

**THE ETHNIC IDENTITY OF HUNGARIANS IN
THE DEMOGRAPHICALLY THREATENED
AREA OF PREKMURJE**

**NARODNA IDENTITETA MADŽAROV NA
DEMOGRAFSKO OGROŽENEM OBMOČJU V
PREKMURJU**

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Abstract

UDC 911.3 : 323.15 (497.12 - 188.7)

The ethnic identity of Hungarians in the demographically threatened area of Prekmurje

The paper deals with the problem of the preservation of ethnic identity of Hungarians in the demographically threatened border areas of Prekmurje (community of Murska Sobota). The native indigenous population (most of them are Hungarians) has a lot of economic and social troubles. A distinctive passivity in the relationship to the ethnic identity is to be perceived.

Izvleček

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Narodna identiteta Madžarov na demografsko ogroženem območju v Prekmurju

Prispevek govori o problemih ohranitve narodne identitete Madžarov na demografsko ogroženem obmejnem območju v Prekmurju (občina Murska Sobota). Domače prebivalstvo, večinoma Madžari, ima veliko ekonomskih in socialnih problemov. Očitna je izrazita pasivnost glede vprašanja etnične pripadnosti.

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INTRODUCTION

The area autochthonously settled by Hungarians in Slovenia encompasses two geographically distinctive areas in Prekmurje. The northern part comprises eleven villages situated in the narrow belt along the Slovene-Hungarian border. The southern – larger and ethnically mixed – part lies in the triangle between the Croatian border and the Hungarian border in the southeastern part of Prekmurje (Fig. 1). As a result of economic migrations in the last decades a smaller number of Hungarians live dispersed in other parts of Prekmurje and Slovenia, especially in towns (Murska Sobota, Maribor, Ljubljana).

The two areas significantly differ from each other with respect to their economic and demographical processes and living conditions in general. The population of the southern part, which is more densely populated and has a better infrastructure, is stagnating or slightly increasing. The northern part is characterized by marked economic and demographical regression (G e n o r i o et al., 1985). The following factors have contributed to the bad economic and social position of this region:

1. Many years of bad transport connections between this area and Murska Sobota and other centers of employment;
2. Lack of central lower-rank settlements in this area;
3. Poor or almost non-existent interconnections between ethnically mixed settlements; they were connected by the so-called 'school road' as late as the 1970s;
4. Negative effects of closed borders on the economic and demographical development of this area;
5. Poor state of agriculture as a basic economic activity in this area.

The northern part of the ethnically mixed area belongs to demographically threatened areas. Due to the migration of its young, active and educated population, this area has an above-average proportion of elderly inhabitants, single households and persons, with a low level of school education, a relatively high percentage of persons employed in agriculture and, in recent years, also of the unemployed. Some elements of cultural landscape disintegration are visible in this part (Z u p a n č i č, 1991).

The minority shares the fate of the area in which it lives. The problematic demographical and social structure is also negatively reflected in the minority's ethnic development. The minority's ethnic structure is deteriorating and its settlement area is shrinking, along with its decreasing number of inhabitants. In the period 1961–1991 the number of all inhabitants in this area dropped by one third, and the proportion of Hungarians by 2 percent



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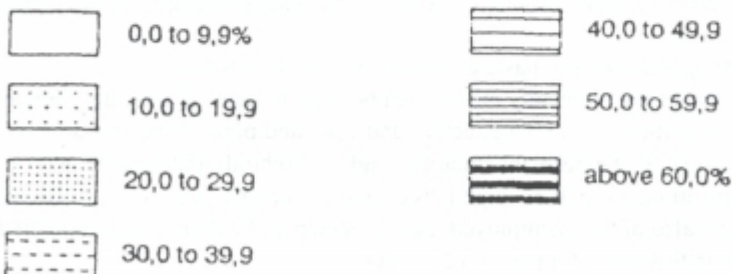


Fig. 1: The share of the Hungarian population in the ethnically mixed area of Prekmurje (Source: Causes data, 1991)

Slika 1: Deleži madžarskega prebivalstva na narodnostno mešanem območju v Prekmurju.

(however, this figure oscillates slightly in the censuses; G e n o r i o et al., 1985; C e n s u s 1991). The minority population is decreasing primarily due to migrations and to the low level of natality, but partly also due to assimilation.

In demographically threatened areas, a minority's ethnic development has some specific features stemming from the earlier mentioned weaknesses of these areas. The aim of this article is to highlight the ethnic development of the Hungarian minority in the above-mentioned area.

THE PASSIVITY OF THE LOCAL POPULATION TOWARDS THE ISSUES OF ITS ETHNIC AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF THE AREA

Slovenian geographers have been monitoring the problems of the social, economic and ethnic development of this area for more than twenty years, either by regular field research in the framework of youth research camps or by periodic field research. This text presents the results of an inquiry carried out in Krplivnik/Kapornak in January 1993. The inquiry encompassed 32 persons in the age group from 16 to 60 years. Although Krplivnik is a small settlement, the results of this inquiry are extremely indicative (a few years ago similar results were obtained by an inquiry carried out in Pordašinci, Središče and Hodoš). A considerable number of persons questioned had no interest in the current social issues. Such passivity in the minority's attitude towards its economic, social and political problems is not an exception but rather a typical trait of demographically threatened areas.

About 60 per cent of persons interrogated were not acquainted with the most powerful political parties in the area and their programs, i. e. they showed no interest at all in these matters. In this respect there were no differences between the Hungarian and the Slovene population. About 60 per cent of Hungarians and 90 per cent of Slovenes (who identified themselves as such in the questionnaire) were indifferent to the question of which political party has the program and representatives that are most suitable for the solution of the problems of the Hungarian minority. Similar passivity was noticed in their attitude towards the work and significance of minority representatives at the local, municipal and state level. It is interesting to observe that their passivity increases with the remoteness of the representatives – in the same way as does their negative opinion about them. An even greater lack of interest was noticed in their attitude towards the new municipal division or local self-management. Although this issue is extremely important for the minority's future development, almost 80 per cent of the questioned answered that this did not interest them. (The question of local self-management was frequently dealt with in the media).

The attitude towards bilingual education is also very interesting. Although a positive attitude towards this issue prevails, they ascribe relatively small significance to intercultural education and preservation of Hungarian national awareness. Some believe that due to bilingualism professional aspects of education are being neglected, what results in poor professional opportunities.

They are somehow more critical with respect to economic issues, although even here the proportion of passive responses reaches about 30 per cent (this figure is slightly higher with the Hungarians). They both recognize major economic problems (unemployment, lack of infrastructure, difficulties in agriculture, etc.) but they look for the causes mainly at the municipal level. Among the reasons for the prevailing bad situation they do not mention the effects of the border position and the structural weaknesses of agriculture, the old age of the population and its relatively low level of education. According to them, the solution to their economic problems will come primarily from municipal and state intervention – i. e. from outside.

All the above-mentioned problems have one common denominator: the passivity of the local population with respect to social, economic, political and ethnic issues concerning their own settlement area. We are thus dealing with a situation in which the local population shows no interest in the minority's fate and future development. This can be at least partly explained as a consequence of the negative social selection in the past, when the young, more ambitious and better educated population was moving out of this area. The older and less qualified population, which remained, has more difficulties in adapting to new conditions and less easily follows the pace of contemporary processes.

Slovenia has a high standard of legal protection of ethnic minorities. But the members of the minorities have to apply it in practical life as well. A conscious endeavour to preserve one's national identity has to be present. That is why the above-mentioned passivity can act as a factor speeding up the assimilation of minority members.

LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Language is one of the most important symbols of national affiliation, and preservation of one's linguistic practice is a key to preserving one's national identity. The Hungarian language is well established at the local level, since it is spoken or, at least, understood by the majority of inhabitants in the ethnically mixed area. Bilingualism, which is a result of bilingual education, is also relatively frequent. But outside the areas mentioned (in municipal offices, in doctors' clinics, at the work place, etc.) the Slovene language is mainly used also by Hungarians (Table 1).

Preservation of linguistic practice and thereby of national identity is also enabled by the media. In Krplivnik about 90 per cent of those questioned watched TV programs and listened to radio programs in Hungarian (or bilingual programs), whereas about 60 per cent at least occasionally read newspapers in the Hungarian language. The research carried out in other settlements also showed that 10–15 percent of the population did not watch any shows or read any newspapers or literature in their own (minority) language (R e p o l u s k - Z u p a n č i č, 1990).

Also interesting are the effects of mixed marriages. On the one hand, such marriages extend the circle of people exercising bilingual communication but on the other hand, assimilation is also present in mixed marriages. In the case of Krplivnik it was found out that the assimilation of Hungarians (with Hungarian as a native tongue) is twice as frequent as the assimilation of Slovenes (A survey, 1993).

Table 1: The relation between mother tongue, colloquial tongue in family and national identity. A case of Krplivnik/Kapornak, January 1993 (A survey, 1993).

Tabela 1: Odnosi med maternim jezikom, pogovornim jezikom v družini in narodno identiteto v Krplivniku/Kapornak, januarja 1993.

Mother tongue	Tongue in family	National identity	Cases
Slovene	Slovene	Slovene	1
Slovene	Hungarian	Slovene	4
Hungarian	Slovene	Slovene	3
Hungarian	Hungarian	Slovene	5
Hungarian	Hungarian	Hungarian	15
Hungarian	Slovene	Hungarian	2
Slovene	Hungarian	Hungarian	2
Slovene	Slovene	Hungarian	0
Total			32

CONCLUSION

The protection of national identity in the border and demographically threatened area in the northern part of the ethnically mixed area involves struggling with the weaknesses of its economic and demographical structure. The local population is preoccupied with existential problems and displays a fairly passive attitude towards the minority's social, economic and political problems and the preservation of its national identity. Such passivity will in the long run speed up the assimilation of the Hungarian minority, the number of which is already decreasing due to migration and to too low a level of natality.

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4. Censuses 1991 – as per national affiliation, computer printouts, (at the Institute for Geography at the University of Ljubljana).

5. A Survey 'Language and National Identity' (in the Slovene language), Krplivnik, January 1993, 32 questionnaires, (available at the Institute of Geography at the University of Ljubljana).

NARODNA IDENTITETA MADŽAROV NA DEMOGRAFSKO OGROŽENEM OBMOČJU V PREKMURJU

Povzetek

Uvod

Območje avtohtone poselitve Madžarov v Sloveniji obsega dva med seboj ločena dela v Prekmurju. Severni del obsega 11 vasi v ozkem pasu ob slovensko-madžarski meji. Južni, obsežnejše del narodnostno mešanega leži v trikotniku med hrvaško in madžarsko mejo na jugovzhodu Prekmurja (slika 1). Manjše število Madžarov prebiva razpršeno po drugih krajih Prekmurja in Slovenije, predvsem v mestih (Murska Sobota, Maribor, Ljubljana). Slednji so rezultat ekonomskih migracij v zadnjih desetletjih.

Severni del narodnostno mešanega območja spada med demografsko ogrožena območja. Zaradi odseljavanja mladega, aktivnega in izobraženega prebivalstva je nadpovprečno visok delež starih ljudi, samskih gospodinjstev ter oseb z nizko šolsko izobrazbo, relativno visok odstotek zaposlenih v kmetijstvu in v najnovejšem času tudi brezposelnih. Vidni so tudi elementi razpadanja kulturne pokrajine (Z u p a n č i č, 1991). Manjšina deli usodo območja, na katerem živi. Problematična demografska in socialna struktura se zato negativno odraža tudi v etničnem razvoju manjšine. V obdobju 1961–1991 se je število skupnega prebivalstva zmanjšalo za dobro tretjino, delež madžarskega prebivalstva pa za 2 % (G e n o r i o et al., 1985; Popis 1991).

Pasivnost domačega prebivalstva do vprašanj etničnoregionalnega razvoja je značilnost območja

Vprašanjem socialnega, gospodarskega in etničnega razvoja sledi slovenska geografija že nad 20 let z rednimi terenskimi raziskavami v okviru mladinskih raziskovalnih taborov ter z občasnimi terenskimi raziskavami. V nadaljevanju so navedeni rezultati raziskave naselja Krplivnik/Kapornak, ki je bila izvedena januarja 1993. Anketa je zajela 32 oseb v starosti 16–60 let. Čeprav gre za majhno naselje, so rezultati dovolj zgovorni (pred nekaj leti smo dobili podobne rezultate pri raziskavi naselij Pordašinci, Središče in Hodoš).

Okrog 60 % vprašanih ni poznalo najmočnejših političnih strank in njihovih programov, oziroma jih to področje sploh ni zanimalo. Med madžarskim in slovenskim prebivalstvom v tem pogledu ni bilo razlik. Pri vprašanju, katera od političnih strank ima najprimernejši program in predstavnike za reševanje problemov madžarske manjšine, ni kazalo nobenega zanimanja okrog 60 % Madžarov in 90 % Slovencev (kot so se v anketi sami opredelili). Podobno pasivnost smo zasledili pri odnosu do dela in pomena manjšinskih predstavnikov na lokalnem, občinskem in državnem nivoju. Še večje nezanimanje je bilo opazno pri odnosu

do nove občinske razdelitve oziroma do lokalne samouprave. To vprašanje je za nadaljnji razvoj manjšine izredno pomembno. In vendar je skoraj 80 % vprašanih odgovorilo, da jih to ne zanima (po medijih je bilo vprašanje lokalne samouprave pogosto obravnavano).

Zanimiv je tudi odnos do dvojezičnega šolstva. Čeprav imajo o njem večinoma pozitivno mnenje, razmeroma nizko vrednotijo pomen interkulture vzgoje in ohranjanja madžarske narodne zavesti. Nekateri menijo, da je zaradi dvojezičnosti zapostavljena strokovna plat izobraževanja, kar vodi k slabšim poklicnim možnostim.

Nekoliko bolj kritični so pri odnosu do gospodarskih vprašanj, čeprav je tudi tu delež pasivnih okrog 30 % (pri Madžarih nekaj višji). Oboji prepoznavajo glavne gospodarske težave (nezaposlenost, pomanjkljiva infrastruktura, težave kmetijstva itd.), vzroke pa iščejo predvsem na občinskem nivoju. Med vzroki slabega stanja ne omenjajo učinkov obmejne lege in strukturnih slabosti kmetijstva, ostarelosti prebivalstva in dokaj nizke izobrazbene ravni. Reševanje gospodarskih problemov vidijo predvsem v poseganju občine in države – torej od zunaj.

Vsi navedeni problemi imajo skupni imenovalc: pasivnost v odnosu do socialnih, gospodarskih, političnih in etničnih vprašanj na lastnem poselitvenem območju. Gre torej za stanje, ko je domačemu prebivalstvu vseeno, kakšna bo nadaljnja usoda manjšine. Vsaj deloma si je to mogoče razložiti kot posledico negativne socialne selekcije v preteklosti, ko so odhajali mladi, ambicioznejši in bolje izobraženi. Starejše in slabše kvalificirano prebivalstvo, ki je ostalo, se težje prilagaja novim razmeram in težje sledi sodobnim procesom.

Jezik in narodna identiteta

Jezik je kot eden najpomembnejših simbolov narodne pripadnosti, zato je ohranjanje jezikovne prakse ključ za varovanje narodne identitete. Madžarski jezik je dobro uveljavljen na lokalnem nivoju, saj ga govori ali vsaj razume večji del prebivalstva narodnostno mešanega območja. Razmeroma pogosta je tudi dvojezična praksa, v znatni meri rezultat dvojezičnega šolstva. Izven omenjenega območja (na občinskih uradih, pri zdravniku, na delovnem mestu ipd.) uporabljajo tudi Madžari večinoma slovenščino (tabela 1).

Ohranjanje svojega jezika in s tem tudi narodne identitete omogočajo tudi javni mediji. V Krplivniku je okrog 90 % vprašanih sledilo TV oddajam in okrog 75 % radijskim oddajam v madžarščini (ali dvojezičnim), okrog 60 % pa jih vsaj občasno prebira časopise v madžarščini.

Zanimivi so tudi učinki mešanih zakonov. Ti po eni strani širijo krog ljudi, kjer je sporazumevanje dvojezično, po drugi strani pa je v mešanih zakonih prisotna asimilacija. Na primeru Krplivnika se je pokazalo, da je asimilacija Madžarov (z madžarskim maternim jezikom) dvakrat pogostejša od asimilacije Slovencev (rezultati raziskave, Krplivnik, 1993).