

LÁSZLÓ GYURGYÍK

On Assimilation and Change of Nationality Based on Surveys Conducted Among Hungarians Living in Slovakia

The results of censuses conducted around 2000 in the countries neighbouring Hungary, and the ensuing discourse, call our attention to some important developments and changes. Among others, the theoretical-methodological aspects of assimilation and nationality change have come to the foreground. This increasing interest creates an opportunity for the concept of assimilation to be cleared from all the residua which it has accumulated – partly as a result of lack of data characteristic from previous decades and partly due to uncertain, misty and careless usage of concepts. In the course of analysing the ethno-sociological and ethno-demographical processes of recent years, a close scientific study of these concepts has become inevitable.¹

In analysing social change on micro- and mezzo-levels, the issue of assimilation and nationality change has come to the foreground in connection with relatively swift and significant changes in the ethnic demographic of regions or settlements. These changes have included change in the number of children attending Hungarian schools as opposed to the national average, changes in language usage and changes in the number and proportion of mixed marriages.

¹ In comparison to a census conducted ten years earlier, the number of Hungarians living in neighbouring countries has changed unfavourably for Hungarians. The size of major Hungarian communities beyond the border has significantly decreased. The degree of reduction in the number of Hungarians region by region has called attention to the ethno-demographic process of Hungarians living beyond the border and has called for thorough scientific analysis of assimilation and nationality change. See László Gyurgyík–László Sebők (eds.): *Népszámlálási körkép Közép-Európából, 1989–2002*. [Censuses in Eastern Europe, 1989–2002]. Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2003.

The present study summarises the outcome of earlier sociological and demographic surveys on the assimilation processes of Hungarians living in Slovakia. It aims to reconsider the results of such recent surveys according to the accepted co-ordinates of social sciences and place them into a unified theoretical structure. Where we have insufficient knowledge, presumptions are provided, taking the risk of possible mistakes. This study does not aim to summarise what has been repeatedly said on the development of assimilation theories.

After clarifying our concepts, we will take a look at the relationship between assimilation processes and segments of social reality. We will then make an attempt to construct interethnic social reality as seen through the assimilation processes. Placement among social co-ordinates is determined by the nature of our fundamental assumptions. My starting point is the obvious, plausible assumption that the assimilation process is headed from minority to majority communities.² Let us look more closely at this process.³

Concepts

Assimilation is a process blurring the borderline between two or more communities, including ethnic or smaller social groups, when members get come contact with each other. It begins with cultural exchange and interaction and ends with the profound fusion of groups. As an accomplished process assimilation means the melding of previously discernible socio-cultural groups. The process of assimilation may be divided into initial, advanced or final stages.

The present study interprets assimilation as a process whose stages are interactive; they develop separately but not wholly independently of one another.⁴ A distinction must be made between intergenerational and intragenerational assimilation, the former referring to assimilation between generations, the latter referring to assimilation within one generation. In the

² This assumption may be made more precise: in Slovakia the assimilation processes modify in differing degree the ethnic characteristics of minority and majority nations in contact. Their relation is asymmetric as regards its ethnic effects. Some individuals of minority origin consider themselves belonging to the majority nation as a result of nationality change. Those belonging to the majority nation tend to assimilate into the minority in a lesser degree.

³ The relationship of national-ethnic communities is not necessarily determined by assimilation processes, on the one hand it can be characterised by cultural pluralism and on the other by segregation.

⁴ Yinger, John M.: *Ethnicity: Source of Strength? Source of conflict*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

course of empirical surveys these types are frequently merged. A distinction on a conceptual level, however, is of the utmost importance. The present study measures assimilation by comparing the ethnic affiliation of the individual to the origin of the parents.⁵

As opposed to sociological approaches, nationality change based upon demographic data should not be regarded as assimilation. It is simply a change of nationality or a change of ethnic identity. The demographic approach regards nationality change as assimilation and does not take into account the process of assimilation.

As regards these two concepts we can safely say that considerable assimilation may take place without a change of nationality and vice versa, individuals may change nationality without considerable assimilation taking place.⁶

Aspects of the social reality and assimilation processes

Now let us examine the assimilation process in relation to certain determining factors of social reality. According to my main hypothesis, assimilation is directed from the minority to the majority community. This will be examined from the aspect of interethnic relations.⁷

	Dimensions	Variables
1.	Cultural assimilation	Degree of knowledge of Hungarian
2.	Structural assimilation	Language of schooling
3.	Intergenerational amalgamation	Homo- or heterogeneity of parents' marriage
4.	Intragenerational amalgamation	Nationality of spouse
5.	Assimilation of identification	Nationality of person

Dimensions. Assimilation processes are influenced by various social factors, with differing impacts, weights and roles. The models for the survey car-

⁵ Such a definition primarily implies an intergenerational change but includes intragenerational elements as well. Determining the beginning of intragenerational change is quite problematic as the direct and indirect impact of origin is realised in the individual's lifetime.

⁶ An individual may consider himself a member of a given nationality while others consider him to be of another nationality due to language use, language of his schooling, nationality of his spouse and the ethnic socialisation of his children. Opposed to this, a change of nationality enforced by violence, ethnic terror or violation of rights does not necessarily enhance a significant assimilation process, especially if only for a short time or ending in the foreseeable future.

⁷ In my analysis the concept of minority and majority covers both their macro (national) and micro (local) senses.

ried out among Hungarians living in Slovakia were created based upon the theory of Gordon and Yinger, and five dimensions were distinguished.⁸

We tried to answer two questions, or rather, two aspects of the same reality. On the one hand we tried to clarify which factors are responsible to the greatest extent for the maintenance or change of national affiliation. On the other hand, we wanted to find out how the ethnic affiliation of members of ethnic groups in contact develops, and what kind of assimilation processes take place between them.

To answer the first question we applied a one-dimensional model in which nationality was the dependent variable and all other factors – (homogeneous-heterogeneous) origin, language of schooling, degree of knowledge of Hungarian and nationality of spouse – were explanatory variables.

The impact of factors influencing national affiliation was analysed in several stages. Initially, the impact of certain explanatory variables on the dependent variable was examined. The results show that homogeneous Hungarian origin plays the greatest role in maintaining national affiliation: 93.6% of persons of homogeneous Hungarian origin considered themselves Hungarian, while 20.1% of persons of heterogeneous origin regarded themselves Hungarian. Not a single person of Hungarian nationality was found among persons of homogeneous Slovakian origin. This may lead us to say that 6% of persons of homogeneous Hungarian origin changed their nationality in comparison to that of their parents. Furthermore, 60% of persons born in mixed marriages change their nationality.⁹

In addition to origin a new dimension was added to our model in turns. We looked at how the proportion of people changing nationality modifies if origin remains the same while the newly included variables are different. We found that the addition of other explanatory variables made significant difference on the number and proportion of Hungarians. A typical case is the change of the language of schooling. In the case of individuals of Hungarian origin who attend Slovakian primary schools, 28% of those interviewed con-

⁸ Gordon, Milton M.: *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origin*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1964. 60–84; Yinger, op.cit.

⁹ In the case of persons coming from mixed marriages, the proportion of those changing nationality is counted unlike that of persons born in homogeneous marriages. If persons coming from mixed marriages belonged to one and the other nationality in equal proportion, i.e. 50–50%, heredity would be balanced since descendants would share in equal proportion between the two nationalities according to origin. This would lead to the simple reproduction of the number of persons of Hungarian nationality; i.e. there would be no assimilation (on group level) within mixed marriages.

sidered themselves Slovak. 2% of those attending Hungarian schools considered themselves Slovak. Change in language dominance resulted in an even greater differentiation than the preceding one. We found that people of Hungarian origin who speak the language of the majority better than their own, almost half (49%) of those interviewed regarded themselves as Slovak. And, as in the previous example, 2% of those who speak Hungarian better considered themselves Slovak. The smallest change in the nationality of those interviewed was effected by the choice of a spouse of different nationality. 16% of those married to a non-Hungarian person and 3% of those married to a Hungarian considered themselves Slovak.

Descendants of mixed couples reflect an even more differentiated assimilation process. 95% of people of heterogeneous origin consider themselves Slovak if they attended Slovak schools (the typical case) while 74% of those who attended Hungarian schools have Slovak identity. There is a similar proportion concerning language proficiency: 99% of those whose command of Slovakian was better than Hungarian consider themselves Slovak while 41% of those who spoke Hungarian better than Slovak still considered themselves Slovak. Ethnic affiliation is the least influenced by the homogeneous-heterogeneous nature of marriage. 89% of people married to a Slovak partner and 66% of those married to a Hungarian partner regard themselves as Slovak.

As it has already been mentioned in the case of persons of homogeneous Slovak origin there is a deterministic relation between origin and identity. They tend to regard themselves as Slovak in every case, even if they happen to attend a Hungarian school or if they speak Hungarian better than Slovakian.¹⁰ Mixed marriages therefore cannot be placed mechanically mid-way on the imaginary line binding homogeneous Hungarian and homogeneous Slovakian marriages. As regards ethnic characteristics mixed (Hungarian-Slovak) marriages are closer to homogeneous Slovak marriages. There is no sign of balancing the two ethnic backgrounds if we consider language usage or cultural customs. The most important asymmetry can be found in the aforementioned transmittal of ethnic affiliation.¹¹

¹⁰ Four explanatory variables may lead to 81 possible combinations, out of which 54 were represented in the survey.

¹¹ In an earlier survey (György Csepeli – Antal Örökény – Mária Székely: *Grappling national identity. How nations see each other in Central Europe*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2000.) the authors concluded that while homogeneous national identity within a family does not prompt children to change their nationality, in a mixed marriage the nationality of the parent who belongs to the majority nation becomes a norm for the growing child when

If every variable added to the model was of Hungarian dominance and strengthened Hungarian affiliation (i.e. those interviewed of homogeneous Hungarian origin, who spoke Hungarian better than Slovakian, attended Hungarian primary schools and had a Hungarian spouse) about 0.3 % of interviewees would change their nationality in comparison to the nationality of their parents. The various values of explanatory variables make nationality changes of varying degree likely.

Complex model. The survey described in the preceding paragraphs examined nationality change in a context significantly differing from the demographic approach.

In reality, however, the ethnic relations of two national communities are much too complex to be expressed by the data, number and proportion of nationality as these hardly tell us anything directly about the delicate ethnic structure of the population of a given territory. Similarly, the ethnic affiliations of those living in the interethnic space of two nationalities mean continuous variables rather than a stack of separate, hermetically sealed categories.

In order to reveal the delicate ethnic structure of the population living in the Hungarian-Slovakian interethnic space, several dimensions have to be taken into consideration when examining ethnic changes. In this approach the interviewees are fixed at some point – let us call it the position of national affiliation (PNA) – in the Hungarian-Slovakian interethnic space. At the two ends of this interethnic space we find people who are extremely bound to their national community – these are the Hungarian and Slovakian core groups – and the various forms of transitional ties occupy intermediate positions between them. According to the results of our survey, the arrangement of the population living in the Hungarian-Slovakian interethnic space forms a U-shaped curve with most people living in the homogeneous ethnic core found at the two poles of the imaginary ethnic space, and the fewest people between the two poles (those equally tied to both ethnic groups).

In the survey sample, 29.1% belonged to the Hungarian and 27.1% to the Slovakian core. 7.5% of those interviewed could qualify as double, transitional: 19.3% as Hungarian between the Hungarian core group and the transitional group, and 17% as Slovakian.

choosing identity, thereby decreasing the maintenance of minority identity. This survey compared the strategies of identity transmittal in the Hungarian communities of Transylvania and Slovakia and found that the transmittal of homogeneity among Hungarians in Slovakia is smaller than among Hungarians in Transylvania.

In this approach, national affiliation extinguished the nationality category and allowed for the examination of the delicate structures of multiple ties.

Let us now examine assimilation processes with the help of the PNA construction. In the following, assimilation refers to the divergence between origin and the national affiliation of the person interviewed.

Assimilation processes can be divided into several phases, from the initial stage to complete, accomplished assimilation. According to the outcome of the survey, the position of national affiliation of nearly half of those interviewed did not change compared to their origin. Assimilation in the direction of Slovakian nationality is of greater extent and intensity than assimilation in the opposite direction. 38.8 % of the population living in the Hungarian-Slovakian interethnic space moved towards Slovakian PNA and only 10.8% towards Hungarian nationality. Differences in the intensity of assimilation processes are also conspicuous. One can find strong (2.1%) and accomplished (0.7%) assimilation in the Slovakian direction even within one shift of generations (the percentage of weak or moderate assimilation is 26% and 10% respectively), while apart from weak (8.2%) or moderate (2.6%) ones, no assimilation can be detected in the Hungarian direction.

Considering all types, assimilation in the Slovakian direction is 4.1 times greater than that in the Hungarian direction.

Macro (national) level – political aspects. Thus far I have tried to reveal how certain dimensions of the assimilation model may influence the change of nationality and the assimilation process. Now let us look more closely at the direction of the assimilation processes. My hypothesis is that the assimilation process is determined primarily by the nation state, and that changes in the political framework lead to changes in the minority or majority status of ethnic groups. Earlier historical-demographic surveys unanimously confirm the role of the nation state. Before the Trianon peace treaty on the territory of present-day Slovakia – which once belonged to Hungary – the proportion of people whose mother tongue was Hungarian significantly increased, while that of Slovaks decreased.¹² If we look at the history of the territory that belonged to Slovakia in 1921, in 1880 63.1% of the population was native Slovak and 23.3% was native Hungarian. By 1910 these numbers changed to 57.6% and 30.6% respectively.

¹² At the same time we have to note that when tracing census data several decades back one should take into account the difference in fertility, mortality and migration rates among certain ethnic groups.

The study of censuses carried out within the frames of the Czechoslovakian nation state after the change of empire in 1918 demonstrated a steady and significant rise in the number and proportion of Slovaks. Aside from a short period between 1950 and 1961, the proportion of the Hungarian population steadily decreased. It has been dwindling since 1991. Between 1921 and 2001 the percentage of Slovaks rose from 65.1% to 85.7% while that of Hungarians fell from 21.7% to 9.8%.

In our sociological survey conducted in 1999–2000 the impact of changes to the nation state on the assimilation process was examined based on answers to questions concerning several generations of ancestors. We looked at the nationality composition of the grandparents and parents of the person interviewed. Parents born before 1918 were regarded as people socialised within the frame of the Hungarian state before Trianon, and those born after 1918 were considered socialised within the frame of the Czechoslovakian state.) The results showed that in the generation of parents born before 1918 the percentage of Hungarians was higher (69.9) than in their grandparents' generation (66.7). In the generation of parents born between 1919 and 1938, the percentage of Hungarians was already lower (55.6) than in the generation of the Grandparents (61.8). A tendency in the opposite direction revealed itself among Slovaks. Among parents born before 1918, the percentage of Slovaks was lower (29.1) than in the generation of Grandparents (30.3). Differences between the two generations in the case of people born after 1918 was even greater; among Grandparents the percentage of Slovaks was 35.7 and among parents 42.8.

At the same time it should be noted that even without significant change in the frames of a nation state, different attitudes towards minorities develop in certain periods. In the history of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, the years of statelessness (1945–1948) were followed by a kind of Czechoslovakian “socialist nationality policy” consisting of several phases. Efforts for reintegration in the 1950s (when due to lack of rights certain layers of the Hungarian community integrated themselves into various hierarchical and horizontal segments of Czechoslovakian society) bore ethnic messages very different from the normalisation period of the 1970s or the anti-Hungarian hysteria of the Mečiar era. These periods influenced strategies of national affiliation/nationality change in varying degrees. Following the years of statelessness, the 1950 census registered the smallest number of the Hungarians in Slovakia (354,532 people). The 1991 census, partly due to national euphoria following the velvet revolution, showed an increasing number (567,296 persons),

while the significant drop in the number of Hungarians in 2001 (47,000 persons) might be interpreted as a consequence of the Mečiar years.¹³

The difference between the number of those belonging to the Hungarian community and those declaring to be of Hungarian nationality can be indirectly inferred through divergence of mother tongue and nationality. The number of people belonging to a national minority is higher based upon mother tongue data rather than nationality data. As regards people belonging to a majority nation, the tendency points in the opposite direction. According to our hypothesis, the greater the difference between these two indexes, the more intensive assimilation takes place in interethnic relations. From 1970 the smallest gap between the number of Hungarians according to mother tongue and the number according to nationality was registered in 1991 (mother tongue data was 7% higher), and the largest gap in 2001 (the number of people who considered themselves to be Hungarian according to mother tongue was 10% higher than the number of those who admitted to be of Hungarian nationality).¹⁴

Beside the political – or macro level – perspective we examined what role the ethnic character of settlements – the micro level – and its changes play in the assimilation process. The study of censuses confirms that the micro level – the percentage of Hungarians living in the settlements – exerts an important influence on assimilation. What happens at the micro level, however, is affected by strong or soft nation state policy. Consequently, the ethnic data of consecutive censuses vary within one region, especially in ethnically mixed settlements. In the long run, for several decades, the percentage of Hungarians in Slovakia has declined in every settlement inhabited by Hungarians. The degree of decline is much smaller in settlements of strong Hungarian majority, than in places where fewer Hungarians reside.¹⁵

¹³ In 2001 the number of Hungarians in Slovakia was 520,528.

¹⁴ *Scítania ľudu, domov a bytov k 3. marcu 1991 v Českej a Slovenskej Federatívnej Republike*. FSU Praha, 1991. *Scítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov 2001. Bývajúce obyvateľstvo podľa národnosti, podľa materinského jazyka a pohlavia za SR, kraje a okresy*. SÚSR, 2002. 8. Instructions how to fill in the questionnaire.

¹⁵ A settlement qualifies as one inhabited by Hungarians if the proportion of Hungarians reaches 10%, or their number exceeds 100 persons. They can be divided into the following groups (the last two are variations of settlements with a Hungarian majority):

1. sporadic settlements: the percentage of Hungarians is less than 10 but their number reaches 100 persons;
2. settlements of Hungarian minority: the percentage of Hungarians is between 10 and 50;
3. settlements of moderate Hungarian majority: the percentage of Hungarians exceeds 50 but does not reach 80%;

Between 1950 and 1991 the number of Hungarians grew countrywide and in some settlements both the number and the proportion of the Hungarian population increased in the period between the two censuses. Nevertheless in the long run a drop in the proportion of Hungarians can be observed in some settlements inhabited by Hungarians. In the period between 1991 and 2001 the proportion of Hungarians in Slovakia fell by nearly 10%, in settlements of strong Hungarian majority by 5.2%, in settlements of moderate Hungarian majority by 7.6%, in settlements of Hungarian minority by 14% and in sporadic settlements by 18.5%.¹⁶

One can thus see that changes in ethnic set-up at the regional and local level are much more mouldable than at the national level. The ethnic constitution of a settlement is often a question of migration and administration. Looking back on the period of dualism, historical-demographic analyses reveal structural changes in opposing directions- in some settlements a shift took place in favour of minorities, and in other places in favour of the Hungarian majority population. Nevertheless, these changes were and are favourable for the prevailing majority.

The results of our questionnaire again indicate the defining role of the ethnic character of settlements in the assimilation process. In settlements inhabited by Hungarians additional explanatory variables created different impacts on nationality change and the assimilation process.¹⁷ In settlements with a Hungarian majority, the transmittal of Hungarian national affiliation was greater than in settlements with a Hungarian minority. 96% of those born in homogeneous Hungarian families considered themselves Hungarian in settlements with a Hungarian majority and 85.2% in settlements with a Hungarian minority. Differences are still more pronounced in the case of people born in Hungarian-Slovakian mixed marriages: in settlements of Hungarian majority 33.6% and in settlements of Hungarian minority, 4.8% admitted to be Hungarian. Similarly, the position of national affiliation- the delicate ethnic structure – of the population of mixed settlements were also significantly different. In settlements of Hungarian majority the percentage of those having double, transitory affiliation was the lowest (6.7%), the percentage of those belonging to the Hungarian core group was the highest

¹⁶ There were a few settlements in 2001 where the proportion of the Hungarian populations increased.

¹⁷ The settlements involved in the survey were divided into three groups unlike the typology of settlements inhabited by Hungarians: settlements of Hungarian majority (where the Hungarian population is above 60%) mixed settlements (between 40 and 60%) and settlements of Hungarian minority (between 10 and 40%).

(51.9%) and the percentage of people belonging to the Slovakian core group was lower (7.2%).

Changes in the ethnic character of settlements significantly modify the delicate ethnic structure of the population. In mixed settlements the percentage of those having double affiliation is the highest (8.7%) with more people belong to the Slovakian core group (31.1%) than to the Hungarian (24.8%). In settlements of Hungarian minority, aside from the relatively high proportion of people with double affiliations, 40.4% of the population belongs to the Slovakian and 13.7% to the Hungarian core group.

The direction and intensity of the assimilation process also varies in settlements with various ethnic compositions. In settlements with a Hungarian majority, the percentage of unassimilated persons is highest (56.7), and the percentages of people assimilating into the Slovak and Hungarian community are the lowest (33.4% and 9.9% respectively). The percentage of the unassimilated persons is the lowest (45.9%) in settlements with a Hungarian minority. At the same time, the percentage of those assimilating into the Slovakian community is the highest (43.6%) here.

The ethnic composition of a settlement implies the quality of the system of national institutions. The proportion of the population of a settlement bears an important influence on the maintenance of national institutions like schools, cultural organisations, programs, and practice of religion. In general, the largest scale of Hungarian institutions is to be found in settlements with a Hungarian majority. In settlements with a Hungarian minority one can hardly find a Hungarian school. Furthermore, Slovakian legislation ensures the possibility of official language use in settlements where more than 20% of the population is Hungarian.

The issue of *time* must be dealt with from two perspectives: changes through time must be examined at the community and the individual levels. At the *community level* we examined how the intensity of assimilation processes changed in the chosen settlements. We asked our interviewees questions regarding the national affiliation of their relatives. When creating generations our starting point was the person interviewed, thus we had the grandparents for the first generation, the parents for the second, the interviewed for the third, the children for the fourth and the grandchildren for the fifth. 64.8% of the grandparents' generation, 61.3% of the parents', 53.1% of the generation interviewed, 47.2% of the children's generation, and 39.9% of the grandchildren's generation was of Hungarian nationality. Within the generation

of the grandparents there were twice as many Hungarians as Slovaks, whereas among grandchildren there were 50% more Slovaks than Hungarians.

The results of the survey conducted with the help of the aforementioned one-dimension model were very similar. We examined two shifts of generations (grandparents – parents, parents – the interviewed) concerning national affiliation and found that the role of homogeneous Hungarian origin seems to determine change through both generation shifts. Concerning the transmittal of Hungarian national affiliation, the role of mixed origin significantly diminishes by the second shift of generations. Its function to transmit identity to descendants is taken over by additional dimensions added to the model. The weight of other variables did not change significantly in either shift. Following the command of Hungarian and schooling in the Hungarian language, the impact of Hungarian nationality of the spouse is the weakest.

Taking another perspective we looked at the changes of ethnic affiliation occurring within the life of *individuals*. At present there is no direct (survey) data at our disposal concerning the various changes of affiliation in the course of an individual's lifetime.

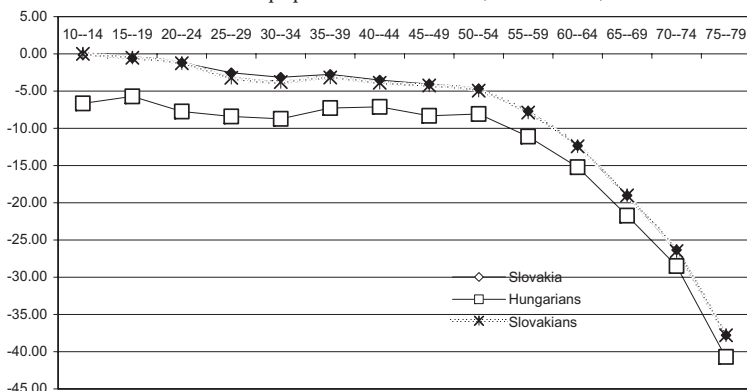
We examined the processes of nationality change according to age based on census data. We compared the changes that took place in the number of five-year-olds in the total population, and of Hungarian and Slovakian nationalities. At first we analysed the changes that took place between 1991 and 2001 (See fig.1).

The difference in changes that took place in the proportion of those belonging to certain age-groups of the population within Slovakia, and of the nationalities surveyed provides a basis for an estimation of nationality change according to age only when certain conditions are met.¹⁸ It can be seen that the decline of the age groups for the five-year-olds between the two censuses slightly intensifies with advanced age, significantly increases with the 50–54-year-olds age group. This natural process is different in the case of the total population of Slovakia, and in the case of the Hungarian and Slovakian nationalities.

While the decrease of Slovaks by age groups is almost identical with that of the total population, the situation of Hungarians is different. The drop in

¹⁸ The idea behind our survey is that several factors influence the number of five-year-olds in the period between the two censuses. One of the most important among these is the mortality rate, which increases as we approach older age groups and another one is international migration. It follows that this approach lends us reliable data only if the age-specific mortality and migration indexes of the ethnic groups under survey do not differ greatly from each other.

1. figure: Changes in the age-group of five-year-olds of the Hungarian and Slovakian population in Slovakia, 1991–2001, %



the number of people belonging to the five-year-old age-groups of Hungarians roughly follow country-wide tendencies, but the decrease of the five-year-old age-groups of the 10–34-year-olds exceeds national values by 5–7 score. Approaching older age groups this divergence becomes smaller, yet the decrease of Hungarians remains greater than the national average. Thus it can be observed that the decline of the Hungarian population by five-year-old age-groups from the age-group of the 10–14-year-olds to that of the 40–45-year-olds is at least twice as much as in the case of the total population. In the first figure the 10–14-year-olds constitute (in 2001) the youngest age group. The data of those who were born between the two censuses are not shown here as they were first registered only in the last census (in 2001). The number of people belonging to certain age groups between 1991 and 2001 is known from demographic statistics.¹⁹ Examining the data of the 0–9-year-olds we saw that the divergence is greater than in the case of census cohorts. The number of the Hungarian 0–4-year-olds was 10.3% lower, that of the 5–9-year-olds was 15.6% lower in the 2001 census than the number of births according to the data of birth register.

The tendency of Hungarians to change nationality is also an age-specific phenomenon. It is highest among children and youths, while decline decreases among the middle-aged and dwindles further on among the elderly. The pattern of the tendencies of nationality change according to age groups

¹⁹ Consequently, data registered with two different methods were compared.

between 1991 and 2001 may be applied to earlier decades as well. The pattern of the drop in the number of Hungarians according to age groups between 1970 and 1980 and between 1980 and 1981 was similar to that of the period 1991–2001.²⁰

Gender. We examined the role of gender in the transmittal of national affiliation. We wanted to know which influence is stronger: the mother's or the father's. Our two competing hypotheses were that on the one hand the traditional structure of Hungarian families living primarily in rural areas strengthens the influence of the father. While on the other hand, the role of the mother in the upbringing and socialisation of the child might mean a stronger maternal influence.

In the survey of two generation shifts, of the four lines of descent, three reflected a strong paternal influence. The survey of cross tables also confirms that the father has a stronger impact on the nationality of the child. 84.2% of children of Hungarian fathers and 82.8% of children of Hungarian mothers considered themselves Hungarian. However, we have also seen that the difference between maternal and paternal influence on the national affiliation of children has decreased, most likely as a result of the high level of modernisation.

The degree of urbanisation of settlements. Assimilation processes are affected by other factors including settlement size, or more exactly, their urban or rural character. According to a very frequent hypothesis, in towns assimilation (nationality change) is faster than in villages. We examined the data of the 1991 and 2001 censuses with the help of a panel survey (in longitudinal approach). In towns we registered a greater decrease of Hungarians (9.9%) than in villages (7.3%). At the same time, in the case of every type of settlements classified according to ethnic character, the proportion of the Hungarian population fell to a lesser extent in towns than in villages. In sporadic settlements there was hardly any difference: the proportion of Hungarians fell by 18.7% in towns and by 19% in villages. As regards settlements with a Hungarian minority, the proportion of Hungarians dropped by 13.3% in towns and 15.6% in villages. Similarly, the degree of decrease was 2 or 3% lower in towns of moderate or strong Hungarian minority than in villages of the same type. The roots of this seeming contradiction can be found in the distribu-

²⁰ Comparing the differences that took place during 3 decades it turns out that the decline of the Hungarian population according to age groups was the most intense in the 1990s. In the 1970s, decrease was similarly dispersed in time but its degree was smaller. In the 1980s dispersion in time was again very similar yet the degree of decline was significantly smaller and the numbers of certain age-groups increased during ten years, which means that a kind of (transitory) dissimilation took place in favour of the Hungarians.

tion of the Hungarian population in settlement types (towns or villages) according to their ethnic character. The Hungarian population living in rural areas lives in greater proportion in settlements of Hungarian majority than Hungarians living in towns do. Thus, the unfavourable distribution of the Hungarian population in towns results in a decrease of Hungarians of a greater extent in villages.

We can reasonably suppose that migration into towns leads to nationality change of a higher degree not because migration is directed into towns but because the proportion of Hungarians in the target towns is lower than that of Hungarians in the villages of departure. Therefore, it seems that we have to doubt that long-standing and widely accepted assumption which drew a direct relation between the assimilation of Hungarians in Slovakia and the process of urbanisation and migration.

The question arises, what is the reason for towns having a more favourable influence on maintaining Hungarian national affiliation in the various types of settlements with a given ethnic pattern? There are only hypotheses to answer this question, one of which may be the yet unknown ethnic consequences of internal migration between villages and towns.

Summary – Outlook

Based upon the results of our surveys, the factors determining assimilation processes can be divided into four groups and can be illustrated with a figure made up of three concentric circles (see figure 2).

- The innermost circle includes the five dimensions constituting the core of assimilation processes – cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, intergenerational amalgamation, intragenerational amalgamation, assimilation of identification – these bear the strongest and most direct influence on the assimilation process.
- Between the innermost circle and the second concentric circle we find demographic factors (gender and age of individuals) and factors defining the structure of settlements (ethnic character, number of inhabitants) – these have an indirect influence on the process of assimilation. Among these factors, ethnic character and the proportion of Hungarians living in the given settlements have an outstanding importance. The latter is to be found on the borderline between the belt of core dimensions and that of demographic and settlement structure factors.
- In the outermost circle, social structure factors (layers, mobility) are to be found. The profession, qualification, status, lifestyle and finan-

cial situation of individuals are factors which may have a more indirect, tinged influence on national affiliation. Certain professions are more tied to the national state than others. In such professions (e.g. in the case of employees within the apparatus of the state, the police and the army) the impact of structural assimilation manifests itself through the professions. People who have the same occupation but who work in institutions with different ethnic connotations and whose ethnic affiliations change accordingly, are also to be listed here. Most likely, the delicate ethnic structure and transmittal of national affiliation in the case of Hungarian teachers, or even school attendants, who work in Hungarian and Slovakian schools differ.

- Those factors that according to our knowledge at present, have no impact on assimilation processes, are to be found outside the outermost circle. Taking into consideration that surveys until present have covered a small sample and a relatively small number of the hypothetically influencing factors, we can only assume which factors can be included here, namely certain consumption, entertainment and lifestyle characteristics whose connection with the process of assimilation we do not know.

Translated by Ivet Császár

Figure 2: Factors and dimensions affecting the intensity of the assimilation process

