

SLOVENE 'DIASPORA' IN THE UNITED STATES¹

CASE STUDY AND RESEARCH INITIATIVES

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SLOVENSKA "DIASPORA" V ZDRUŽENIH DRŽAVAH
Vzorčna študija kot vzpodbuda za nadaljne raziskave

Izvleček

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Obravnavana je slovenska manjšina v ZDA, predvsem njeno številčno stanje, spreminjanje starostne sestave in narodnostne zavesti, regionalna razporeditev, pomen za ameriško družbo, zavedanje povezanosti s prvotno domovino ter pomen nastanka slovenske države za okrepitev narodnostne zavesti ameriških Slovencev.

Ključne besede: Ameriški Slovenci, ZDA, etnična skupina, etnična zavest.

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Abstract

The Slovene ethnic group in the USA is discussed, particularly its number, changes in the age structure, ethnic awareness, regional distribution, its significance for American society, its connectedness with the country of its origin and the importance of establishing the Slovene state for strengthening ethnic awareness of American Slovenes.

Key words: American Slovenes; USA; Ethnic group; Ethnic awareness.

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Studies of ethnic communities have strong roots in American geographical investigations. They explore the multi-ethnic composition of American population; occasionally the investigations reveals more general trends or behavior of human populations, while stressing the specificities of each ethnic group. European researchers often focus on a selected ethnic group to document its contribution to America and stress the demographic or cultural loss that the old country endured because of their departure.

The geographical studies of immigrants and their descendants that originated from Slovene lands were established as part of the geography department research objectives already under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Anton Melik before World War II. The most comprehensive study by Slava Lipoglavšek-Rakovec² have been followed after the war especially in the past two decades, authored, however, mostly by historians. Prof. Dr. Vladimir Klemenčič has been the leading stimulator of these studies. This paper is a token acknowledgment of his role.

The term of 'diaspora' has gained some recognition in contemporary writing on ethnic communities³. It should be used with caution, however, because it may not represent what it implies. 'Diaspora' as a detached settlement that retains the property of the core entity; it implies the retention of societal attributes in spite of the territorial separation. The Slovene writing of today stresses the spatial clustering and institutional changes, and pays less attention to the connectivity through formal and informal networks. Observing the phenomenon of survival of a culturally defined ethnic group, demands a continuous evaluation of retention and/or dilution of individual and group properties, their substitution with new cultural component, and expansion of the total culture complex: the old and the new are symbiotically merged into a new creation, which only in name retains firm ties with the original entity⁴. The process, often described as process of assimilation reflects more the scale of analysis than the changes of individuals or groups. The transformation of an ethnic group is further due to the changes in the composition of the aggregate. In ethnic migration studies little attention is given to these two distinct transformations. This review of the Slovene 'diaspora' recognizes this duality of processes, but is mostly confined to analyze only the changes in the composite.

Smaller ethnic groups - the Slovenes among them - cannot claim major demographic contributions to the United States population. The departing emigrants nevertheless

²Slava Lipoglavšek-Rakovec. "Slovenski izseljenci: geografski pregled predvojnega stanja," *Geografski vestnik*, XXII (1950), pp. 3-60.

³A specialized periodical *Diaspora*, A Journal of Transnational Studies, Oxford University Press, began in 1991.

⁴Among the earliest recognitions of this new composite is the work of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. Cambridge, Mass., 1964.

created significant void in the population structure of home communities. It is estimated that Slovenia - the term used here for the territory and society of Slovenes regardless of the administrative boundaries existing at various historical times - lost up to one third of its total population due to migration. Nevertheless, the total demographic contribution to America was negligible. In selected areas of greater concentrations in the United States, the presence of Slovenes was noticed. Like other ethnic communities, they created their segregated neighborhoods, established centers of cultural, social and political activities, published newspapers, magazines, books and created Saturday schools, campground retreats, formed local and national fraternal organizations. The largest two organizations are the conservative *Kranjska Slovenska Katoliška Jednota* established in 1894, with headquarters in Joliet, south of Chicago; and a rival politically progressive *Slovenska Narodna Podporna Jednota*, created in Chicago in 1904, which recently moved the headquarters from Chicago to Pennsylvania.

The transformation of neighborhoods, the dilution of distinct ethnicity, in part spontaneous, in part induced by the policies of the US local and national administration, has been a major problem for the study of territorial patterns. The spatial distinctiveness that was clear in the past is less evident today; because the information is recorded by territorial units, and non-spatial attributes are not adequately acknowledged. This leads to the assumption that the clusters are disintegrating and the ethnic components are being absorbed by the host society. We hear about the vanishing neighborhoods and we assume that ethnicity is vanishing with them.

As long as the neighborhoods existed, they supported and were supported by neighborhood-type activities. The proximity of residence and the presence of activity centers retained the governing power for interaction. The sharing of symbols, values and attitudes, the complementarity of communication, maintained a proximity-based interacting system. Ethnicity or ancestry data assumed the existence of such a system. The assumption is also that once the neighborhood's cohesion is reduced or fades, it is the end of an interaction community system. For the ethnic community it represent the substitution of an ethnically based system with a more general societal clustering that lost its ethnic distinctiveness⁵. The once ethnic neighborhood of Slovenes in Pueblo; Colorado, around the St. Stephen's Church in Chicago, on the Slovenski hrib in San Francisco - to mention just a few - are being replaced by ethnically mixed population where the Slovene presence survives in the memory of older residents. Subsequent research can lead to a more thorough documentation and can reveal the persistency of the system beyond the neighborhood.

⁵This aspect was examined in my earlier studies. See: Joseph Velikonja. "Ethnicity, Geography and Communication," *Geographica Slovenica* 24 (1993), pp. 87-92.

This presentation is only calling attention to a few selected aspects of the transformation, using the Slovene migration as a case in point.

1. The declining size of the "Slovene" group. The number of people of Slovene ancestry declined by 2,026 in the 1980-90 decade and counted 124,437 people in 1990. Half of them declared Slovene as their single ancestry (father and mother both of Slovene ancestry); for an additional 20 percent the Slovene ancestry was considered primary (total 87,500). The remaining 37,000 recognize their ethnic ancestry as predominantly non-Slovene.⁶ We take the figures with some reservation. They include an unknown number of non-Slovenes, like the Slovaks, on the other hand exclude Slovenes who are being counted among the Austrians, Yugoslavs, or Slavs. The totals can only be speculated. What is revealing is that the declined number reflects most likely the fading of ethnic awareness and not the declined number of the survivors. The observation is based on an analysis of other ethnic cohorts, such as the Italians, where the numerical increase is a result of an increased awareness of ancestry.

2. The aging of ethnically identifiable population. The longitudinal assessment of migrants as a group presumes that the immigrants were mostly young at the time of arrival. With years they age; the ethnic group is augmented by their US-born children. Taking the two groups together, namely the foreign born, and the US-born, we soon approach a 'normal population age structure' for the total ancestry group, where the older and very small portion of the pyramid consists of foreign born, and the younger bottom portion of the native born. If the inflow of people of the same ethnicity continues, the middle of the pyramid remains. When, however, as is the case of most European ancestry groups, the immigration declines, the foreign born cohorts are only the survivors of earlier migrations and the majority of the ancestry population are US born of the second, third or subsequent generations. This is evident with the Slovenes.

Demographically the transformation is clear, though complicated with generations; progressively more and more offsprings of mixed marriages reduced the number of people with single ancestry. The US data point to this transformation: for people of Slovene ancestry, only one parent of Slovene ancestry is being recorded for half of the total. As expected, the foreign born cohort of single ancestry is advancing in age: Slovene immigrants with Slovene parents advance in age, the second generation is much younger and increasingly of mixed parentage while the third consists predominantly of people of multiple ancestry. The median age of the US population is 33, the median age for the people of primarily Slovene ancestry is 46.7, more

⁶For additional information of the Slovene ancestry group in 1990, see Jože Velikonja, "Demografska podoba Slovencev v ZDA v letu 1990," *Slovenski Izseljenski Koledar* 1995, str. 145-149.

precisely 65.1 for the foreign born and 44.7 for the US born. These figures reflect also the level of ethnic awareness in addition to the actual age of the Slovene ancestry group: immigrants are more likely aware of their ethnic ancestry than their offsprings. Another interesting observation is that the median age of Slovene immigrants who entered the US in the 1980-1990 period was 31.4, i.e. lower than the 33.0 for the total US population, the median for immigrants who came prior to 1980 was 66.4 (in 1990, not at the time of arrival): migration is still dominated by younger people but their aging is a non-stoppable process.

Significant other transformation is occurring: the foreign born immigrants are carriers of cultural patterns of the country and society of origin; the second generation, however, retains only those selected cultural components that were transmitted to them by their parents and by the ethnic community, which through time become less and less dominant. For the foreign born the cultural legacy consists of lived experiences, for the US born second and third generation is the legacy transformed through the eyes of their parents and other ethnic participants of the community. The most prominent element that can be identified in the transformation process is the use of the mother tongue. Even when the ability of language use is still present in the second generation, the vocabulary, the idiomatic communication ability, the total symbolic system in the mother tongue is greatly reduced. The impoverishment is evident in the less frequent use of the language within the ethnic community organizations and in the simplified vocabulary used in ethnic publications. Though the exact data are not available, it is estimated that the number of people of Slovene mother tongue in the United States does not exceed 15,000. The US statistics tell us that 72.3 percent of the foreign born Slovenes spoke a foreign language, predominantly Slovene, but the foreign mother tongue dwindles to 10.0 percent among the US born. This means that one fourth of the foreign born does not speak Slovene, and that 90 percent of the US born of Slovene ancestry did not recognize the Slovene as their mother tongue. This means that the predominant mother tongue of people of Slovene ancestry is not Slovene, but English.

3. Population of Slovene ancestry has been concentrated in few selected areas of the United States. The dominance of Ohio and the city of Cleveland has prevailed to these days though the total number has declined from 56,687 in 1980 to 49,598 in 1990, from 44.9 per cent of the total Slovene ancestry population to 39.8 percent. Similar decline is evident in Pennsylvania (from 17,416 in 1980 to 14,584 in 1990) and in Illinois (from 12,471 to 11,743). The general migration pattern of the US population is however reflected in the increase of people of Slovene ancestry in Florida and in the Sun-belt states. The dispersal is under way.

The contiguity that dominated the early settlements is giving way to new communities where information linkages sustain the social network and contribute to the maintenance of social awareness. The dispersal of the ethnic group is evident from

numerous components: closure of ethnic parish churches, community halls, discontinuation of home delivery of ethnic newspaper, reduced attendance at cultural and social events. The spatial data reflect territorial dispersal and might imply the demise of ethnicity as a factor of identification. However, it does not account for the transformation where the face-to-face communication has been replaced with modern technical linkages. The telephone, TV, radio, and now the FAX and E-mail have created the technological mesh that can be utilized for interpersonal communication and therefore substituted the imperative of proximity. The Slovene ethnic community is cognizant of these new means of interaction. In recent contacts with professionals of Slovene descent, significant number of communications were received by e-mail and FAX messages. Only few of them were in part written in Slovenian.⁷

4. The Slovene diaspora is numerically marginal for the contemporary American society, but is quite relevant for the Slovene society in general. The diaspora accounts for an estimated one third of the total Slovene population. In the past the impact was mostly economic and demographic, in contemporary conditions it accounts more for the quality than for the quantity of outflow. As an illustration, in 1990, Slovenia had 1737 people with doctoral degrees. At the same time 738 people of Slovene ancestry in the US had doctoral degrees, 208 Ph.D.'s were foreign born and 530 born in the US. In addition 1,245 held other professional degrees. The number of Ph.D.'s in Slovenian greatly increased in the last few years mostly as a result of the planned project of "2000 experts", and governmental financial support for advance training of Slovene graduates. The brain drain from Slovenia is nevertheless very significant. A number of them was trained abroad - and stayed abroad.

A recently completed project to identify achievers of Slovene ancestry (375 US residents) throws some light on what can be labeled as Slovene intellectual 'diaspora'. Over half (54 percent) are US born. The result is not surprising for US observers, though it is for foreign observers, who often state that most of their 'ancestry' achievers are foreign born temporary immigrants. Among the people recorded, 150 are holders of doctorates or equivalents. Territorially, they are more dispersed throughout the US than the general population of Slovene ancestry. The largest concentration of them is in Ohio. The factors that account for this concentration are the holding force of the natives on one hand, and the opportunity for service and employment in some way linked to the existence of ethnic community. As a side-observation: The Governor of Ohio and the bishop of Cleveland are of Slovene ancestry.

These individuals have pursued their goals outside organized groups and mostly outside their ethnic communities but have nevertheless made their contributions to the

⁷The reference is made to the work on a new edition of the *Who's Who of Slovene Descent in the United States*, scheduled for publication in 1998, compiled and edited by Joseph Velikonja and Rado L. Lencek..

two lands (or even more) and to two or more different societies. The direct linkage between the organized communities and the achievement of individuals is weak, though indirect intergenerational support is evident in numerous careers. The individualism of the United States recognizes that belonging to an organized group is a right, not an obligation. While the organizations enabled powerless individuals to assemble for their own protection, a great many individuals sought their role in individual pursuits on their own. This should not be taken as an indication of anti-social behavior, but mostly that their goals were not accepted within the programs of organized communities. Furthermore, ethnic associations were created and sustained by ethnic participants, who were often excluded from similar associations of the host society. Many individuals however aimed to be recognized not for their ethnic labels, but for their achievements within a larger society. They transcended ethnicity and were able to gain support through external, neutral, or multi-purpose networks. This is what the process of societal integration is all about: a non-stoppable process of grafting of individuals on the tree of the society in the space of their existence. The value of these individuals for any society is disproportionately greater than their minuscule number would imply. Everybody contributes something. The Slovene migrants to the United States contributed for decades their muscular power. The contemporary world, however, has greater demand for brain power, especially in the technologically advanced societies. Economic estimates have been made regarding the asset or value of individual immigrants for the receiving society. This is a direct transfer of assets from one society to another.

5. The initial compound of the Slovene emigrants in the United States at the turn of the century consisted of migrants who entered the United States after leaving Austria-Hungary; they brought with them some allegiance to the country of their birth and some additional allegiance to their ethnic nationality. The allegiance to Austria survived to these days. It is evident in the data of country of origin. As late as in 1960, 5759 of the 32,108 foreign born with Slovene mother tongue allegedly came from Austria. In subsequent decades the US born cohort became the dominant component of the Slovene diaspora. The modification of ethnic awareness is due in part to the demographic changes, where the third generation represents the bulk of people of Slovene ancestry. How strong is their awareness of the ancestry of the forfathers? Which would be for them the country of origin of their grandparents? Austria, Yugoslavia, Slovenia? The facts and awareness of these facts do not agree with any level of consistency.

6. The second component is the political, social and cultural transformation of the region of origin, where events of 1990s saw the affirmation of ethnic and national

recognition of Slovenia as a sovereign political entity.⁸ This affirmation had major repercussion for the Americans of Slovene ancestry. The previously prevailing identity as "Yugoslavs", was practiced by authorities on both shores of the Atlantic. The 1991 independence of Slovenia changed the attribution and gave way to new ethnic distinctiveness. For numerous people of Slovene ancestry it recognized their individual Slovene identity and replaced the generalized label of Slav, Slavic, or Yugoslav. The immigrants who came to the United States after the creation of the Yugoslav state in 1918 accepted the Yugoslav designation. For the descendants of pre-World War I immigrants, however, the situation was quite different. For them the Yugoslav frame was an alien label, and the language of Yugoslavia, Serbo-croat, and the symbols of the country, be it the Karadjordje labels or the postwar red star reflected the political reality, but was not necessarily recognized as part of their "heritage". Especially for the post-World War II period, the cultural and political links between the country of origin (or ancestry) and the organized communities in the United States passed through the "Yugoslav" and the "red" screen, which were objectionable to numerous people of the older generation because of its "Yugoslav" component, and to the post-World War II generations because of the political "red" label. The events in 1990's removed these impediments and are generating a revival of ethnic contacts between the country of forefathers and mothers and the country of immigration.

The US policies seldom recognized the Slovene label. The Census acknowledged the Slovene ancestry but most information regarding the Slovenes was included under Yugoslavia and Yugoslavs. The 2000 Census will be a major step forward with Slovenia as a recognized sovereign country. The official pre-1991 Yugoslav policies on the other hand, recognized Yugoslavs abroad, though at the same time rejected as their 'subject of interest' those who did not support the socialist Yugoslavia and the system of self management. The political label appeared to be more important than the recognition of a distinct Slovene ethnic 'diaspora'. Or to turn the direction: those emigrants and their descendants who did not endorse the existence and the policies of the Yugoslavia of the time, had no base to claim any ties with their country of origin or the country of origin of their parents and grandparents.

Recent political transformations produced substantial changes. For an ethnic revivalism, too little and too late. The establishment of a democratic and independent Slovenia gave substance to a revival of awareness, that Slovenia exists as a viable entity to which they can hold some emotional or not legal allegiance; the possibility of new transatlantic links has opened and the potential of interpersonal linkages derived from ancestry background surfaced. The medium is not the Slovene language but

⁸Extensive study of this issue for the Canada Croats is Daphne N. Winland. "'We Are Now an Actual Nation': The Impact of National Independence on the Croatian Diaspora in Canada," *Diaspora* 4/1 (1995), pp 3-29.

English, the network is the universal and ethnically neutral system of telephone, FAX, internet linkages and electronic mail. The critical component for the operation of the system is not territorial proximity and neighborhood clustering, but the awareness of communication partners and the technology that provides the intercommunication. In today's world, such a network does not discriminate. It enables the information exchange and becomes an integrative formative system of new dimensions.

The maintenance of this new system represents an enrichment both for the intellectual community in the old country and the additional benefit to participants in the US. In such a system, the numerical size of the ancestry group becomes marginal. The creation and maintenance of this new 'community' is under way and may replace the earlier forms of 'diapora's' presence. If such a community of awareness, linked by modern technology does not affirm itself, the Slovene presence in the United States is destined to extinction.

SLOVENSKA "DIASPORA" V ZDRUŽENIH DRŽAVAH

Vzorčna študija kot vzpodbuda za nadaljne raziskave

Povzetek

Geografske študije o priseljencih s slovenskega ozemlja in njihovih potomcih so se začele že pred 2. svetovno vojno, v okviru raziskav Oddelka za geografijo, še v času predstojništva prof.dr.Antona Melika. Najobsežnejši raziskavi Slave Lipoglavšek-Rakovec so po vojni, zlasti v zadnjih dveh desetletjih, sledile še druge, predvsem s strani zgodovinarjev. Vodilna sila teh raziskav je bil prof.dr.Vladimir Klemenčič in moj članek naj bo kot priznanje tej njegovi vlogi.

Izraz "diaspora" je pridobil nekaj priznanja v sodobnem pisanju o etničnih skupnostih, a ga je kljub temu treba previdno uporabljati, ker morda ne predstavlja vedno tega, kar dejansko pomeni. "Diaspora" pomeni ločeno naselitev, kjer ohranjajo lastnosti izvirne skupnosti; izraz vključuje ohranjanje družbenih atributov navkljub ozemeljski ločitvi.

Značilen proces ameriških priseljenjskih populacij, ki izvirajo iz Evrope, je staranje. Preživeli priseljenci predstavljajo vse manjši sestavni del vseh takih skupin, ki jih v glavnem sestavljajo druga in tretja generacija, torej že v Ameriki rojeni potomci. Etnične razlike se s pospešeno hitrostjo stapljajo s kulturnimi lastnostmi družbegostitelja. Slovenske skupine se še vedno pretežno nahajajo znotraj področij, ki so bila dosegljiva v času množičnih migracij; manjše spremembe so vidne kot številčen upad populacije v državah Ohio, Pensylvania, Illinois, Minnesota, ter v znatni rasti v

državah 'Sončnega pasu'. Bližina v etničnih soseskah, ki je bila v zgodnjih naselitvah odločilna, se umika novim prostorsko razpršenim skupnostim, kjer se družabna mreža vzdržuje s sodobnimi informacijskimi povezavami, ki pripomorejo k vzdrževanju etnične zavesti.

Transnacionalne skupnosti, katerih člani vzdržujejo nekaj resničnih ali simboličnih zvez s svojo izvorno deželo, se neprestano spreminjajo. Poleg drugih dejavnikov vpliva nanje politika ZDA, kot tudi politične spremembe v izvorni deželi glede njenih čezoceanskih "državljanov". Neodvisnost Slovenije je v letu 1991 sprožila novo etnično zavest, ki je zamenjala predhodno avstrijsko, slovansko in jugoslovansko 'nalepko'. Sprejeta nova tehnološko napredna informacijska mreža, ki jo uporablja večji del že tam rojene in izobražene slovenske diaspore v ZDA, bo proizvedla novo zavedno "skupnost".