

Original Article



The coexistence of Swabians and Hungarians in a village in near Budapest

KOME – An International Journal of Pure
Communication Inquiry
Volume 2 Issue 2 p. 64-72
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Published by the Hungarian Communication
Studies Association

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Abstract: The study takes the contact hypothesis of social psychology as its starting point and examines a Swabian-Hungarian ethnic village as an example. The contact hypothesis suggests that contact or interaction between members of different groups under the right circumstances diminishes prejudice and hostility between those groups and mitigates stereotyping and discrimination. However, for this effect to occur, certain conditions must be met: the parties should be of equal status, have a common goal, cooperate, receive the support of authorities and maintain a personal relationship, since this is the only way long-term success can be achieved. Pursuit of mutual assimilation, physical proximity and time can also help people to accept each other and adopt coexistence. These conditions have been met in the case of the Swabian and Hungarian ethnic groups living in the village of Dunabogdány. Social and political processes, Catholicism and the fact that the German language has been added to the local school curriculum have also contributed to the successful outcome.

Keywords: ethnic minorities, interethnic relationships, assimilation, group identity, stereotypes, prejudice, contact hypothesis

1. INTRODUCTION

In a small village located in near Budapest, Swabians and Hungarians now live in peace while simultaneously maintaining their national identities. This coexistence is the end result of a long and hard process propelled by the interplay of various factors. In characterising this process we may consider voluntary and forced moves, conscious and instinctive decisions, and factors related to or independent of the individual, or we may look at macro- and micro level variables. If we intend to examine this process of coexistence in a scientific manner, we may borrow the notions, definitions and results of several different fields of science. The present study takes the contact hypothesis as its framework in interpreting the results of empirical data¹.

¹ The data were collected as part of my PhD thesis written for the Doctoral School in Social Communication, the Corvinus University of Budapest. The title of the thesis is: Marital mobility – a study of three generations in Dunabogdány.

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Article received on the 06th Nov, 2014. Article accepted on the 20th Dec, 2014.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Exploring, understanding and analyzing prejudices and stereotypes has always been a central issue in social psychology. The first endeavours in this area began in the 1920s and 1930s, but the first significant steps were the works of Adorno (et al 1950) and Allport (1954) who examined several basic notions and phenomena. While the former used an approach placing the individual in the centre and summarized research on authoritarian and prejudiced personality, the latter emphasized the role of everyday observational processes in the emergence and prolonged existence of prejudices and stereotypes. I will depart from these thoughts to describe the processes leading to peaceful coexistence in Dunabogdány.

Firstly, we must briefly discuss the notion of group identity: how it emerged and why it is relevant (Sólyom 2014). Factors that feed on emotions and knowledge applicable to or related to our own group form an integral part of our individual identity, since a person's identity – according to the theory of social identity – originates from the collective. This is where we learn in what ways we are similar to or different from other group members. This means that our individual identity includes the mindset and value system of our own group, and since we are part of a collective, our personal identity also affects and shapes group norms and behaviours. Individual and group identities mutually influence each other, which is also true for stereotypes and prejudices: personal prejudices will affect those of the group and *vice versa*. The sense of belonging to our own group is determined by two factors: one is that we define ourselves as members of a group and the second is that other individuals also regard us as members. According to numerous studies in the fields of psychology, sociology and social psychology, the importance of group identity lies in the fact that, based on criteria of special personal significance to us, we tend to assign a higher value to our own group than we assign to other groups included in the comparison. In addition, the importance of group identity for a group member lies in the fact that the group we self-identify with and are members of is our primary source of self-confidence (Turner-Oakes 1986).

Evaluations are strongly affected by the relations between the different affiliations of an individual; thus the peaceful coexistence of groups or heavy tensions between them have an impact on perceptions and opinions, the emergence of stereotypes, attitudes, and solidarity within the group as well as loyalty between different groups (Doise 1980). Given that we have an interest in the success of our own group, we are likely to be biased, which results in different groups competing with one another. This competition is the source of conflicts between groups. Negative stereotypes and prejudices, biased opinions and occasionally hostile attitudes on the part of the majority group serve the purpose of preserving its dominance. However, when the interests of groups suit or complement each other, tolerance, equity, friendliness and friendship prevail (Fiske 2006; Kovács 2010). At this point, it should be noted that linguistic and cultural differences between groups will not *per se* become prejudices. The social, economic or political context is also part of the equation. During interactions between groups, different parties evaluate each other's acts and behaviours based on a pre-set, ethnocentrically constructed system of categories and they mutually create characterizations which include unique "ethnic" negative features (Hagendoorn 1995).

As for the relationship between the majority and the minority, tensions and conflicts between the two stem from the competition for power, for the right to make decisions over the use of resources, for income, prestige and influential positions in decision-making and government. The basic type of minority-majority relationship is that between an ethnic minority and the majority population of a state. The ethnic minority is constructed by the majority driven by xenophobia and prejudices. According to Allport (1977), we will have enemies once we have named them. During the process of developing an identity, it is the majority which is first identified with the minority following later and having to conform to already established

norms. This was the case, for instance, when ethnic Germans were given the label Swabians. The majority labels, identifies, limits, subjugates and if needed, excludes. Once the minority has been constructed, the majority generalises its features, classifies, creates negative stereotypes, and if the minority does not meet its standards, punishes: the majority discriminates, limits opportunities, excludes and, in the worst cases, builds ghettos and exterminates. If, however, the so-called other meets certain standards, the majority will accept and welcome it.

2. DISCUSSION

Ethnic minority communities are the products of migration or redrawn borders, forcefully detached from their own original groups. Voluntarily or because they have no alternative, they continue their lives in a state with a different language and culture, among strangers and enemies. Whether they decided to give up their majority status or became a minority for some other reason, the result is the same: they lack the confidence and privilege the majority groups enjoy and they become vulnerable. The harmony ensured by the majority status of the group is thus replaced with the conflict-filled existence of being in minority. A minority status has several disadvantages in itself. The struggle for survival while trying to meet various expectations, the fight for acceptance and hospitality are the source of numerous conflicts from the beginning.

Several approaches and theories have emerged in social psychology in an effort to decrease inter-group conflicts. Sherif (1980) advocated the theory of “superior goal”, Allport (1954) suggested the contact hypothesis and Adorno (1969) urged a school curriculum emphasizing the importance of autonomy and critical thinking. These remain the fundamental suggestions of social psychology today.

According to the contact hypothesis, differentiating between group identities creates distorted views of other groups and is also the cause of the overvaluation of one’s own group. If the theory is correct, then prejudices, stereotyping and discrimination may be diminished, while sympathy may be increased through interactions and direct contact between members. The more frequent and regular the interactions are between the members of different groups, the less those groups will resort to prejudices and stereotypes when thinking about the other. The explanation behind this hypothesis is that knowing others decreases anxiety and fear related to the members of other groups; with more information, attitudes towards the other identity change significantly. Furthermore, contact increases empathy towards the situation of the other group and awakens trust in its members (Tausch-Hewstone 2010).

Interaction *per se* does not necessarily result in the decrease of prejudice and inter-group hostility. For this to happen, four requirements must be met (Siklaci 2010): participating parties should be of equal status; the parties should be willing to cooperate; they should declare their mutual goals; and they should receive support from their respective legal and social authorities. However, if the parties meet while they differ in position, status or roles, an increase in and reinforcement of prejudice may be the outcome. In such cases, the conflict itself has to be managed first, and only after a successful attempt may we expect a change in attitudes. Pettigrew (1998) further developed and redefined the original contact hypothesis and added a fifth requirement to the previous four: the situation must allow participants to establish amity. According to Pettigrew, this is necessary because contact is particularly efficient if it is long-term and allows the creation of cross-group friendship-like relationships. The goal of assimilation on the part of both parties helps coexistence. However, the physical closeness of the majority and minority groups and time are important factors when it comes to improving relations between groups and attaining peaceful coexistence. Physical closeness does not only mean living geographically close to each other, i.e., everyday coexistence, but

also refers to the extent to which a given minority has already assimilated into society. Mutual understanding and acceptance are directly proportional to the level of assimilation. Acceptance of dual identities also leads to less prejudice between groups as this also requires a lower level of attachment to one's own group, and cross-categorization allows the same people to belong to another group simultaneously. This dual affiliation is an indication of tolerance and empathy in the direction of an external group (Crisp 2010). According to an inter-ethnic study in Hungary (Balassa and Kovács 2010), there is a higher chance of personal relationships forming between groups in ethnically diverse localities, and the closeness of residence and everyday shared activities also decrease negative attitudes, i.e., simple coexistence decreases prejudice. One of the developments rooted in the contact hypothesis is the extended contact effect (Wright 1997), according to which the knowledge that our fellow group members have close and good relationships, even friendships with members of an external, "enemy" group may further decrease prejudice towards that group. The reason is probably that such behaviour by other members of our group acts as a kind of norm and serves as a model of how we should behave towards the other. It provides information suggesting that a given individual may not be as "threatening and terrible" to us and to our group as we originally thought. As a result, we redefine inter-group relations in less negative terms and seriously reconsider the validity of our stereotypes.

Let us now examine the tenets of the contact hypothesis by examining the relationship between the Swabian minority and Hungarian majority in our village. Throughout my research, I have explored majority-minority relations (Sólyom 2004, 2014). Specifically, I have examined the relationship between the Swabian and Hungarian inhabitants of Dunabogdány, a village near Budapest in Pest County. In this municipality, the minority language is still used as a mother tongue; however, due to the opening up of the ethnic community, the assimilation process had a strong influence on identity and assisted peaceful coexistence with the Hungarian majority. At this point, an important factor should be noted: in Dunabogdány, the Swabian minority enjoys a plurality status meaning they have outnumbered Hungarians for several generations².

My experiences indicate that the studied Swabian community possesses a dual identity. They define themselves as both Hungarians and Swabians and exist simultaneously as Hungarians and Swabians. They have acquired the knowledge essential for securely participating - as a survival technique - in communication with the majority of Hungarians. The Swabian community imported easily applicable, acceptable and useful elements, which meet certain basic standards. While maintaining and emphasizing its minority identity, the community accepts certain Hungarian majority practices as a result of Hungarian language socialization. However, there are considerable generational differences. It is important to note that although this community is willing to adopt a dual identity, it rejects complete homogeneity, full assimilation or giving up its Swabian identity.

Throughout history, Swabians as an ethnic group were subject to forced assimilation. For example, they were expected to adopt the values of the Hungarian majority while Hungarians did not acquire a Swabian mentality - not even over a long time. Swabians were expected to learn Hungarian so that they could pursue studies and find a job, and if they wanted to build a career, they even had to change their names to sound more Hungarian. They were considered Hungarian for military service purposes - when they were needed, the fact that they were Swabians did not make a difference. Nevertheless, Swabians did all they could to preserve their identity but could not resist assimilation. Prior to the Second World War, the community of the village was rather closed, which determined inter-group and intra-group relationships

² By Hungarians, I mean non-Swabians who are almost exclusively Hungarians, although there are a small number of Slovaks and Serbs. The inhabitants of the village also speak of Swabians and Hungarians and do not specify ethnicity. They consider every non-Swabian person a Hungarian.

and communication. Strictly following norms was the typical way of life: the norms specified how people should behave with others, whom they may speak to or marry, whom children could or could not play with, whom people may spend leisure time with or have emotions for, what tone they may use, which bar or tavern they may go to or where they could sit in church. The community took the arrival of outsiders quite hard, which is still reflected in the attitudes of some indigenous Swabian families who complain about too many “foreigners”: people who relocate to Dunabogdány from other places. The norms once so strict eventually loosened up as a result of certain historical, political and social events – for example, the Second World War, the repatriation of 1947 and increased mobility (school, commuting to work, mixed marriages). The traditional set of values dissolved, the validity of the original ethnic knowledge and points of orientation for self-classification disappeared leading to assimilation. Nowadays, the village is more open and accepting but some indigenous families still limit outsiders’ approaching them. They continue to work a lot to preserve their Swabian identity although they have lost their language with only the most elderly villagers being able to speak and understand it. Certain group norms and values have been successfully protected and continue to serve as a basis for identity, a pillar for ethnic survival. This includes the reviving of relations with Germany, holding Swabian festivities and practices, organising intensive German language courses (a German ethnic kindergarten and school operates in the village), music and dance classes, several choirs, bands and ethnic civil society groups. The Swabian community considers itself a minority mainly based on its ancestry. Their minority culture – as it is experienced and lived in day-to-day life, different from the majority, with a set of distinct values, norms and practices covering all areas of life including the use of traditional clothes – is not as complete as it had been before the Second World War. The reasons include the modernization and assimilation mentioned above. Elements and practices of Swabian culture, which were passed down through generations, mainly survive in festivities and celebrations but are not fully articulated in everyday life.

Assimilation has not reached its full level and local Swabians do what they can to prevent it. The Swabian language is a case in point, which is currently limited to older generations while the natural language of communication among young people is Hungarian even if they have working knowledge of the minority language, which they quite rarely do (Bindorffer-Sólyom 2007). Linguistic assimilation is practically complete, language exchange has taken place. However, Swabians attempt to preserve their mother tongue in a certain form and on a certain level; it is taught as a foreign language to grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the kindergarten and schools. The members of younger generations not only all speak better Hungarian but due to their socialization, their knowledge rests also on Hungarian culture. They take classes, however, where complementary information is taught on their ethnic community and background, also as a part of formal education. Swabians in Dunabogdány can be considered assimilated; they possess a Hungarian national identity, albeit their ethnic identity also remains. Hungary is their home country but they do whatever they can to preserve their ethnic culture. They try to keep their two identities in balance, which means they are forced to find an equilibrium between assimilation and ethnic survival.

Assimilation as a compromise solution involves adopting a dual identity, which is in part a defensive response to various elements, phenomena and processes threatening Swabian identity, but which also has the effect of decreasing conflicts between groups and thus helping self-preservation. Having a dual identity also means that when Swabians define themselves as Hungarians, the negative stereotypes and attitudes Hungarians may have against Swabians become less condemning and exclusionary. The experiences gained during interethnic relations, the consequent emotional influences and assimilation counteract animosity and guide the relationship of the two ethnic groups.

Györgyi Bindorffer's (2001) study found that prejudice did exist in the past between Swabians and Hungarians in Dunabogdány but ethnicity motivated discrimination against the Swabians did not start until after the Second World War. Coexistence had been peaceful prior to 1945. The two ethnic communities had shared a similar life until certain political decisions with a series of negative effects were made. After that, Hungarians accused Swabians of being responsible for the Second World War; Swabians thus became scapegoats, victims. Their property was confiscated, they had to face forced labour, expulsion, repatriation, the arrival of outsiders and the loss of Hungarian citizenship. They felt these measures were unjust since they were good citizens, who had worked efficiently and restlessly ever since they had settled here and they had even completed military service to defend the country. Swabians became particularly hostile towards Hungarians who occupied the houses of Swabian families either expelled from the country or forced to move in with another family and who thus acquired all their property. Protestants and settlers were also unwelcome. The Hungarians of Slovakia were now held responsible for everything bad that suddenly happened to the Swabians and in Swabian eyes, they became the scapegoat.

Discrimination faded away in the early-to-mid fifties, which in turn increased the chances of interactions between people of equal status thus paving the way for assimilation. Social mobility, cooperation and the end of seclusion together with everyday coexistence, shared work, being neighbours, mixed marriages and the formation of a common 'Bogdány conscience' had a positive impact on either groups' evaluation of the other group. Mutual understanding and acceptance increased, prejudiced behaviour ceased to exist and currently there is no discrimination towards Swabians on either an individual or a group level. Stereotypes related to Swabians do exist but they are of no relevance, since Swabians are even proud of these stereotypical characteristics (e.g. frugality, economizing, considerable wealth and hard work). Stereotypical slurs against Hungarians also continue to exist (e.g. lazy, careless and messy); but the two groups appear to have accepted each other completely. There are of course some individuals in the village who up to this day still think differently and hold grudges against members of some members of the group or against the whole group, people who cannot forgive the events of the past. Negative remarks and comments also occur when specific problems need to be solved or during discussions related to the life of the village but these do not fall under the scientifically defined category of prejudice or discrimination.

Based on this research, we can conclude that as everyday interactions between Swabians and Hungarians became more frequent and positive, coexistence has led to a decrease in prejudice. There are no considerable differences in status in the village, one party may count on the cooperation of the other, and their shared goal is to peacefully live together. Institutional requirements are also met since both laws and social norms assist in getting to know and accept each other. Swabians accept Hungarians and *vice versa* leading to a strengthening of self-confidence for both ethnic groups and to more resilient relations overall. In addition to the abovementioned four criteria, belonging to the same religion also aided the rapprochement of the ethnic groups. Swabians are Catholics and a non-Swabian sharing the same belief constitutes a step forward in itself. Previously – particularly prior to the Second World War – local Hungarians were categorized by Swabians based on their faith. They distinguished Protestant Hungarians – who remain a minority in the village even today – from Catholic Hungarians who had arrived from outside the municipality. Having the same religion as Catholic Hungarians, who were also outsiders, meant they accepted them more readily than they did Protestants, which was also observable in mixed marriages. However, they remained hostile to Hungarians coming from villages and towns nearby.

Origins and knowledge of German also bring parties closer to each other but this only has an effect among members of younger or middle-aged generations, since the first generation,

which was forced to become acquainted with members of another group, did not know the language of the newcomers and did not share ancestors with them. However, their children – if they attend the kindergarten and school in Dunabogdány – learn German and participate in the events of the Swabian community, and may also participate in musical life through the local conservatory. Due to the increased number of opportunities for social mobility and to the spread of mixed marriages, we may also observe shared families and a shared ancestry, factors which may facilitate the development of friendships between group members.

It is important to note that in Dunabogdány, cultural differences between Swabians and non-Swabians are not serious enough to render relations and communication almost or actually impossible or to cause hostility. This has probably never been the case; conflicts were never very serious or violent. Instinctual or conscious differentiation and prejudices were a result of differences in mentalities such as the careful protection of private property – not only in a financial but also in an intellectual sense – and were not a consequence of differing cultural practices.

As other studies have also shown, one may observe in Dunabogdány that it is not only the ethnic composition of a personal environment that affects the individual but also the other way around: an individual influences the composition of his or her environment. If some of those belonging to one group are open, interested, and ready to establish friendly or family relations with another ethnic group (e.g. through mixed marriages), other group members will have a tendency to do the same. They will consider these acts and behaviours as a model or a pattern, which will eventually result in acceptance and the opening up of a previously closed community. During my research, I have also experienced that Swabians no longer form such a closed community as they did prior to the Second World War. They are much more open and gladly welcome not only Swabians but anyone to their events. At first, their community was forced to open up because of historical, political and social pressure - a process that is nowadays voluntary. Acceptance and tolerance have increased over time and the village is much more welcoming than it used to be.

3. SUMMARY

This study described the process leading to the peaceful coexistence of Swabians and Hungarians in Dunabogdány. The notion, meaning and importance of group identity in inter-group relation dynamics were used to provide a theoretical background. According to this approach, our individual identity originates from the group we belong to; this is how we are able to define ourselves within the group and to distinguish our group from other groups and their members. Our own group affects us and *vice versa*. Inter-group relations determine whether peaceful coexistence or conflicts will follow and accordingly influence perceptions, attitudes and opinions regarding other groups. This general description also applies to majority-minority relations. When there is a conflict, the minority assimilates, flees or is destroyed. The majority either accepts/welcomes or attempts to forcefully assimilate minorities resulting in a constant state of conflict. If they remain unwilling, the ethnic group is either frightened away or is exterminated. According to the contact hypothesis, communication and interactions between the groups, and becoming acquainted with each other aid acceptance and understanding while decreasing stereotypes and prejudices. The more frequent and deeper the direct contact, the more quickly will opinions and attitudes change. This process can be observed in Dunabogdány, where the Swabian minority and the Hungarian majority – following the years of forced assimilation - can peacefully coexist today. However, this does not mean surrender on the part of the Swabian community but rather the development of a dual identity. This enabled them to save their ethnic group and to create the necessary environment for peaceful coexistence. The Hungarians also agreed that

this form of “half” assimilation was sufficient and allowed Swabians to preserve their traditions. Both sides entered a compromise but this required the presence of certain basic criteria: equal status of parties, a shared goal, cooperation, institutional support and amical relations between the two ethnic groups. Furthermore, the wish to become acquainted with the other group, physical closeness and time also helped to increase acceptance. Finally, social and political processes, a common faith, and German – a language learnt and used by members of both groups – also influenced Hungarian-Swabian relations.

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