CROATIAN ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS IN SLOVENIA: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THE ETHNIC SITUATION

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ABSTRACT

Croatian Ethnic Associations in Slovenia: Historical Context and the Ethnic Situation
The article discusses the institutionalized form of Croatian ethnicity in Slovenia. It focuses on ethnic gatherings at Croatian ethnic associations, where eleven existing associations have been combined in a union as an umbrella organization. We used the survey questionnaire method with the leaders of the Croatian associations, and the discourse analysis method for newspaper and internet articles on the issue of the Croatian national minority in Slovenia. Using the ethnic situation model, we attempted to examine them in a wider historical-spatial perspective. The ethnic situation is a theoretical-observational model, which enables putting the observed ethnic situation into an appropriate synchronic (spatial) and diachronic (historical) context. The activities and organizational structure of the Croatian ethnic associations are mostly conditioned by and correlate to the ethnic situation in Slovenia as the host society, but also to the wider surrounding region and the European Union.
KEY WORDS: Slovenia, Croatian ethnic associations, ethnic situation, national minorities

IZVLEČEK

Hrvaška etnična društva v Sloveniji: zgodovinski kontekst in etnični položaj
Članek obravnava institucije hrvaške etnične skupine v Sloveniji. Osredotoča se na združevanja hrvaških društev, na Zvezo društev kot osrednjo organizacijo, v katero se je povezalo enajst društev. Uporabljen je vprašalnik, ki so ga izpolnili vodje hrvaških društev, ter diskurzivna analiza časopisnih in spletnih člankov o hrvaški etnični manjšini v Sloveniji. Model etničnega položaja je teoretsko-opazovalni model, ki omogoča umestitev etničnega položaja v ustrezen sinhroni (prostorski) in diahroni (zgodovinski) kontekst. Aktivnosti in organizacijska struktura hrvaških društev so v največji meri odvisne od etničnega položaja v Sloveniji kot državi gostiteljici pa tudi v širšem okolju regije in Evropske unije.
KLJUČNE BESEDE: Slovenija, hrvaška etnična društva, etnični položaj, nacionalne manjšine

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INTRODUCTION

The largest wave of Croatian migration to Slovenia occurred after the Second World War, especially in the 1960s and 1970s (until 1981), but at that time, these were internal migrations that were taking place within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). In the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, Croats enjoyed the status of a constituent people, together with Serbs, Muslims (Bosniaks) and indigenous Slovenes. The Soviet model of solving the national question was in force in Yugoslavia, according to which constituent peoples (today's nations) had the right to their own national republic (state), but as citizens of SFRY had equal rights in all republics and provinces. This was *de jure* true, but in practice the founding of associations, schools and other institutions using one's mother tongue was not tolerated. Despite the fact that Croats had organized associations before the Second World War, no association was founded after the Second World War. Upon the disintegration of Yugoslavia and Croatia's and Slovenia's independence, the character of the migrations changed, and the statuses of the persons affected by these migration movements also changed.

In this article, we look at the past, present and future of Croatian ethnic associations in Slovenia by analysing several aspects of their institutionalized ethnicity. For this purpose, we used the survey questionnaire method with the leaders of Croatian ethnic associations in Slovenia, as well as the content analysis method for analysing various newspapers and internet articles about Croats in Slovenia. With the help of the ethnic situation model, which is grounded in Luhmann's epistemological constructivism and Theory of Social Systems, we analyse the condition of Croatian ethnic associations in a broader historico-spatial perspective.

THE ETHNIC SITUATION: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL-THEORETICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCHING MAJORITY-MINORITY RELATIONS

Sociology and (cultural) anthropology have not created a sufficiently developed framework for researching ethnic and national minorities which would allow for this phenomenon to be examined in its entirety from the standpoint of these scientific disciplines. The most likely reason for this is the fact that sociological and anthropological research of minorities is a branch of ethnic studies (Eriksen 2004: 210), which is focused on the relations *between* ethnic groups and identity construction, and only rarely on the relation of the state towards these ethnic groups, and this relation is the one which forms the majority-minority situation. According to Barth (1969: 19), this might be the main reason why sociological-anthropological theory regarding minorities is underdeveloped. A credible description of an ethnic situation presupposes studying a state's function as an organization which concentrates its power on a certain territory and its role in shaping the ethnic situation. It realizes its power through the mechanisms of observing, monitoring, controlling, naming and categorizing the social groups and individuals which make up the state's population.[1]

If we accept Luhmann's (2001b) principle, according to which systems are constructed and maintained, by use of monitoring, through a process of differentiating and marking, then special attention should be paid to the descriptions and self-descriptions of the observer (both inside and outside the situation), and to their logical grouping into classification systems of human collectives, discourses, worldviews and constructions of different identities. In this kind of theoretical framework, the transformations

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1   For a detailed description of these functions of the state see *Moć klasifikacije: klasifikacijske sheme i konstrukcija etničke strukture u Banskoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji (1785.–1860.) [The Power of Classification: Classification schemes and constructions of the ethnic structure in the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia (1785–1860)]* (Vukić 2008).

of ethnic groups are not a consequence of cultural differences among them, but of a cognitive process in which the observers *create differences through differentiation* (Bateson 1979: 99).

The theoretical conception of the ethnic situation which is discussed here is grounded in the philo-sophical concepts of "situation" (Sartre 2006), "situational determination" and "life centre" (Dilthey 1980), and to a much greater extent in sociological theories of "social situation" (Thomas and Thomas 1928), Parsons' (1949) connection between the concept of situation and theory of action, the "face-to-face situation" of Berger and Luckmann (1992), and micro-sociological theoretical orientations and their analyses of a situation in the context of everyday life (Collins 1988).

From the standpoint of Luhmann's definition of observation, it can be noticed that an ethnic situa-tion is the result of the interplay between internal and external observations and definitions. Differen-tiation between internal and external definitions enables observation of an ethnic situation from several different standpoints, i.e. analytical levels. From the standpoint of a second-degree observer, science can construct and observe ethnic situations at the level of mutual presence in the conditions of everyday life, at the level of states, at the level of mutual relations among states, or at the level of supra-national constructions such as the European Union. The task of such an approach is to show how micro-situations are transformed into macro-situations and vice versa. The second research pro-gramme is the observation of observers and their codes of differentiation, descriptions, categorizations and classification systems. The mechanisms through which power-carrying observation instruments define ethnic situations and the processes by which this "micro-physics of power" is manifested in eth-nic situations can be understood in such circumstances.

Luhmann's methodological orientation follows from this – observe the observers and their de-scriptions of a situation. "Observers can often better predict the effect based on their knowledge of the situation than based on the knowledge of personas and, in accordance with that, their observation often, if not overwhelmingly, does not even match the mental state of the actors" (Luhmann (2001a: 240). In that sense, our approach in this article is based on observing the effects of the state and its in-stitutions on one hand, and discourse analysis of the Croatian minority community, which is the result of observing and understanding one's own position within the Slovene ethnic situation, on the other. We learn about the actions of the Slovene state and its institutions from our position of second-degree observers through first-degree observers, Slovene social scientists and their interpretations of the mi-norities' conditions in Slovenia (Medved 2009) (Žagar 2001) (Kralj 2008) (Ploštajner 2000) (Zorn 2009). As Geertz asserted as early as 1973, the social sciences should not engage in establishing "objective facts" but interpretations of these facts and interpretations of these interpretations. That is also the only thing that is left to the second-, third-, and nth-degree observers.

THE POSITION OF THE CROATIAN ETHNIC MINORITY AND ASSOCIATIONS IN THE SLOVENE ETHNIC SITUATION

The ethnic situation is an analytical observation instrument in the eye of the observer. Observers are, according to Luhmann's constructivist epistemology, systems of science, art, politics and organization, particularly the state. Our ethnic model situation includes the temporo-spatial context determined through observation, individual participants (actors) and the state – a monitoring and classification instrument holding a monopoly on political power. The structures and processes in an ethnic situa-tion (in this case the Slovene) are reflected through constant communication and interaction. An event adds to an event in interaction, and a statement to a statement in communication. Interactions and communications are, in time, routinized and institutionalized, and relatively firm structures of relations are formed, which unburden participants from thinking about what to do in each particular situation (Berger and Luckmann 1992: 42–45). In the world of routinized events and communication, sometimes

an event 'occurs' with the meaning that Badiou (2005: 173–178) attaches to that concept. The event is recognized since, in contrast to the usual events, it automatically effects a change in an ethnic situation. After that, neither the past nor the future of the participants in the ethnic situation can remain the same. For the Slovene ethnic situation, the decision to secede from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and the creation of the Slovene national state was such an event. The Slovene state, like any other, started carrying out its main functions: counting the population, monitoring, punishing, and issuing laws and decisions, based on the new population classification scheme. Although the census which had just been conducted according to the classification scheme and census models of SFRY was used in these processes, the data were interpreted in a manner which was conducive to the new ethnic situation. Thus, according to the 1991 census, Slovenia had a population of 1,965,986, of whom 87.84 percent (1,727,018) declared themselves as Slovenes. Italians and Hungarians, who comprised 0.16 percent and 0.44 percent of the overall population respectively, were recognized as national minorities in Slovenia, while the Roma, 0.12 percent of the overall population, were categorized as an 'ethnic community'. All of the minorities in question had their collective rights recognized as stipulated in the 1991 Constitution. Immigrants from other republics of the SFRY and their successors who held Yugoslav citizenship were recognized as neither ethnic nor national minorities. According to the 1991 census, immigrants consisted of 54,212 Croats (2.76 percent), 26,842 Muslims (1.37 percent), and 47,911 Serbs (2.44 percent), while 12,307 (0.63 percent) declared themselves as Yugoslavs, 9,011 (0.46 percent) did not declare themselves in terms of nationality, 53,445 (2.72 percent) were of unknown ethnicity, and 5,254 (0.27 percent) declared themselves as belonging to a region (for example, Bosnians or Istrians) (Žagar 2001: 110).

In the new interpretation, the ethnic situation gained the following characteristics (structure): minority rights are acknowledged only to the indigenous Italian and Hungarian minorities (relatively small communities which have the support of their mother countries in Slovenia's neighbourhood). Members of the former constituent peoples of Yugoslavia mainly had their Slovenian citizenship recognized, but not their collective minority rights. In these processes, a certain number of citizens were 'erased' and were left without basic citizens' and civic rights, while the Roma were recognized as a community only 16 years later (Zorn 2009: 211). According to the latest report of the Slovene Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of the 'erased' was higher than 25,671 (www.mirovni-institut.si).

According to the reports of the European monitoring bodies and Commissions, the state of human, civic and minority rights in Slovenia is satisfactory and within the European standards. This of course does not mean that there are no problems with minorities in Slovenia. As Žitnik Serafin (2013: 51) showed in her most recent article, differentiating between indigenous and immigrant Roma increases their discrimination in Slovene society. Although we agree with this assessment, we as second-degree observers believe that the Slovene model is much better and more flexible than the models which exist in Croatia and Serbia and which were created under the pressure of the European Union. This model, which recognizes the minority rights of all ethnic groups, has proved to be useful mostly to the minority communities' elites, while the majority of members of the minority communities have gained very little benefit from the fact that they are members of a recognized national minority.

Furthermore, problems with constructing and maintaining an ethnic identity appear at the personal level. Members of minority national communities are placed in a situation in which they have to choose between a wish to preserve their uniqueness and an interest for inclusion in the Croatian national corpus through assimilation. The identity problems of members of national minorities are manifested during parliamentary elections when members of national minorities have to decide whether to use their voting right to vote for a representative of their own minority community or for a representative of some Croatian party. The consequence of such a system is that one can become a national minority parliamentary representative with just a few hundred votes.

Researching Croatian ethnic associations in Slovenia can also give us insight into their perception of the newly-established ethnic situation in Slovenia.[2] The beginning of the 1990s was a time of ethnic mobilization, and Croats felt a need to organize themselves in Slovenia on an ethnic/national basis. The first Croatian association was founded in Maribor in 1990, but the Slovenian public did not approve its founding, since it was perceived as an association for the promotion of the Croatian state and Croatian political interests (Ivanjko 1997: 261). After the Maribor association, several other Croatian cultural associations were established, which, during the Homeland War, mostly worked on collecting humanitarian aid for Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and on accommodating refugees (Perić 2005). Today Croatian ethnic associations represent a specific social space created by members of the community themselves, depending on the particular structure and leadership of the associations, which model and establish certain rules, from the level of openness/closure of the association (to other Croatian ethnic associations, as well as to other ethnic communities) to the intensity, number and types of activities.

Croatian ethnic associations represent an institutionalized form of Croatian immigrant ethnicity in Slovenia. They create and form various activities of the Croatian ethnic community, so they could be defined as their places of gathering and belonging. They represent the Croatian ethnic community in relation to the society of origin (Croatia), as well as in relation to the accepting society (Slovenia).

Croats in Slovenia are organized into 11 Croatian ethnic associations which are integral parts of the umbrella ethnic organization called the Union of Croatian Associations in Slovenia (SHDS), with headquarters in Ljubljana. The titles of the associations indicate the form of the association – the cultural aspect of the ethnic association along with obligatory adjective "Croatian" (eight associations have the words "Croatian cultural association" in their titles); one is defined as a students' Croatian association; one is a political branch of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) political party; some are defined according to the geographical site of immigration within the accepting society (Maribor, Velenje, Ljubljana, Škofija Loka, Jesenice, Lendava, Novo mesto) or according to the geographical/regional area of emigration (Međimurje – two associations, Istria, Komušina, Pomurje).

The members of the Croatian associations also include Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where citizenship and nationality are not the same categories and where a strong connection between the ethnic and religious factors can be noticed. Religion plays an important role in mobilizing the ethnic, and Croatian Catholic missions to Slovenia have contributed to this. These associations are usually founded by older and middle-aged persons, and exhibit a patriarchal structure, which is particularly evident in the area of management, as the heads of all of the associations are men. The founders include Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina and different regions of Croatia, so that the founders therefore represent a mixed regional origin. With regard to educational structure, the founders usually have college or university degrees. The associations do not set local or regional boundaries, and the local and regional identities are of the same ethnic matrix. Membership in the associations is voluntary, and the associations are financed through membership fees or sponsorship (by Croatian entrepreneurs in Slovenia and their friends), while some financial means are also acquired from the Republic of Croatia and ministries of the Republic of Slovenia. A smaller number of members are younger, i.e. belong to the second or third emigrant generation. In addition to the Croatian Student Association in Ljubljana, which is part of the SHDS, there are also two student associations, the Croatian Student Association in Maribor and the Ćićarija Student Association of Istria and Primorje, which are active on social networks

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2 Our data are based on the results of a research survey conducted with leaders of Croatian associations in Slovenia. After formal meetings and holding introductory conversations with leaders of associations, a written questionnaire was developed containing 70 questions divided into several sections: data on the establishment of the association; age/gender and educational structure of leadership/members of the association; the structure, organization and activities of the association; relations with associations, organizations, and clubs of other minority communities in Slovenia, as well as with the Slovenian institutions and the Croatian consulate and embassy in Slovenia. In addition to the survey, eight semi-structured interviews of maximal variation were held (respondents of different gender, education, from different parts of Slovenia, etc.) with individual Croats in Slovenia according to random selection criteria.

where they connect with and establish communication and interactive links with younger Croats, equally connecting both on-line and off. Certain associations within the SHDS, but not the SHDS itself, are also present on the Internet and social networks, and they play an important role in public relations. Due to closeness of the homeland, particularly Međimurje County, the majority do not feel like part of a diaspora in the classic sense, so that Croats from Croatia, when referring to Croatian associations from Slovenia, do not use the term "from the diaspora", but usually the term "from neighbouring Slovenia". Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the other hand, do feel like part of the diaspora, and their local communities see them as compatriots from abroad/diaspora.

The SHDS also organizes the Assemblies of Croatian Culture, which are one of the activities of the Croatian counties in Croatia, and it is the only association from abroad there. The associations within the SHDS have varying degrees of openness/restrictedness. It could be concluded that the majority of them are of an open type, but there is more horizontal than vertical cooperation with other ethnic groups. Relations with the Croatian institutions are not particularly well-developed, but the situation has been improving recently. Ethnic solidarity is crucial to the founding, maintaining and future development of these associations. The Pomurje-Lendava Croatian Cultural Association, which is among the youngest and most open of the associations, has won several awards for cross-border cooperation, joint activities and projects and for promoting and linking Croatia and Slovenia as two homelands.

Although the remaining Croatian associations are also connected to other Croatian associations and institutions in Slovenia, as well as institutions in Croatia, this Croatian association shows the highest level and multiplicity of connections with local and regional institutions in both Croatia and Slovenia. The SHDS is engaged with and has for years been advocating for the improvement of the situation of Croats in Slovenia, i.e. for the recognition of the Croats' status as a national minority, because Croats are the largest ethnic group in this area. They also advocate for the right of reciprocity. Their status, according to them, undermines their effort to engage more actively in politics and in Slovene state bodies. On the other hand, they work to improve the status of their state of origin through various diaspora practices, mainly through strong promotion of cultural engagement and tourism.

Learning of the Croatian language, as an important marker of ethnic identity, is a project within the framework of the programme Teaching the Croatian Language Abroad, financed by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sport. Currently 66 students in Slovenia are learning the Croatian language and culture. These are mostly students up to the fifth grade of elementary school and children who spend longer hours in school. Interest drops in higher grades and it is often the practice that students quit after only one year.

Most of the associations, aware of the assimilation process particularly in the second and third generation of immigrants, emphasize as their goals and motives for establishing the association the need to transmit their ethnic culture to their descendants and to attract a higher number of younger members of the community, and this is also seen as the only possibility for the ethnic community to survive.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SLOVENE ETHNIC SITUATION FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF CROATIAN ETHNIC MINORITY MEMBERS

A modern ethnic situation is a complex configuration of positions and relations of ethnic groups and the state in an observed spatial-temporal context. Processes which are the result of power relations in the framework of the European system of states, relations in the region which are manifested through conflicts and wars for borders and for the shape of a state, as well as inter-ethnic relations within the state itself, affect the shape and structure of the ethnic situation. Ethnic identities are created by institutionalizing the actions of collective and individual actors on all three spatial-temporal levels, while relations between ethnic groups are formed within ethnic structures. Positions and

identities of collective and individual actors in an ethnic situation result in different *definitions of the ethnic situation*. It is precisely these different definitions of situations that are often the source of not only of conflicts, but also of the dynamics in ethnically complex societies. The fight to impose one's own definition of an ethnic situation is actually the fight for hegemony in a social system. The ruling ethnic group possesses the power to impose the official definition of an ethnic situation. In creating and maintaining the official definition, it has at its disposal the state as an organization and a legal system, as well as its ideological instruments and organizations in charge of producing the founding myths, inventing tradition and the official history. School systems and state propaganda are the media through which "the right definition of the ethnic situation" is transferred onto and planted into the individual. Individuals' awareness of their own position within an ethnic situation is part of the shared repository of knowledge in social systems. Everyone in a particular ethnic situation knows what they can expect and from whom, and how they should behave (Berger and Luckmann 1992: 60). The official definition of a situation, through laws, legitimizes the position of ethnic groups by evoking the history of ethnic relations in a system. An ethnic situation is given as an external force which defines in advance individuals who are carriers of numerous social roles and labels which have been assigned to them. A rough scenario for individual biographies is often prepared in advance in an ethnic situation. In addition to the official definition, there are also parallel definitions of the ethnic situation, but their scope is limited. Whether it will be possible to hear parallel definitions and stories depends on power relations in all three spatial-temporal dimensions of that situation. The social and historical sciences, proponents of various ideologies and numerous organizations such as the mass media, nation states or federal bodies such as the European Union constantly observe, monitor and control the population and each other, producing descriptions of situations of our place and time in the world. Descriptions are arranged into discourses and they create the episteme, i.e. the *Weltanschauung* of an epoch. From the systems theory viewpoint, observing ethnic groups in a social system proceeds on the inclusion-exclusion level of differentiation (Luhmann 2011: 73), as a relation between a majority and a minority. The majority-minority situation which determines the position of an ethnic group in a system is constituted through observation, categorization and classification of the population, which starts at the time of modernization in a liberal-democratic model of management and governance. The notion of minority and majority appeared only during the process of the development of the idea of number, representative governance and electoral law in the 18th century, in countries in which democratic revolutions had occurred (Appadurai 2008).

Using the content analysis method, we analysed the answers we received from surveys and interviews conducted with representatives of Croatian ethnic associations in Slovenia and gained insight into an 'alternative description' of the ethnic situation in Slovenia. The discourse of the Croatian ethnic minority in Slovenia develops around several topics: the first and key topic is the expression of loyalty towards the Slovenian homeland and state, and the feeling of closeness and friendship with the Slovenian people. We believe that a feeling of hurt and disbelief is also developed from the feeling of friendship, due to the non-recognition of Croats' collective rights in Slovenia. The second topic is the historical and scientific proof of the Croats' autochthony in Slovenia, according to which they should, on the basis of the Slovene Constitution, be recognized as a national minority with all accompanying rights and obligations, just like Hungarians and Italians. The third topic concerns the state and assimilation politics. Furthermore, it is very important for members of the Croatian ethnic community to emphasize the large amount of cultural activity and production which is directed at cooperation and understanding with the Slovenians. It is very important for them to emphasize that all this is achieved with minimal financial means which they receive from the Slovene and the Croatian states.

Croatian ethnic associations are well interconnected in Slovenia and throughout the world, and the Slovene Croats believe that this is a quality which the Republic of Slovenia should recognize and value. In the end, they criticize equally harshly both the Slovene and the Croatian administrations, which despite all efforts made by the Croatian ethnic associations continue to ignore their requests to

change the Croats' status to that of a national minority. According to them, this would be in line with the EU *acquis*. Their description of the ethnic situation of Croats in Slovenia might have been best summarized by one of the distinguished citizens, an ethnic Croat.

> I find the Croatian community in Slovenia lost, because it feels that no one from the Croatian side takes care of it, while Slovenia behaves unfriendly or at least not friendly enough. The feeling that we are second-class citizens is present among some 80 percent of the members of the Croatian community, except among those who are fully assimilated. Since 1991, the media has never had friendly relations towards Croatia. There are many reasons for this and it is impossible to describe all of them. All in all, I believe I speak for many when I say that it is not pleasant for us in Slovenia and that many would return or move if the economic situation allowed it. And we are particularly dissatisfied, just like other members of former SFRY constituent peoples, that we neither have any collective rights nor is it possible to expect something like that, considering both the left-wing and the right-wing parties' political attitudes. Slovenia is a country which can be friendly to foreigners only if they do not come from the south, from the former SFRY. I think it would not be wrong to say that we are guests in Slovenia by necessity, but that we do not feel this to be our home in the full sense of that word. In order for Croats to succeed in Slovenia, they must try much harder than Slovenes. This is my personal opinion after having spent 52 years in this environment, and I do not want this to be, in any way, attributed to the institutions or associations in which I am an active member.

CONCLUSION

In its report, the European Commission emphasized several times that constitutional protection and regulation of special rights of indigenous ethnic communities (minorities) in Slovenia satisfies the highest standards of protection, although problems in their implementation exist in practice, particularly concerning the Roma community. In contrast to the European observers, we as sociologists and observers believe that both the actions and discourses which describe these actions of the Slovene state institutions, as well as of minority ethnic communities, are conditioned by the ethnic situation in Slovenia, the region and the European Union. It can be concluded that the actions and the organization of the Croatian ethnic associations are, to the largest extent, conditioned by this factor. The representatives and members of these associations believe that the recognition of the national minority status for Croats is a condition for their survival in the Republic of Slovenia. The Slovenian Constitution does not allow for the future political organization of Croats, and their political actions are primarily directed towards sensitizing the Slovene and Croatian populations, political lobbying with Slovene parliamentary representatives and writing protest letters and decrees. Discourse analysis of their petitions and articles shows that they have high expectations for Croatia's accession to the European Union, after which, they believe, their problems will be easier to solve. Mutual interaction among Croatian associations in Slovenia is on a high level, as are cultural activities directed towards the preservation and promotion of Croats' cultural identity. The enthusiasm and engagement of the associations' members is remarkable, but there are problems regarding insufficient funding from the Slovene state and loss of membership due to poor inclusion of the young (assimilation).

Historical heritage and ethnic structure, which is usually the result of historical movements, influence the perception and understanding of our situation. Furthermore, the idea of number and counting, which lies in the foundation of the liberal ideology, creates ethnic situations which can potentially spin out of control, e.g. the idea that a minority would, due to its cultural and religious characteristics, one day become a majority in 'our' state. One of the tenets of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s was a real or imaginary threat that the Albanians, due to their high birth rate, would become the majority in Serbia. The assimilation policy of a state is often not conscious or intended, although the minorities might see it that way. If slight vertical movement of minority community members is enabled through the educational system, art or sport, there are good chances that this possibility will be exploited. On

the other hand, recognizing the national minority status of all ethnic groups, as is the case in Croatia or Serbia, is also no guarantee that all members of a minority will automatically be better off. This has become the business of leaders and ethnic elites, so that in these countries they are called 'ethno-businessmen', since the funding which the state distributes to national minorities is fairly substantial. It seems that the right solution lies in the parallel and consistent implementation of human and civil rights and raising awareness of the possibility of co-existence of several identities of one person or a community. Why could I not be Slovene and an engineer before noon, a European and a chess player in the afternoon, and a Croat who follows ancient customs in the evening?

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POVZETEK

HRVAŠKA ETNIČNA DRUŠTVA V SLOVENIJI: ZGODOVINSKI KONTEKST IN ETNIČNI POLOŽAJ
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Članek obravnava institucije hrvaške etnične skupine v Sloveniji. Osredotoča se na združevanja hrvaških društev, na Zvezo društev kot osrednjo organizacijo, v katero se je povezalo enajst društev. Uporabljen je vprašalnik, ki so ga izpolnili vodje hrvaških društev, ter diskurzivna analiza časopisnih in spletnih člankov o hrvaški etnični manjšini v Sloveniji. Model etničnega položaja je teoretsko-opazovalni model, ki omogoča umestitev etničnega položaja v ustrezen sinhroni (prostorski) in diahroni (zgodovinski) kontekst. Evropska komisija je v svojem poročilu večkrat poudarila, da je v Sloveniji uveljavljena najvišja stopnja ustavne zaščite in ureditve posebnih pravic avtohtonih etničnih skupnosti (manjšin), čeprav obstajajo v praksi težave z njihovo implementacijo, zlasti glede romske skupnosti. V nasprotju z mnenjem evropskih opazovalcev kot sociologi menimo, da so dejanja in diskurzi, ki opisujejo ta dejanja slovenskih državnih institucij kot tudi etničnih skupnosti, odvisna od etničnega položaja v Sloveniji, širši regiji in Evropski uniji.

Analizirali smo odgovore, ki smo jih dobili iz vprašalnikov in intervjujev, opravljenih s predstavniki hrvaških društev v Sloveniji, in pridobili vpogled v »alternativni opis« etničnega položaja v Sloveniji. Diskurz hrvaške manjšine v Sloveniji se razvija okrog različnih tem: prva in najpomembnejša tema je izražanje lojalnosti slovenski domovini in državi, občutenje bližine in prijateljstva s slovenskimi ljudmi. Verjamemo, da se je tudi občutje prizadetosti in nezaupanja zaradi nepriznavanja hrvaških kolektivnih pravic v Sloveniji razvilo iz občutja prijateljstva. Druga tema je zgodovinsko in znanstveno utemeljevanje hrvaške avtohtonosti v Sloveniji, s katero naj bi dosegli ustavnopravno priznanje statusa nacionalne manjšine in vseh pripadajočih pravic in dolžnosti, tako kot jih imata italijanska in madžarska nacionalna manjšina. Tretja tema je državna in asimilacijska politika. Prav tako člani hrvaške skupnosti poudarjajo pomen pestre kulturne dejavnosti in ustvarjalnosti, ki sta usmerjeni v dobro sodelovanje in razumevanje s slovenskim prebivalstvom. Vse to izvajajo z minimalnimi finančnimi sredstvi, ki jih dobijo od slovenske in hrvaške države.