Bosnians: And Where Do Slovenes Go on Sundays], the first comprehensive study of Bosnian (then internal) immigrants. She conducted interviews among Bosnians in Slovenia and explored their habits in everyday life. In 2000/2001, Dekleva and Razpotnik (2013) conducted research on young descendants of migrants from former Yugoslavia in Slovenia, also examining issues of delinquency and violence. Another study – *Učinki priseljevanja v Slovenijo po drugi svetovni vojni* [Impacts of Migration to Slovenia after the Second World War] – focused on the demographic aspect of migration to Slovenia (Josipovič & Serafin 2006). Mateja Sedmak (2018) focused on young female descendants of immigrants from former Yugoslavia and examined their identity formation, questioning the assumption of straightforward cultural assimilation. In her monograph *Spol in migracija* [Gender and Migration], Cukut Krilić (2009) provides a detailed review of the literature dealing with female migration in Slovenia. She mentions, among others, Špela Kalčić's research (2007) on the clothing practices of Bosniak men and women in

Slovenia, as well as Natalija Vrečer's (2007) and Đonlić's and Černivec's (2003) research on the experiences of forced immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bajt and Pajnik (2010) note that research on migration in Slovenia intensified during three key periods, namely Slovenia's independence, the 2001 immigration crisis, and EU accession. The studies employed various methods, including ethnographic and biographical methods, where, through interviews and conversations with immigrants, their stories were presented first-hand and the immigrants themselves were allowed to participate in the research as subjects and not merely objects (Bajt & Pajnik 2010). Subsequent studies (e.g. Kralj 2008; Kogovšek & Bajt 2016; Pajnik 2017; Pušnik 2017; Jalušič & Bajt 2020; Smrdelj 2021; Smrdelj et al. 2021) concentrated on refugees from the Middle East, critiquing the concept of illegal immigration, examining the public perceptions of immigrants and refugees, exploring the securitisation of migration, and analysing immigration policies. Barbara Gornik (2020) explored a child-centred approach to the integration of migrant children and discussed the principles of this approach in policy-making. Mandelc and Gajić (2022) studied the relation between Albanian immigrants and the majority Slovene population, finding that ethnic distance on the part of the majority population contributed to slower and more difficult integration of members of the Albanian community (especially women), compared to linguistic distance.

3. Methodology

Our study focuses on the descendants of immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina living in Slovenia, often referred to as the second generation. The goal of our research was to understand the nature of their connections with "spatially mobile and immobile persons" (Faist 2000, 192) within broader migrant networks, their cooperation with extended kinship groups or even transnational circuits in economic, cultural, or social spheres, and to determine whether these descendants participate in the creation of transnational social spaces.

We employed a qualitative research strategy, using semi-structured interviews. While the prepared questions provided a basic structure for the conversations, we adapted their order and emphasis based on the interviewees' responses. The interviews were conducted in 2020 and 2021. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, eight interviews were conducted in person, each lasting over two hours, while four interviews were conducted online via Zoom. The online interviews were shorter, as the lack

of personal contact created a less relaxed atmosphere, resulting in more succinct answers. All interviews were conducted in Slovene, recorded, and transcribed.

Although the sample was small, we aimed for internal heterogeneity. We employed snowball sampling to find interviewees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, starting with personal contacts that led to additional participants. Additionally, we attended an event organised by the Union of Unions of Cultural Associations of Former Yugoslavia's Constitutive Nations and Nationalities in Slovenia (ExYumco) and the newspaper Dnevnik, where representatives of Serbian and Bosniak associations were present, providing further contacts for interviews.[3]

To preserve anonymity, all names are fictional. The interviewees vary in gender, age, education, ethnic origin (Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks), and religion (Orthodox, Muslim, atheist). The youngest interlocutor was 32 years old and the oldest 57, with an average age of 41.5. The sample included nine women and three men. We also considered the geographical diversity within Slovenia, selecting interviewees from Ljubljana, Jesenice, Velenje, and Mengeš. The first three cities had been the main industrial centres since the 1960s, attracting most internal immigrants. All interlocutors are descendants of economic immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina who came to Slovenia between 1960 and 1990 when Yugoslavia was still a unified state. We focused on the descendants of economic migrants to ensure comparability, leaving the analysis of refugees from the 1990s conflict for future research. Although the interviewees do not represent a single generation due to varying ages, their parents shared a common economic motivation for migrating to Slovenia – a better life.

One additional linguistic characteristic in the interviews requires clarification. To maintain the colloquial tone, we retained the specific word **down**. In Slovene, the word **down** refers to places in the south, while the word **up** refers to places in the north, depending on the speaker's perspective. From a Slovene perspective, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) is down, a term the interlocutors frequently used to refer to Bosnia. When we say Bosnia, we mean Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4. Shifting Borders: From Internal to External Migration

To place our research in a broader context, it is necessary to briefly explain the history of internal migrations within Yugoslavia. The parents

of our interlocutors were part of that history, contributing to their children's connections with the wider migrant network.

Labour migration to Slovenia has traditionally been most prominent from Bosnia and Herzegovina, combining two ethnic communities: Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs. Although Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia were under the same ruling authority since the late 19th century, when Bosnia and Herzegovina became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a significant influx of Bosnian immigrants to Slovenia only occurred after the Second World War. The communist leadership realised that part of the population could not be fully integrated into the labour market, opening the borders for hundreds of thousands of immigrants (Božić & Kuti 2016, 415). The migration of workers from Yugoslavia to other European countries also triggered greater internal migration within Yugoslavia. Economic development had an immense impact on both internal and external migration as well as on the composition of pluri-local social spaces within and beyond Yugoslav borders (Božić & Kuti 2016, 412). Migration flows within Yugoslavia were intensive as the state enabled the free movement of workers who were directed to different parts of the country, depending on the development level of each republic (Malačič 2008, 46). Slovenes who had migrated to Germany left behind vacancies while Slovenia's rapid industrialisation created demand for new workforce largely sourced from the less developed rural areas across Yugoslavia. The migration flow to Slovenia was mainly a consequence of industrial economic development, peaking in the 1970s and 1980s (Kržišnik-Bukić 2010, 502). Slovenia's industrial centres like Jesenice and Velenje required unskilled or semi-skilled workforce, leading many Bosnian workers and their families to move to Slovenia. The largest number of migrants thus originated from Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats forming the main ethnic communities (Kržišnik-Bukić 2010, 502).

The administrative borders between Yugoslav republics did not present "a barrier for the development of multiple and inter-locking social ties and pluri-local networks" (Božić & Kuti 2016, 412);

> The communist party encouraged ties between different ethnic groups and facilitated social ties among the youth in all republics using the ideology of 'brotherhood and unity'. Social spaces across the borders of the republics developed particularly among members of the same ethnic group. [...] They were and partially still are enduring networks of exchange and support regardless of state boundaries (Božić & Kuti 2016, 412).

The disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 resulted in new international boarders and new politics of belonging and exclusion. The new political reality put internal immigrants in a new position; they became transnational immigrants and were no longer citizens of the country they resided in. With the new national borders, the terminology changed but migration patterns remained similar. These "new" minorities began establishing associations and non-governmental organisations to organise themselves and institutionalise their networks (Medvešek et al. 2023, 218). In Slovenia, ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia have yet to be recognised as autochthonous[4] national minorities. Kržišnik-Bukić (2014, 151) refers to them as "unconstitutional national minorities". These communities continue to advocate for recognition, though progress has been limited. In 2011, the Slovene parliament adopted a declaration on the position of the national communities representing the peoples of the nations of former Yugoslavia.

The most visible form of an officially organised and recognised community is the religious one. Bosniaks and Serbs registered their respective religious communities, Muslim and Orthodox, through which they organise as a community, maintain their transnational ties with homeland and migrant communities worldwide, and receive financial support from the Slovene state, though they have no political influence.

In the 21st century, Slovenia's new political reality as an EU member and part of the Schengen zone not only transformed the former fellow citizens of other republics of former Yugoslavia into third-country foreigners, but also complicated their access to the job market and travel, with a new visa regime in place (Malačič 2010, 91). Nevertheless, in 2010, Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the EU's visa-liberalisation regime, enabling BIH citizens to travel to and from Slovenia more easily.

5. Transnational Social Spaces and Descendants of Bosnian Immigrants

Given their strong immigration tradition, political status, and the fact that Bosnians are the largest immigrant group in Slovenia today,[5] it was reasonable to assume that Bosnians in Slovenia create and maintain transnational social spaces with members of the same group in various locations. However, we must keep in mind that there are several ethnic groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and transnational social spaces are often created within each of them. In our interviews, we focused on descendants from different ethnic groups from Bosnia, namely Bosniaks

and Serbs. We found that they sustain connections with their transnational kinship groups and broader migrant networks. Most engage in social and cultural activities, such as cultural and sports societies connected to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only a few are involved in economic activities, primarily by providing assistance to those seeking to migrate to Slovenia and find employment. None of our interviewees participate in political activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina; however, through cultural associations, they engage in political discourse in Slovenia, particularly by advocating for more rights for ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia (Kržišnik-Bukić 2014).

5.1 Reciprocity: Social and Economic Support

The main reason for Bosnians to migrate to Slovenia during Yugoslavia was economic benefit. Beyond improving their own lives and those of their children, they also provided financial support to family members who stayed in Bosnia (spatially immobile persons). "Social exchange in the form of mutual obligations and expectations of the actors" (Faist 2000, 192) was evident. Reciprocity as a social norm was exercised and remains present in the second generation in Slovenia. Descendants offer assistance to network members, especially those wishing to migrate to Slovenia. They also benefit from the network through information-sharing when looking for new workers or for business opportunities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and support for preserving their culture in Slovenia.

Our interlocutors emphasised one specific period following the break-up of Yugoslavia, namely the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, when communication with the wider network of Bosnians intensified. Migrant communities in Slovenia offered substantial aid to refugees and accommodated many family members and friends. Amila recalls: "During the war, I had refugees here. Oh, there were so many!"

Assistance to communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues today, in various forms, from financial to social. Many respondents mentioned facilitating the obtainment of work permits and other documentation for permanent residency, demonstrating solidarity with newcomers to Slovenia.

"We help a lot," says Samir, "they don't know all the laws, so we explain what they need to do. For example, at the company where I work, there must have been five of them from my village, all of whom I employed. They all came from Bosnia."

Leila recalls how she aided immigrants from Bosnia:

> I worked for ten years in a company that needed workers. We prepared all the documentation. We helped relatives and acquaintances and beyond. We connected with the Institute for Employment from Bosnia, and they sent over whoever was ready to work.

This was the business approach of Leila's company, but she first reached out to her kinship group, offering them work in Slovenia. Only when she exhausted all of her contacts, her company turned to the Employment Agency in BIH.

There is also institutionalised solidarity through organisations in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Asja helped new immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina through the association that she co-founded in Velenje:

> In the association, we had very high goals in terms of helping economic immigrants from Bosnia. At that time, Slovenia was still in its golden age, it was economically flourishing, employment was at its peak. At that time, many of these emigrant workers started working in Slovenia. We have also seen various exploits, e.g. when filling out visas, which suddenly became "expensive". […] In the end, it was no longer a workshop, we were just a bureau where people came and we filled out the forms.

Asja also explains that, after a few years, these workers brought their families to Slovenia and their association helped them integrate into the local community.

> We welcomed these families into our environment. Showed them around the city, showed them the basic institutions they will have to contact. We usually went with them to the first meeting at school or kindergarten where the child was enrolled. Then we followed them for several years, or they turned to us with requests for information or, say, for help with writing or translating.

These networks give members access to more "economic, human and social capital" (Faist 2000, 193), and the number of people in a network who are willing or obliged to help is crucial. "Information is also a benefit" (Faist 2000, 193) and the larger the network, the better. There are indications of business collaboration between descendants of Bosnian immigrants and the business community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina is Slovenia's fourth-largest trading

partner for both exports and imports (SPIRIT – Izvozno okno, n. d).[7] Many companies engaging in business with Bosnia and Herzegovina are owned by members of the Bosnian community in Slovenia. One of our interlocutors owns a company that imports products from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Slovenia, leveraging her kinship connections in Bosnia to succeed in her trading business. Entrepreneurs often utilise insider advantages – such as knowing the language and having friends and acquaintances abroad – to establish a foothold (Faist 2000, 195).

5.2 Institutional Cooperation through Cultural Associations

Beyond economic cooperation within transnational kinship groups, there is also institutional cooperation between cultural associations in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of our interlocutors explained:

> First of all, the association was established to represent culture, facilitate project work, and undertake humanitarian projects. Our primary focus is on raising awareness, promoting Bosnian-Herzegovinian culture, and fostering cooperation with cultural institutions in Bosnia. We introduced various theatre performances to Velenje, which had never been showcased there before. Previously, cultural offerings were limited, mainly featuring singers from Bosnia, despite Velenje's multicultural nature. Our experiences in Ljubljana, where we were exposed to diverse cultural expressions during our studies, may have influenced our evolving expectations. Through the association, we aimed to bring something new to Velenje and establish connections with cultural institutions in Bosnia.

According to Medvešek et al. (2023), there are 17 registered NGOs (associations) of the Bosniak community in Slovenia. They are mainly cultural and sports associations with educational activities. There are 36 registered NGOs representing the Serbian community in Slovenia, which includes Bosnian Serbs.

In their report, Medvešek et al. (2023, 222) analyse the activities of immigrant NGOs, stating that they play a crucial role in building strong social networks and support systems, socialising immigrants, preserving the immigrants' original culture and language, advocating for the inclusion of immigrant voices in public debates and policy decisions, and defending the rights and interests of immigrants (Medvešek et al. 2023, 222). This includes working with government officials and other organisations to address issues such as discrimination, access to

education and healthcare, and other challenges affecting the immigrant community (Medvešek et al. 2023, 222). These NGOs also organise or participate in charity campaigns both in the host country and their country of origin (Medvešek et al. 2023, 222). Medvešek et al. (2023, 223) emphasise that immigrant organisations also serve as representatives of their communities to their countries of origin, playing a vital role in establishing contacts with institutions and organisations in those countries. Some of our interlocutors confirmed that they take an active part in these associations and participate in preserving and promoting their culture, but also maintain networks that are created through these organisations.

5.3 Communication and Modern Technology

The technological breakthrough in communication technology and travel has shrunk the world and accelerated the emergence of transnational social spaces. Castells (1996) emphasised the role of technology in creating transnational social spaces. He argued that the development of information and communication technologies had enabled people to communicate and interact across borders, creating new forms of social and cultural exchange.

Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are geographically close; therefore, frequent and cheaper airline connections do not play a significant role in travel between these two countries. However, these connections are essential for maintaining links with the global Bosnian network. According to our interlocutors, their transnational kinship groups are dispersed across Europe and globally. The Schengen regime and national borders in Europe can pose obstacles for frequent visits. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, when Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the EU visa liberalisation regime in 2010, travel around Europe became easier.

Descendants of migrants are often referred to as "digital natives" (Prensky 2001), meaning they have grown up in an era where digital technologies are pervasive and integrated into daily life. As such, they tend to be more comfortable and adept at using communication technologies such as social media, messaging apps, video calls, and email compared to their parents, who may be considered "digital immigrants" (Prensky 2001) and have had to adapt to these technologies later in life. Descendants, having grown up with instant messaging and social media platforms, often prefer quick and immediate forms of communication. They may use platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger,

or Instagram to stay in touch with family and friends in their country of origin, engaging in real-time conversations and sharing updates more frequently compared to their parents, who may rely more on traditional methods of communication such as phone calls or letters.

For younger generations, communication technologies are seamlessly integrated into their everyday lives, serving as essential tools for maintaining connections with their country of origin. They may use technology not only for staying in touch with family and friends but also for accessing news and information, participating in cultural events and activities, and engaging with online communities related to their heritage.

According to our research, the descendants of Bosnian immigrants are quite active in maintaining social ties with extended family and friends. All our interlocutors communicate with their extended family members in Bosnia and Herzegovina or other European countries (mostly Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, UK, Italy) and even USA or Australia. They use modern communication technology and they all confirm that it helps them to communicate on a more regular basis. They mostly use Viber, Skype, Facetime, Facebook, Messenger, but also traditional phone calls.

Leila expresses gratitude for modern technology: "Thank God today we have Skype, Viber, WhatsApp … In the summer, when they come down here, if possible, I'll go to Bosnia to see them."

Samir recalls how it was to communicate in the past, before modern technology and apps:

> There was no such thing before, everything was expensive. I remember that I topped up the phone card for 500 tolars[6] and then you just made one call and the money was gone. When I had a girlfriend down there, I was constantly topping up my phone. I went down every weekend after work. She was down, I was here. With three or four of us working together, we used one car to share the expenses. Or I rode sometimes with one, sometimes with another. Thanks to these applications, you can communicate with each other more often, you are more connected.

The frequency of communication ranges from daily to weekly, monthly, and yearly, depending on the closeness of the relationship. Immediate family members (parents, siblings) are in contact more regularly than extended family, and close friends also communicate more often. Amila had a spinal surgery a few years ago and was immobile for four months. She recalls how everyone called her:

> I tell you, relatives called me from far and wide. It's true, if something good happens, you call, and if something not that great happens, everyone calls, and I had contacts when I was ill. Apparently, my mother told her sister about the operation, and her sister told her children, so everyone called.

The geographic proximity between Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina enables frequent travel and visits, which helps sustain strong family ties. Most of our interlocutors visited BIH more frequently in their childhood. Nevertheless, some continue to visit their relatives and friends every year, usually just once a year. A few own houses in BIH and they go there more often and for longer periods. When relatives from Europe drive to Bosnia, they pass through Slovenia and always stop to visit. This is a common experience for most of our interviewees.

Overall, while both descendants and their parents may use communication technologies to stay connected with their country of origin, the ways in which they use these technologies and the extent to which these are integrated into their lives can vary significantly due to generational, cultural, and technological factors.

Based on our qualitative research, we can conclude with three main observations. The descendants of Bosnian migrants to Slovenia are part of a wider global network of Bosnian migrants. They regularly communicate with each other and help other network members when needed. Reciprocity is a common practice within transnational kinship groups. Our interlocutors mention helping other members of their kinship group who want to emigrate from Bosnia and Herzegovina. They help them with information and financial support. Entrepreneurial activities within transnational kinship groups were also observed. The main form of institutional transnational cooperation is cultural associations, where also the descendants play an active role.

6. Conclusion

The formation and significance of transnational social spaces in the context of migration have emerged as a crucial area of study. Immigrants frequently establish networks and maintain connections with their countries of origin, creating social spaces that transcend national boundaries. In Slovenia, where migration has surged in recent decades, the development of transnational social spaces among immigrants provides an intriguing case for exploration.

This paper investigates the descendants of immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Slovenia and the creation of transnational social spaces.

These transnational patterns of mobility emerged notably after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The first generation of immigrants from the 1960s and 1970s were internal migrants who developed extensive networks, largely involving extended family but also members of local communities from which they emigrated. Even without today's advanced telecommunication technology, they preserved close contacts with the wider migrant and non-migrant network.

Our qualitative research reveals that descendants of Bosnian migrants in Slovenia actively participate in transnational activities within their transnational kinship groups. They engage in reciprocity by offering social and financial support to the members of the group. Moreover, there are indications of activities in transnational circuits, meaning that there are entrepreneurial activities present among the descendants in Slovenia and business community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they exploit the insider advantages, such as language and social ties. However, further research is needed to explore this dimension in greater depth.

Considerable cooperation was also detected between the cultural associations of ethnic communities and associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, mainly in the cultural sphere. However, these organisations also serve as representatives of their community to their country of origin, playing a vital role in establishing contacts with institutions and organisations in the country. This aspect, too, requires further research to gain a broader understanding of institutional cooperation.

Another focus of our research was the methods of communication used within transnational networks. Advances in communication technology have facilitated the expansion of these spaces into broader migrant networks, encompassing both close and distant family members residing across the globe. Descendants of migrants, who have grown up surrounded by digital technologies, are skilled users of communication tools like social media and messaging apps. They prefer immediate communication through platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, unlike their parents who may rely on traditional methods like phone calls. For younger generations, these technologies are seamlessly integrated into daily life, facilitating connections with their transnational kinship group, accessing news, participating in cultural events, and engaging with online communities related to their heritage.

Despite their close integration into Slovene society, the majority of our interlocutors maintain a strong connection to their ancestral roots. They demonstrate a deep respect for their ancestors' traditions, customs, and social ties with Bosnia and Herzegovina. They also participate in mechanisms characteristic of transnational social spaces, such as reciprocity, by offering financial and social support within their kinship group, making use of insider advantages as economic entrepreneurs, and participating in networks with institutional links to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Notes

[1] Faist (1998) began developing the theoretical framework based on a case study of Turks living in Germany who were active in the economic, political, or cultural spheres in Turkey.

[2] In the theoretical framework of transnational social spaces, Faist (2000, 195–196) defines diasporas as transnational communities, representing the third level of connectedness between "international movers and stayers". These communities are linked "by dense and strong social and symbolic ties over time and across space". The key prerequisite for diaspora is "that communities without propinquity link through reciprocity and solidarity to achieve a high degree of social cohesion, and common repertoire of symbolic and collective representations" (Faist 2000, 195–196). "Diasporas can only be called transnational communities, if the members also develop some significant social and symbolic ties to the receiving country" (Faist 2000, 197).

[3] We acknowledge that Bosnian identity is multifaceted and encompasses several ethnic identities. Nevertheless, we chose to interview representatives from two ethnic groups: Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs. One reason for this decision is that, according to official data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURS), immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina are categorised as a single group, making it impossible to discern their ethnic backgrounds from the data.

[4] The term autochthonous is important in this context, as it reflects a legacy of the Yugoslav Constitution which recognised specific national minorities as autochthonous due to historical border shifts. In Slovenia, only two groups hold this status: Italians and Hungarians. To date, Slovenia has not extended this designation to any other ethnic minority.

[5] The SURS measures the arrival of new immigrants every year and, over time, immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina have consistently been among the most numerous.

[6] The tolar was Slovenia's currency from 1991 to 2007, when Slovenia entered the Eurozone and adopted the euro. The exchange rate in 2006 was 240 tolars to 1 euro.

Acknowledgement

Nastanek transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov: potomci priseljencev iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji

Povzetek

Članek na podlagi raziskave o dejavnostih potomcev priseljencev obravnava koncept transnacionalnih družbenih prostorov. V intervjujih s potomci priseljenske skupnosti iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji smo raziskovali, kako ti vzdržujejo transnacionalne vezi s širšo družino in izkoriščajo prednosti tovrstnih mrež. Skozi odlomke iz intervjujev predstavljamo mehanizem vzajemnosti, vključenost potomcev v institucionalno, organizacijsko in poslovno sodelovanje znotraj širših transnacionalnih omrežij ter načine njihove komunikacije s transnacionalno sorodstveno skupino.

Ključne besede

Transnacionalni družbeni prostori, priseljenci, potomci, Bosna in Hercegovina, Slovenija