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### National and Cultural Identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina

*We will present the first results of a sociological survey, which was carried out in the last months of the Yugoslavia of Milošević one year after the NATO bombings, in May 2000.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the research preserves the imprint of an era, which is over by today. Whether it is really closed and to what extent the political transformation, which came about in the autumn of 2000, changed the situation and state of mind of the Hungarian minority, this can be revealed only by future researches—when their results will be compared with our report prepared in the spring of 2000 and with other earlier reports.*

The questionnaire survey was carried out in the home of the questionees, with the method of personal inquiry. It included 21 (smaller and larger, from different regions) settlements<sup>2</sup> and within these, 562 adults (over the age of 18) of Hungarian nationality. The sample group selected with the quota method represented the Hungarians in Vojvodina (or rather their composition recorded at the 1991 census which went through various transformations though) with approximate accuracy according to the size of the localities, the sex, age, and qualification of the respondents.<sup>3</sup> Hungarian was the language of the questionnaire and the conversation as well.

The survey was carried out as a joint effort with Miklós Tomka, important figure of the sociology of religion. The following report comprises the subject matters examined by me: the different segments of national and cultural identity. (We have carried out a similar survey—again, in the framework of a joint research with Miklós Tomka—among the Hungarian population of Transylvania, Transcarpathia, and Upper Hungary in 1998 and 1999.<sup>4</sup> What is more, we have conducted a representative data survey—on similar subject matters—also in Hungary, in the organisation of the Kerkai Jenő Egyházzsociológiai

<sup>1</sup> The organisation and execution of the questionnaire survey was the task of the KÓD Ltd. of Budapest and the public opinion polling group of the Magyarságkutató Tudományos Társaság of Szabadka (Scientific Society on Hungarology), under the lead of Gábrityné dr. Irén Molnár. We greatly appreciate their work!

<sup>2</sup> Ada (Ada), Bácsföldvár (Bačko Gradište), Csóka (Čoka), Felsőmuzslya (Mužlja), Gombos (Bogojevo), Horgos (Horgoš), Kelebia (Kelebija), Kishegyes (Mali Idjoš), Magyarakaniza (Kanjiža), Óbecse (Bečej), Palics (Palič), Péterréve (Bačko Petrovo Selo), Szabadka (Subotica), Székelykeve (Skorenovac), Temerin (Temerin), Tiszaszentmiklós (Ostojičevo), Topolya (Bačka Topola), Torontáloroszi (Rusko Selo), Törökbecse (Novi Bečej), Újvidék (Novi Sad), Zenta (Senta).

<sup>3</sup> Those, who left Vojvodina in the past decade, are mainly from among the younger and more qualified strata. It can be said about our sample group that it somewhat over-represents those, who have a university degree as compared to the situation in 1991. To offset this, it relatively 'under-represents' those, who have a maturity exam but also those, who have lower qualifications than that (primary school education or lower). The sample over-represented the age groups below 30 and above 60—but not significantly—at the expense of the middle aged. Although the divergences balance each other to a certain extent as far as their effects are concerned, it can be asserted for sure that our results—given the higher qualification of the sample group than the average—are somewhat 'better' than the current situation in Vojvodina.

<sup>4</sup> Gereben, Ferenc and Tomka, Miklós, Vallásosság és nemzettudat. Vizsgálódások Erdélyben [Religiosity and national identity. Researches in Transylvania]. Kerkai Jenő Egyházzsociológiai Intézet, Buda-

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Intézet.) If we add to all this that the majority of the questions we asked this time were used at the beginning and around the middle of the 90s too, when we surveyed almost 2280 persons of Hungarian nationality in eight Central European countries,<sup>5</sup> a new possibility is becoming apparent: should the occasion arise, we could 'extend' the data collected in Vojvodina in 2000 both in time and space and compare them both with figures deriving from other countries and with earlier figures of Vojvodina.

We have to note that also the volumes of studies prepared in the research workshops of Vojvodina depict—and with authenticity—the miserable demographic, economic, and cultural situation of the Hungarian minority living in the examined area, as well as the effects of the assimilation endeavours which have continuously prevailed since the 1920s, the South Slav internal wars raging in the 1990s, and the circumstances of dictatorial internal affairs.<sup>6</sup>

The studies written in Vojvodina outline a varied picture on this ethnic group, which is decreasing in striking magnitudes, has considerably restricted opportunities, and is clearly endangered. The population of the Hungarians on Vojvodina was somewhere around 420.000 and 440.000 in the decades after World War II, even at the time of the 1971 census. During the 1991 census, only 340.000 Hungarians were found. The pace of decline accelerated in part because of the wave of refugees of about 40.000 persons and, in part, because of the ever-faster trends of aging and natural decrease which seem to be impossible to stop. According to estimates, the census of 2001 will record only some 270.000–280.000 Hungarians in Vojvodina.<sup>7</sup>

**National identity**

When we inquired about whether the asked persons *considered themselves*—after all the hardships and afflictions of their minority status—*members of one (or more) nations*, only 2,5% of them replied 'no'. 10% of the respondents expressed a *dual* (most often Hungarian–Serb) *identity*, and 87,5% explicitly identified themselves as *Hungarians*. These proportions do not seem to be a speciality of Vojvodina: we found very similar ratios among the Hungarians of Slovakia and Transcarpathia. What is more, the ratio of

pest, 2000; Gereben, F., Nemzeti és kulturális identitás Kárpátalján [National and cultural identity in Transcarpathia]. *Pro Minoritate*. Spring 2000; Gereben, F., A szlovákiai magyarok identitástudata és olvasáskultúrája [The identity and reading culture of Hungarians in Slovakia]. *Új Forrás* (under print).

<sup>5</sup> The 8 countries are: Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Yugoslavia, (regarding certain details of the questions:) Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, and Hungary. For a detailed presentation and analysis of the data see Gereben, F., *Identitás, kultúra, kisebbség*. Felmérés a közép-európai magyar népesség körében [Identity, Culture, Minority. A survey among the Hungarian population of Central Europe]. Osiris–MTA Kisebbségkutató Műhely, Budapest, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. *Vajdasági útkereső*. Eds.: Gábrityné dr. Molnár, Irén and Mirmics, Zsuzsa. Szabadka, 1998. /MTT Könyvtár 2/; Göncz, Lajos, *A magyar nyelv Jugoszláviában (Vajdaságban)* [Hungarian language in Yugoslavia (in Vojvodina)]. Osiris K.–Fórum K.–MTA Kisebbségkutató Műhely, Budapest–Újvidék, 1999.; *Vajdasági marasztaló*. Eds.: Gábrityné dr. Molnár, Irén and Mirmics, Zsuzsa. Szabadka, 2000. /MTT Könyvtár 3./

<sup>7</sup> Mirmics, Károly, Demográfiai jellemzők, társadalmi mutatók [Demographic characteristics, social indicators]. In: *Vajdasági marasztaló*. pp. 31 and 45.

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those who expressly identified themselves as Hungarians among the adult population of Hungary was slightly less, only 85% (because the high proportion—one tenth—of those, who did not reveal any national bonds). The Hungarian national identity seems to be the strongest in Transylvania in the entire Carpathian Basin: there, 95% of the respondents declared themselves to be clearly Hungarian—that is, without considering those of dual identity—when they replied to the same question of the 1998 survey.

Thus, the ethnic identity figures of Vojvodina fall in line with the usual behaviour norm of the Hungarians of Central Europe. This is happening in spite of the fact that the proportion of those, who believed that (sometimes or more frequently) they were *disadvantaged* because their ethnic affiliation, was the highest among the Hungarians of Vojvodina (about two thirds of them revealed this). The proportion of the same category was between 50 and 60% in the rest of the countries.

We asked from those, who declared that they belonged to the ethnic Hungarians (in the form of single or multiple identity), our usual question: *'What does it mean to you to be a Hungarian?'* We elaborated the spontaneous questions given to the open question first, by creating identity categories (See Table 1) and second, with the method of content analysis (separating the characteristic text fragments).

Table 1.

**'What does it mean to you to be a Hungarian?'**  
**Identity categories among Hungarians in Vojvodina – distribution in %**  
**(May 2000)**

Identity categories	%
Does not know or did not reply	5,8
(Exclusively) <i>negative experience</i> : disadvantageous minority status, difficulties, suffering, depressing experiences, oppression, etc.	7,4
<i>Indifferent</i> : 'it is all the same what I am', it is just like belonging to any other people; it does not mean anything /special/; 'it is more important to be a human person'.	7,2
<i>A natural, self-evident thing</i> ; a condition we inherited; it is our <i>origins</i> : also our ancestors were Hungarians.	5,9
<i>Belonging somewhere</i> (to a community, a nation, a people, the homeland, the closer environment, the family).	6,3
Common ( <i>mother</i> ) <i>tongue, culture</i> , traditions, history, religion, customs, Hungarian schooling and education.	28,2
<i>Pride</i> , or other <i>positive feelings</i> (happiness, joy, glory, honour, satisfaction, it means 'everything'); or positive characteristics (to live honestly and upright—as a Hungarian).	21,9
(Despite the difficulties) <i>undertaking, struggle, firmness, mission</i> ; minority existence; despite the disadvantageous situation one has to maintain it, preserve it, and persist; freedom and minority rights have to be defended or attained; the identity has to be bequeathed to the future generations.	17,3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100,0</b>

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According to Table 1, the dominant element of the Hungarian identity in Vojvodina is the *cultural* identity of belonging somewhere, which is based upon language, history, traditions, Hungarian education, etc. Also *positive feelings* and the moral gesture of the *acceptance and preservation* of ethnic identity had prominent roles in the ethnic self-definition of the respondents. These three elements proved to be the three pillars of national identity in other regions of Central European countries as well, merely their proportion in relation to each other differed: Transylvania (and Transcarpathia) laid the emphasis on the acceptance of the sometimes difficult minority fate and identity, the Slovakian Hungarians are characterised by a relative balance of the three factors; the special trait of the identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina seems to be the fact that they stress the cultural properties. The 'identity aspect' of the mother country is the most peculiar one: beyond the relevant predominance of emotional elements, the 'natural thing' and the 'belonging somewhere' (to a country, a nation, etc.) were mentioned in greater numbers than in any of the other regions. That is, the issue of national identity receives a different emphasis in Hungary than in the medium of Hungarians living as a minority: many live their collective identity as if it was a natural condition and as if their belonging to the country and its society was self-evident. In addition, this is accompanied—in a peculiar manner—by a fairly strong (but not necessarily substantial<sup>8</sup>) emotionality. This latter fact can be regarded as peculiar, because the emotional content has decreased in Vojvodina and in every other region outside the borders. We can state in connection to Vojvodina also that as compared with the experiences of our survey of 1992/1993<sup>9</sup> (this is true not only in case of the above-mentioned identity categories but the identity elements revealed with the content analysis as well), the importance of less conscious, less rational (indifferent, considering only mere evidences), and emotion-oriented identity types decreased. Simultaneously, the significance of those types, which live the identity more consciously, tie it more to cultural properties (especially to the mother tongue), and accept and actively live it, has grown. This means that the *identity of relatedness to a cultural nation* has grown and become stronger in Vojvodina too despite all the afflictions and the threat of war (or perhaps, in part, as a consequence of this?).

*Religiosity*—in conformity to our previous experiences—is an essential element of identity in Vojvodina too. The figures of the 1991 Yugoslav census report on the denominational distribution of the Hungarians in Vojvodina. According to them, the majority, 88% is *Catholic*, and 6% is *Protestant*.<sup>10</sup> Among the persons we surveyed, the proportion of (Roman) Catholics was 88% again, but about one tenth of the respondents did not belong to any congregation or denomination (this category is perceptibly more numerous: it amounts to some 4%). A total of 72% of the Hungarians in Vojvodina declared

<sup>8</sup> The cross-tables reveal this: generally a lower level of education, a lower level cultural performance, etc. accompanies the emotional-type identity category.

<sup>9</sup> Cf.: Gereben, F., *Identitás, kultúra, kisebbség*. [Identity, culture, minority]. p. 77, and Table VIII of the Appendix.

<sup>10</sup> Based on: Gábrityné dr. Molnár, Irén, Vallási életünk [Our religious life]. In: *Vajdasági marasztaló*. p. 164.

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some form of bonds (more active or more moderate) to a religion (50% in Hungary), and this is a good result also in comparison to other groups of Hungarians outside the borders: only Transcarpathia surpassed this result (83%).<sup>11</sup> Also this group seemed to confirm the thesis that belonging to a minority has a positive effect with regard to the intensity of the ties to various denominations and religion given that the identification needs of the members of a minority are enhanced: *religiosity (and the Church) are one of the factors, which strengthen national identity*, as we could see it again in course of the survey in Vojvodina.

Also the bonds to the various *national symbols*—which we listed in the questionnaire—are rather strong. Among them, the respondents found especially the *national anthem* significant from the point of view of national identity: on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 ('not important'—'very important'), it received a score of 4.21. The second and the third places (practically a tie) went to the *Holy Crown* (4.08) and the *red-white-green banner* (4.06). The *Nemzeti dal* (National Song) written by Sándor Petőfi received a relatively high score (3.89), and was followed by the Hungarian *coat of arms* (3.77), and the *sound of bells at noon* (3.53), which has a regional significance, as it recalls the memory of the historic victory at Nándorfehérvár (today: Belgrade). The respondents attributed only a moderate symbolic power (3.00 and 2.91) to the other memorial places related to Vojvodina (the monument of the *battle of Zenta* and the *Church of Aracs*). Similarly, the *kokárda* (rosette) was classified among the less important national symbols (2.99).

The national anthem, the national tricolour, and the Holy crown were universally the three most important national symbols among the Hungarians outside the borders, independent of which country they lived in. In comparison to this, the symbols of regional origin were subordinated to these, that is, the mentioned collective national identity seems stronger than the regional identity in this field.

However, this statement is true only in case of the cultural symbols. When we examined the notion of the homeland and the belonging to a region, we specified certain geographic categories and the interviewees had to mark the intensity of belonging on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 ('not at all' and 'completely'). '*Native land*' and '*Vojvodina*' led the field by far (4.64; 4.70) and, although '*Yugoslavia*' received a much smaller score (3.41), it is still greatly ahead of *Hungary* (2.47). That is, *in the field of regional-geographical ties, local (regional) identity is very strong; it practically equals to the notion of the native land*. The identification with the community of the cultural nation, which we found important earlier, does not constitute a simultaneous attraction toward the mother country. On the contrary: Hungary received the lowest score! Even the region of '*Central and East Europe*', which the Hungarians outside the border (not only those in Vojvodina) could not really grasp, got a higher score (2.64). '*Europe*', like this, without any further divisions, had a strong moderate attraction (3.16) in the eyes of the Hungarians of Vojvodina even with its prestige after the NATO bombings.

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<sup>11</sup> Tomka, Miklós, *Vallás és nemzeti tudat* [Religion and national identity]. Manuscript, Budapest, 2000. p. 15.

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**National self-image, perception of the past, and prospects of the future**

We asked three questions in connection to the possibly existent characteristic traits of the given ethnic communities. We primarily inquired about the peculiar features of the *Hungarians in Vojvodina*. The proportion of missing answers and 'I do not know' was rather high, 15%, and an additional 22% believed there were no such characteristics. The remaining respondents, about two thirds of the total, named certain traits spontaneously, among which *diligent* (industrious, likes to work) led the field with 139 references, then came *flexible* (tolerant) with 38, *persevering* with 29, *discordant* with 26, *shy* with 20, and *friendly* with 18 references. If we sum up the characteristics (perhaps many kinds) mentioned by one respondent, 40% of all of the respondents named *exclusively positive* traits, 15% a *mix* of both positive and negative, and 8% *only negative* features. This latter category seems to be weakening as compared to the situation measured in the first part of the 90s, while the proportion of those, who did not answer and believed that there were no such traits, increased significantly. Thus, it seems that on the one hand, national self-image became more unsure in Vojvodina and, on the other, it is as if it became *more positive* (in self-defence?). Moreover, on the basis of the actual leading trait-categories, it appears to be *more flexible, modest, even intimidated*, most probably under the pressure of the circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

We touched upon the characterisation of *Hungarians in Hungary* in a separate question. Although many avoided the question (every fourth person) and another 26% believed they had not characteristic traits, the predominant majority of those who expressed their opinion depicted mostly a sombre picture of the citizens of the mother country: as opposed to the insignificant 6% of those, who mentioned only positive traits, the proportion of those, who mentioned only negative characteristics, amounted to 33%. The named specific features reveal that a great part of the Hungarians in Vojvodina are hurt and offended: according to them, the Hungarians of Hungary *do not like* (despise) those of Vojvodina (29), they are *conceited* (27), *jealous* (25), *discordant* (18), *selfish* (16), *materialistic* (13), *unsociable* (12), etc. These attributes (even if we can find also some of positive content—although with fewer references) might be based upon specific and mostly negative experiences.

If we just remember the figures of regional-geographical bonds and the extremely unfavourable position of Hungary among them, we can conclude that a rather negative picture has evolved about the mother country and its population in Vojvodina—and this is not unique among the regions outside the borders. This happened in spite of the fact that Hungary gave shelter to and helped in many ways the refugees and other injured parties of the South Slav wars (also Hungarians of Vojvodina), and despite that the Hungarian

<sup>12</sup> The effectiveness of the comparison is spoiled by the fact that in 1992/1993, we inquired about the characteristics of Hungarians in general and not only about those of the Hungarians in Vojvodina. The comparison is justifiable only if we assume that the Hungarians living outside the border thought primarily about the Hungarians of their own medium already at the beginning of the 90s when they were talking about the formation of national identity.

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national policy has been revealing an increasingly explicit solidarity with the Hungarians of the neighbouring countries. The roots (which would be worthy of further analyses) of this negative image on the country would lead us most probably to the world of everyday relationships, in which the conflicts of the evidently quite different scales of values, ways of thinking, and financial opportunities did not make it possible for the Hungarians of Vojvodina to be able to get rid of the stigmas of their minority situation.

In any case, the confrontation has to be fairly intense because the picture of the population of the mother country is scarcely more positive than that of the majority nation, the *Serbs*, who possess the instruments necessary to exercise pressure on the part of the state and who caused the break out of the recent South Slav wars. Many more talked about their (imagined or real) special traits than in case of the Hungarians in Hungary, and 41% of all of the respondents mentioned only negative characteristics in connection to them. (Primarily that the Serbs are violent and aggressive, that they 'exaggerate' patriotism, they are nationalists, arrogant and despise the other nations, etc.)

Similarly to the national self-image, also the prospects of the future of the given ethnic group form an organic part of the identity. Hungarians in Vojvodina—after the end of the bombings and before the end of the regime of Milošević—judged their *own future* to be rather *gloomy*: 60% revealed (strong or moderate) pessimism, while the proportion of optimists was only 35%. (The Hungarians of Vojvodina qualified as the most pessimistic people among the Hungarian ethnic groups of the Carpathian Basin with these figures.) We received completely different results when we inquired about the future prospects of the '*Hungarians as a whole*': here, the proportion of pessimists was only 27%, while the optimist constituted about two thirds of the respondents. (In Hungary, we found 20% less optimists when we asked the same question.) This means that the Hungarians of Vojvodina are not 'inherently' pessimists. They only had a pessimistic vision—at least in May 2000—on their own situation and possible fate.

We were interested not only in their vision of the future, but also in their *perception of the past*, so we surveyed it with various questions. We tried to reveal whom those historic personages and what those historic events were that they regarded expressly positive or that they refused and found unpleasant. (The figures and events—named by the respondents spontaneously—could belong to Hungarian and non-Hungarian history alike.)

We can find those figures of Hungarian history in the leading group of the list of positive historic personalities (See Table 2), who established or defended a secure and strong Hungary of European significance (*Saint Stephen, King Matthias*), and who were the champions of national liberty and prosperity (*Kossuth, Széchenyi, Petőfi, Rákóczi*). These names are important also in other regions of the Carpathian Basin inhabited by Hungarians—including Hungary too—and they figure among the most popular figures. Even their order is very similar. However, the list of Vojvodina has a peculiar feature, different from any other region: Marshal Tito stands first (in 1992/1993), who was brought to the limelight probably owing to the contrast of the confused present and the embellished nostalgic past. The other speciality is the presence of *János Hunyadi*, victorious commander at Nándorfehérvár, around the middle of the list, which indicated that historic consciousness has also regional traits beyond the collective national characteristics.

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Table 2.

References to positive and negative historic figures and events among the Hungarians in Vojvodina (May 2000)

Highly valued positive personalities	Number of references	Highly valued positive events	Number of references	Unpleasant, negative personalities	Number of references	Shameful, tragic events	Number of references
Tito, J. B.	110	1848/49	91	Hitler	190	Trianon	95
Saint Stephen	93	Hungarian conquest	34	Stalin	87	The wars	70
King Matthias	54	Revolution of 1956	28	Milošević	67	World War II	60
Kossuth, Lajos	43	End of World War II	27	Šešelj	26	Recent wars in the South Slav areas	51
Széchenyi, István	22	Establishment of the Hungarian Kingdom	26	Rákosi, M.	21	World War I	40
Petőfi, Sándor	21	Victory at Nándorfehérvár	18	Mussolini	15	Holocaust	36
Hunyadi, János	16	Battle of Zenta	9	Ceaușescu	11	NATO bombings	23
II. Rákóczi, Ferenc	10			Horthy, M.	10	Throwing down the atomic bomb	12
Antall, József	7			Kádár, J.	10	Mohács (1526)	12
Chieftain Árpád	7			Nero	7	Harassment of ethnicities	12
Columbus	6					Repression of the 1956 revolution, the retrorisions	10
Gandhi	6						
Horthy, M.	6						
Napoleon	6						



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Also the other lists of Table 2 have remained similar to those of the Hungarians of other regions and to the lists of the first part of the 1990s. Invariably, the *Revolution of 1848/49* means the most important reference point of Hungarian history, followed by the *Revolution of 1956* (and the *Hungarian conquest*) with a decided difference. The circle of positive events related to the given region expanded with the memory of the *Battle of Zenta*. The *Hitler–Stalin* order at the head of the list of negative personalities remained the same too. That is, in spite of the slaps which all came ‘from the left’ in the past decades, the moral judgement on the two totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is far from being balanced. A difference among the negative historic events (led by Trianon) is that the massacre carried out by the partisans of Tito in the autumn of 1944, to which at least 20.000 Hungarian civilians fell victims, did not specifically appear in the list—as opposed to the list of 1992/1993<sup>13</sup>. (Another contrast to 1992/1992 is that the executions in Újvidék carried out by the Hungarian troops in 1942 were not mentioned either.) These sombre memories were probably included in such general expressions as e.g. ‘harassment of ethnicities’, due presumably to their threatening actualisation in the wars of the recent past. As far as *Milošević* is concerned, the interviewed persons are not reserved at all: he, who was still the acting president at the time of the survey, stood high on the list, at the 3<sup>rd</sup> place among the negative historic figures.

#### Cultural identity

According to the experiences of the survey, the most important element of cultural identity of minority Hungarians is their clinging to the *mother tongue*. This justifies that we deal with the sociological phenomena related to the use of the mother tongue separately. 95% of the respondents declared it expressly that Hungarian was their mother tongue. 4% of the rest revealed—Hungarian—a mixed (mostly Hungarian-Serb, and 1% Hungarian-Croatian) mother tongue. 55% of the interviewees, more exactly, 87% of the married respondents had a spouse of Hungarian mother tongue, that is, our survey found the proportion of *mixed marriages on the basis of tongue* to be 13%, which is similar to the findings among the Transcarpathian and Slovakian Hungarians. (This ratio proved to be somewhat lower in Transylvania.)

It is an extremely important question what is (can be) the language of *education* of the persons living in a minority group. 62% of the respondents in Vojvodina *studied* all the way through their education (in every class of every school type) *in Hungarian*.<sup>14</sup> *Mixed language of instruction* (in certain classes or school types the instruction is in Hungarian and Serb in the others) characterized 35% of the sample group, and the proportion of those, who attended schools all the way through in which the *language of instruction* was the *language of the majority*, amounted only to 2%. The role of mother tongue

<sup>13</sup> See Gereben, Ferenc, *Identitás, kultúra, kisebbség*. [Identity, culture, minority], p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> Naturally, this did not mean that the majority language was completely disregarded: first, the Serb language is a separate subject all through those schools too, where the language of instruction is Hungarian; second, it happened on several occasions (especially in high schools) that certain subjects were taught in the language of the majority—let’s say, because of the lack of Hungarian teachers—also in schools where the language of instruction was Hungarian.

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usage in the school played a bit greater role among the interviewees in Vojvodina than among the Hungarian population of other countries of Central Europe. The results in connection to schooling in the mother tongue were rather low especially in Transcarpathia (50% studied in Hungarian to the end, and 16% did not study in Hungarian). (We have to remark that these figures reflect past situations given that the respondents were already adults when they talked about their schooling.)

Naturally, choosing the language of instruction greatly depends on the level of education the respondent achieved. According to the prevailing tendency, the more classes one finished the less chances that person had to study in the mother tongue in all of them: 80% of those, who graduated from primary school (or did not even finish it) attended exclusively Hungarian schools; *two thirds* of those, who have some professional training qualification attended such schools; *half* of those, who graduated from high school; *one third* of those, who hold a university degree. The rest received the school qualification or degree necessary for their employment—wholly or in part—in the language of the majority. Thus, this reveals that *mother tongue, in general, opens the way only to the obtainment of a school qualification corresponding to a lower social status*. This tendency is not a peculiarity of Vojvodina; it is an unfortunate concomitant factor of the life of minorities in Central Europe. (Given that we found the same results also among the Hungarians of Transylvania, Transcarpathia, and Slovakia.)

We examined also the proportions of language usage at five *scenes of everyday life*. As far as the chances to use the mother tongue are concerned, there is a relevant difference between the scenes (as it is shown in Table 3). *Family* is at the head, followed by the *circle of friends*: dominant use of mother tongue is present in case of both. (This is true not only in Vojvodina, but also in the groups living in other countries.) Next comes the *workplace*, the scenes of commerce (*shops, the market*), and at last, with a proportion of only one tenth, the spots where one encounters the *authorities (official locations)*. At these spots, the members of a minority—as they leave the intimate sphere and step outside into the citizens' publicity—do not really get along in their mother tongue and they do only to a very minute degree in front of the authorities.

We prepared a global indicator on the basis of the language usage figures of the five scenes of everyday life, which express the chances of mother tongue with respect to a relative totality of situations in life. According to this, among the Hungarians of Vojvodina, a dominant presence of mother tongue, which is prevailing widely (in all of the five scenes), characterises less than one tenth (8%) of the respondents, and we found an additional 16% of those, where the use of Hungarian could still be considered dominant (it is present in 3-4 scenes). Thus, *about one fourth of the Hungarians in Vojvodina are able to live their everyday life (or rather, its greater part) in their mother tongue*. This percentage is perceptibly lower than the situation we encountered in the other countries surrounding Hungary. The others live in the state of more or less balanced bilingualism or close to the predominance of the language of the majority. On the basis of all this, it seems that the chances of Hungarians in Vojvodina had *in the past* to use their mother tongue (language of instruction!) were *above the average* in relation to the general situation in Central Europe. However, their *present* opportunities to use it are *below the average*.

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Table 3.

**Proportion of Hungarians in Vojvodina who communicate exclusively or mostly in Hungarian (May 2000)**

Scenes of communication	In % of the number of respondents (N = 562)
In the heart of the family	92,5
In the circle of friends	68,0
(Last or current) workplace	43,2
In shops, at the market	34,7
In an office, with the authorities	10,5

The *language of dreaming, counting, praying, and the* (rarely or more frequently attended) *religious services* is Hungarian in about nine tenth of the cases. These occasions of mother tongue usage—together with the verbal communication of the families—form such a personal sphere of language usage, which remains to be dominated by the mother tongue even if it has been driven quite into the background by today in the other fields of life.

In the course of the year preceding the survey, *the language of the majority of the books read by Hungarians in Vojvodina was Hungarian*: most of the annual readings (above 90%) of 78% of the readers was made up of books in the mother tongue. (We found that the proportion was very close in Transylvania and Transcarpathia, and it was somewhat lower (two thirds) in Slovakia.) Only 10% of the readers read more non-Hungarian-language books than Hungarian ones in the course of the year before.

We saw similar tendencies in connection to periodicals, but only the *weeklies* proved to be such publications, which revealed strong mother tongue dominance (about 77% said they read weeklies 'preferably in Hungarian'). In case of *dailies* and *magazines*, the advantage of readings in the mother tongue was more moderate, it turned out to be around 60% on the whole.

The great proportion of mother tongue presence in the readings might be connected to our recurring experience according to which reading culture is a prominent instrument of the manifestation and at the same time preservation and strengthening of identity.

With respect to the proportion of readers of books, the survey revealed that some 60% of the interviewed Hungarians read at least one book, which is the same result we found in Upper Hungary. This proportion was somewhat higher (65–70%) in Transylvania and Transcarpathia and, according to the most recent survey carried out in Hungary in the autumn of 2000, somewhat lower (about 50%) in Hungary. The proportion of regular readers (who read one book per month on average) is 12%, which is more

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or less the same in Hungary (it is higher in Transylvania: 16–17%). It is a peculiar feature that with the intellectual decline along the slope of modernisation, the (Hungarian) population of the given countries does not encourage the habit of reading, but instead, it gets rid of it as if it was some dead weight. (Especially if we are talking about—as we did in the survey—*reading a book through*.) All this calls our attention to the danger of the contradictory nature of modernization processes and the loss of cultural values which, in cases, accompanies them. Naturally, reading is not only a question of modernisation: in the course of our previous researches, we could clearly ascertain about the presence of a *majority-minority (diaspora) decline*, namely, that the presence of minority status (outside the borders) and its intensification went generally hand in hand with the improvement of the indicators of reading culture. Earlier, the majority-minority status exerted an influence only on the composition of readings and the quality of the readers' taste. More recently, at least in relation to the Hungarian 'majority' and the minority Hungarians living outside the borders, it has an influence also on the quantity of reading.

As far as the quality indicators of the readings are concerned: we can find among the *current readings* (the book the respondent was reading at the time of the survey or the last one before the survey) more frequently two novels of Mór Jókai: *Az arany ember* (The Golden Man) and *A kőszívű ember fiaí* (Sons of the Stone-hearted Man); the Bible; and the novel of Géza Gárdonyi: *Egri csillagok* (Eclipse of the Crescent Moon). The *great interest in the national classics* is evident if we look at the actual readings' column of Table 4 (which indicated the authors of the most popular readings): the preponderant majority of the listed writers belongs to the famous writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian literature and, in cases, of world literature (from Jókai through Zsigmond Móricz and 'the local resident' Dezső Kosztolányi to László Németh). The earlier and more recent representatives of American bestsellers (D. Steel, S. King, M. Mitchell, R. Cook) are also present beside them although to a lesser degree. If we compare the list of readings of Table 4 with the readings of Hungarians living in neighbouring countries (in so far as the 'best of' lists, which is just the peak of the iceberg, make this comparison possible at all) we can say that the attraction to literary values and cultural tradition revealed in *the writers' list in Vojvodina resembles the list of Transylvania the most and that of Hungary the least*.<sup>15</sup> (In the mother country, those bestseller writers are at the head, who ended up in the 'also-ran' category in the list of Vojvodina.) The readers of Upper Hungary and Transcarpathia are between the two poles: as compared to Vojvodina, they read fewer classics and more (American and Hungarian) bestseller writers.

If we examine the whole of the readings closely, that is, we look at the structure of readings, the above described tendency receives more precise foundations, as we can see it in Table 5 (in the relation of Vojvodina). The differences in the readings in the field of (20<sup>th</sup> century) classics and fiction are striking: Vojvodina excels in the first, Hungary in the latter. At the same time, the mother country is perceptibly at the head also in case of non-fiction literature.

<sup>15</sup> Cf.: Gereben, Ferenc, and Tomka, Miklós, *Vallásosság és nemzettudat* [Religiosity and national identity], p. 95.

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Table 4.

**Most popular authors of recent readings of Hungarian readers in Vojvodina (May 2000)**

Authors	Number of references
Jókai, Mór	24
Rejtő, Jenő	12
Steel, D.	11
Gárdonyi, Géza	8
Móricz, Zsigmond	8
King, S.	7
Zilahy, Lajos	7
Kosztolányi, Dezső	6
Mikszáth, Kálmán	6
Cook, R.	5
Hugo, V.	4
Mitchell, M.	4
Madách, Imre	3
Németh, László	3

Table 5.

**List of recent readings based on their style and character in Vojvodina and Hungary (May and October 2000)**

Style and character of readings	In % of the Hungarian adult readers	
	Vojvodina	Hungary
Romantic	8,1	3,1
Classic realist (19 <sup>th</sup> century and earlier)	9,8	3,4
20 <sup>th</sup> century realist	31,4	16,9
Modern (valuable from an aesthetic point of view)	2,0	3,4
Fiction (detective and adventure stories, bestsellers)	25,5	42,4
Non fiction	22,9	29,1
Unknown	0,3	1,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

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Regarding the proportion of writers in the reading structure on the basis of their *nationality*, Vojvodina is ahead of Hungary with respect to Hungarian authors (54%–42%), while Hungary is ahead of Vojvodina with regard to (North) American writers (30%–18%). That is, people are much more attached to Hungarian authors in Vojvodina and (for the time being) manage to resist the Americanisation tendencies better than the mother country.

Thus, the trend detected in the first part of the 90s has proved to be true again and again: the *challenges of minority fate raise the value of national culture and make it more attractive* with the intention of strengthening the identity.<sup>16</sup> This is especially true in case of those traditional elements, which are easier to understand. This phenomenon is delineated most expressly in Transylvania and Vojvodina.

In connection to the writers of *memorable and favourite readings* (which does not necessarily correspond to recent readings), the lists refer to the preservation of traditions even more. (These inventories contain a fair number of classical names and titles even in Hungary.) The hundred-year-old *Egri Csillagok* is the most memorable reading in every Hungarian ethnic group in Central Europe and in the mother country and Vojvodina as well. The second and third places go almost everywhere to the two Jókai novels: *Az arany ember* and *A kőszívű ember fiai*. The list of favourite writers in Vojvodina is almost like a national pantheon: *Jókai, Mikszáth, Gárdonyi, Móricz, Rejtő, Petőfi, Arany, Kosztolányi* etc. (This cannot be a surprise given that the list of current readings was almost as prominent as this.) All this confirms our conclusion above, which emphasized the greater affinity of minority fate—and within it, minority fate in Vojvodina—to traditional values.

*In conclusion:* We carried out the survey among the greatly decreasing Hungarian population in Vojvodina, in Yugoslavia, before the fall of the Milošević regime in May 2000 and observed the intensified signs, on the one hand, of pessimism and intimidation and, on the other, of firmness and clinging to one's identity and the cultural elements, which strengthen that identity (mother tongue, religion, reading culture in the mother tongue, etc.). Despite their particular afflictions, the Hungarians of Vojvodina have revealed many similar traits as compared with the other Hungarian groups of the Central European region. Also the changing tendencies of their state of mind unveil general characteristics: the decreasing emotional content of identity and its more conscious character; the 'improvement' of self-image; the strengthening of local and regional bonds instead of the nation-wide 'notion of homeland'; the marking out of historic reference points on the basis of a similar scale of values, etc. Nevertheless, peculiar traits appear: a more intense sense of discrimination; the relatively restricted opportunities for the use of the mother tongue; the clearly sensible flexibility; and fear as well. Hungarians in Vojvodina are full of hope with respect to the future of the Hungarians of Central Europe even if they tend to be more pessimistic with regard to their own future. Doubt and hope, escape and regional bonds, fear and reinforced identity—all this taken together characterised the situation of Hungarians in Vojvodina in the recent past.

<sup>16</sup> I attempted to analyse the relationship of identity and reading culture in detail elsewhere, see Gereben, F., *Identitás, kultúra, kisebbség* [Identity, culture, minority]. pp. 213–219.

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