

## ARTICLES

## FROM ETHNIC TO NATIONAL: POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY IN SLOVENIA

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## ABSTRACT

**From ethnic to national: political geography in Slovenia**

Early geographic research has made the Slovenian ethnic component in Austria, Italy and Hungary a laboratory of studies on the minority-majority relations within nation-states, as well as on ethnic migration processes. Later, studies made during the »cold war era«, on the multiple development opportunities cross-border co-operation enables, have shown ways to overcome political divisions and cultural diversity. Recently, the integration and disintegration processes within the frame of Europe, and in particular in the Western Balkans, have come into the spotlight of research in political geography. At the same time the multi-cultural aspects of border regions, the territorial identity and the ethnic components continue to play an important role in the studies of Slovenian political geographers.

## KEY WORDS

political geography, ethnic studies, border studies, cross-border co-operation, Slovenia, Western Balkans, European Union

## IZVLEČEK

**Od narodnega k nacionalnemu: politična geografija v Sloveniji**

Zgodnje raziskovanje političnogeografskih problemov je v ospredje postavilo etnično ozemlje Slovencev v Italiji, Avstriji in na Madžarskem. Območja ob državnih mejah Slovenije/Jugoslavije z omenjenimi državami so postala družbenogeografski laboratorij proučevanja odnosov manjšina: večina v zaokroženem prostoru zgodovinsko pogojene avtohtone poselitve le-te. V času »hladne vojne« so obmejna območja še vedno ostajala v vizirju političnih geografov, vendar tokrat kot mostiščne regije med Vzhodom in Zahodom. Čezmejna gospodarska kooperacija je zmanjšala politična nasprotja in vzpostavila kulturno sobivanje ob odprti meji. Ob koncu 20. stoletja je integracija in disintegracija evropskih držav usmerila pogled slovenskih geografov v smer Zahodnega Balkana. Istočasno ostajajo poprejšnje vsebinske razprave – kot so multikulturalnost, obmejne regije in družbeno stična območja – še vedno v središču proučevanja politične geografije.

## KLJUČNE BESEDE

Politična geografija, etnične študije, obmejna območja, čezmejno sodelovanje, Slovenija, Zahodni Balkan, Evropska zveza (EU)

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## 1 The frame

In 2012, Slovenia is still the youngest nation-state within the European Union (EU). The Republic of Slovenia was constituted in 1991, as the former Yugoslav federation broke apart. The country was recognized by the international community (by the EU and UN, among others) in 1992, was successful in its application to join the EU and NATO in 2004, eliminated border controls to other EU member-states and introduced the European currency (Euro) in 2007. This was the first time in history that ethnic Slovenes claimed nationhood; the territory they have occupied for about 1500 years has been controlled by various European powers like Austro-Hungary, the Venetian Republic and the Yugoslav federation.

Political geography is, in this article, observed from the general, from the subject's core point of view. Three classical spheres of research are highlighted: 1) border disputes and cross-border relations, 2) ethnic and minority issues, including assimilation and migration patterns and 3) topics on spatial/political integration and disintegration. Even in this frame of discussion we might have missed one or the other important research. We apologize to colleagues which works/discussions we've left out. We consider them as similarly important themes in political geography. Several other topics – like the works of hundreds of human geographers, regional planners, »eco-environmentalists«, etc. can be considered within the broader frame of political geography as well. We recognize that monographs, guidebooks, the national atlas and other material on Slovenia, in particular if published in a foreign language, could be – out of promotional reasons – considered within the subject of political geography as well.

### 1.1 Introduction

The area between the Alps, the Danubian Lowlands and the Mediterranean Sea has been in the focus of geographic research since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In »The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola« (original: »*Die Ehre des Herzogtums Crain*«), the Carniolian nobleman Johann Weikhard Freiherr von Valvasor (Janez Vajkard Valvasor) wrote an outstanding description of the ethnically central territory of the Slovene settlement; due to the excellent description of the hydrology on one of the karstic lakes (Cerkniško jezero), he became Fellow of the (London) Royal Society. The outer parts of the ethnic territory (like the provinces Styria, Carinthia, and the Gorizia/Trieste hinterlands) did not have geographic or cartographic studies made by Slovenian geographers until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the Styrian Blaž Kocen introduced geographic textbooks and as the Carniolian Peter Kozler printed, according to Austrian rulers, a controversial map »*Zemljovid Slovenske dežele in pokrajim*« (»A map of the Slovene Land and Regions«) in a scale 1 : 576,000 on the territorial dispersion of the Slovenian ethnicity (Slovenski šolski muzej 2011). This excellent work in cartography was inspired by the Spring of Nations (1848) and today could be labeled as irredentistic, as the author claimed ethnically mixed lands as Slovene's own. It resembled the nationalistic ideal of *Zedinjena Slovenija* (The Unified Slovenia), claiming that provinces within the 19<sup>th</sup> century Habsburg monarchy with Slovene population should become united as one single, ethnic/national unit (within the frame of the Empire).

After WW1, several territories settled by the Slovene ethnicity remained outside the predominantly Slavic state of Yugoslavia: South Carinthia in Austria, the Mediterranean and Sub-Mediterranean pre-alpine areas in NE Italy and the Raabe region in Hungary. Geography was within the post-WW1 Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (= Yugoslavia) among the rare sciences that constituted the newly created universities (i.e. University of Ljubljana), but the sub-discipline of political geography had not received any attention – with one exception: the ethnically predominantly Slovene areas in neighboring states. The cartographic exhibition on Slovene territories (»*Kartografska podoba slovenskega ozemlja*«), organised by Valter Bohinec in 1954, focused in particular on the »lost regions« (NUK 2011). The post-WW2 communistic Yugoslavia was particularly interested to ignite this issue as, for one, Austria and Italy were westerly oriented nation-states, and secondly and most-

ly, as the assimilation processes (often initiated by nation-state acts) in Austria, Italy and Hungary rapidly started to reduce the number of ethnic Slovenes »behind the borders« (Si. *zamejski Slovenci*). Maps on Carinthia (Klemenčič V. 1972), the Trieste/Gorizia Upper Adriatic and the western Friuli-Venetia Giulia region (Si. *Beneška Slovenija*) (Medved 1974; Medved and Ingolič 1978) with bilingual names (of towns, areas and attractions) were published and guide-booklets printed (Gosar 1983). With the exception of Slovene colonists who settled the emptied German villages in Vojvodina (Serbia) (Pak 1963), the position of ethnicity within the »Yugoslav socialist federation« was otherwise never seriously studied.

Inspired by the democracy movements in Eastern Europe, the geography-led eco-awareness movement (»*Zeleni Slovenje*«) joined the Slovene intellectual elite in overthrowing the communist regime in 1989. Geographers took leading positions in the political establishment. Political geography was applied »*in situ*« by two geographers – Lojze Peterle, who took the position of Prime-minister, and Dušan Plut, who became politically responsible within the 5 member nation-state's Presidency.

## 2 The early days of political geography

The modern geography in teaching and research started within the University of Ljubljana in 1919. Courses in Political geography were not taught until late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Anton Melik (1890–1966) embodied Slovenian geography for nearly half of this century. His excellent descriptions of geographic features were later complemented by Svetozar Ilešič (1907–1985), an outstanding teacher on classical geographic thought. Both university professors denied Political geography as sub-discipline, but in their publishing, two topics undoubtedly should be placed within this frame: 1) initial research on Slovenian Diaspora and 2) regionalization of the territory settled by Slovenes. In Melik's basic work on Slovenia (*Slovenija – geografski opis* 1963), the number of Slovenian emigrant nationals within Yugoslavia was represented at 66.963; 380.000 subjects were believed to be living in other countries of the world (2/3 in the US). In his work for, the first time, the Slovene ethnic border in Austrian Carinthia was drawn (p. 357) as the territory was named »*Slovenska Koroška*« (Slovenian Carinthia). Melik and Ilešič worked intensively on the issue of natural and physiognomic divisions of Slovenia (Si. *Regionalizacija Slovenije*) as well. In all of their »regionalizations« (1946; 1954; 1958), the areas described did not end at the Slovenian/Yugoslav border but included natural areas and, in part, cultural centers of nearby nation-states (Hungary, Austria, Italy) (Ilešič 1972). Interestingly, »Slovenian regions« did not enter into the bordering Yugoslav republic of Croatia. This is a contradiction in itself, considering that, in the book named above, the non-natural Croato-Slovene border setting and the number of 43.000 Slovenians living in Croatia is pointed out. Much later, in a second regionalization attempt, Ivan Gams (1986) framed his regionalization within the borders of than (still) Yugoslavia. The young generation of Slovenian geographers follows the trend set by Gams (Kladnik 1996), and recently some younger geographers have discussed Slovenian regions within the macro divisions (cross-border-like) of Europe (Gosar and Klemenčič V. 1994; Klemenčič V. et al. 1990; Gulič and Praper 1998; Lorber 2003).

The Slovene minority issue in neighboring countries was, among other research topics, the driving force behind the creation of the Institute of Geography in 1962. The lead researcher of the institute, Vladimir Klemenčič (1960) studied, at the beginning of his academic career, Austrian censuses and followed the assimilations process spatially. Klemenčič's research was based on socio-geographical methods and included detailed demographic and spatial analyses of the post-WW2 Carinthia. Later, his interest turned to the Italian and Hungarian border regions as well, but his love for the initial topic remained until today; the problem of the Carinthian Slovenes has now become internationalized (Klemenčič M. and Klemenčič V. 2010). The general direction of the institute provoked research on the border regions in general. In the 1970s and 1980s, several geographers studied the negative and positive effects of the initially closed, then semi-closed, and finally open border of Slovenia/Yugoslavia to the West. Spatial

changes induced by the open border in border regions, in particular at border crossings and in ethnically mixed areas, have become major research topics of the institute. Slovenian research on cross-border traffic and impacts on the urban/rural landscape (Klemenčič M.M. 1979), the intensity of the cross-border shopping (Jeršič 1970), tourism (Gosar 1979) and the broad band of the cross-border cultural exchange, visits and culinary experience (Bufon 1994), just to name a few topics, has been praised within and outside of the profession. The remaining closed border towards Hungary was less eagerly studied, but several geographers from the then newly formed University of Maribor pointed out its negative effects. Olas (1973; 1985) blamed the steady emigration of the border area population, in search for seasonal work in Austria and Germany, for the degradation of the rural landscape.

Just ahead of the proclamation of nation-state sovereignty, studies on ethnic Slovenian populations abroad moved (partly) away from focusing on the ethnically mixed territory along borders. The Slovene ethnicity abroad has become a complex field of study. Zupančič stated that ethnic Slovenians in the Austrian capital Vienna (and in some industrial centers) outnumber towns/villages in Carinthia, where this group is autochthonous (Zupančič 1997; 2008). The Slovene Diaspora (Si. *izseljenci*) and the economic migration subjects (Si. *zdomci*) have become a single study object, disregarding their initial migration motive (often political!) and relation to the existing state of Slovenia/Yugoslavia (Velikonja 1974; Gosar 1979; Genorio 1991). Instead, their cultural and economic impacts within the host country and in the region of origin are placed in the foreground of studies. Also, the autochthonous ethnic minorities living within the Yugoslav Slovenia, in particular Italians and Hungarians, have come into the spotlight of geographic research. Along with it, the development of regions along borders (cross-border regional planning) has become objects of studies with colleagues of universities in western Italy and southern Austria (Klemenčič V. et al. 1990).

### 3 The contemporary political geography

Political Geography was introduced into the geography curriculum of the University of Ljubljana in 1993; the first course companion was published in 1998 and the first textbook printed in 2001. The two volumes of Milan Bufon's »*Osnove politične geografije*« (Fundamentals in Political Geography) were inspired by Julian Minghi and other American textbook writers (Bufon 2001a; 2001b). Geography at the other two Slovenian universities, in Maribor and Koper, soon becomes enriched with courses on political geography. In particular has this content gained ground at the University of Primorska, in Koper where the initial undergraduate and graduate study programs in geography were entitled »Geography of Contact Areas« (in 2008 changed to »Geography«). Since creation in 2005, the seat of the Association of Political Geographers of Slovenia is located there.

As mentioned in the introduction, several geographers have become politically active since Slovenia's independence. In their position as members of political parties and/or within commissions established to solve disputed territorial and/or cross-cultural problems, they have played important roles. They have contributed to nation-state policies involving minority rights for the Italian and Roma population (Franco Juri; Jernej Zupančič), led negotiations on disputed topics with the EU (Rado Genorio; Ivo Piry), and contributed to the solving of territorial and political problems with the neighboring countries. In particular the relationship with Croatia was tense. In the Croato-Slovene bi-partisan border commission, constituted in 1992, two geographers become members: Croatian Mladen Klemenčić and Slovenian Dušan Fatur. Geographer Milan Orožen Adamič has become Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to Croatia in 2004.

Since political establishments of Slovenia and Croatia often acted unilaterally, following their own interests, scientific expertise on the border issue was needed. The provisional border in the Mediterranean Adriatic (Piran Bay and its continental hinterland) was predominantly under the observation of geographers from both countries (Klemenčič and Gosar 2000). In part, other segments of the land-based

border also did not comply with the interest of the local population and/or nation-state policies. All in all, about a dozen relatively small border areas were disputed, and research was needed. In particular, the real-estate rural ownership in the north-easterly section was thoroughly studied (Belec 1996; 1997; Gosar L. 2009). Some solutions, produced by geographers were forwarded to responsible institutions of the nation-states – like the proposal of the Joint Zone of Management in the Upper Adriatic – but they have ended up in the drawers of governments. Finally, in 2010 both governments, supported by the positive outcome of the referendum on this issue in Slovenia (51.5% in favor), decided to forward this issue to an international arbitrary court.

New migrants, to some extent of Yugoslav heritage, have come into the spotlight of geographical research in the 1990's. The immigrant communities of Croats, Bosniaks/Muslims, Serbs, Albanians and others from the territory of the former Yugoslavia make a substantial number of residents in some smaller industrial centers of Slovenia – like in Koper, Jesenice and Velenje, for example, where their share exceeds one-third of the overall municipality population (Dolenc 2003; Mlekuž 2005; Josipovič 2006). Geographers and other colleagues at the University of Primorska had the privilege in 2008 to introduce Slovenia's presidency to the European Union by organizing a conference on the (European) Intercultural Dialogue (Gosar 2008). The issue of New Minorities has become of international interest due to the fact that, in the mid 1990's, the young nation-state's government erased (Si. »izbrisani«) several thousand ethnically non-Slovenian residents because of the failure to forward documentation on their prime residency and citizenship in proper time. Despite the fact that, since 2008, this issue has been lawfully solved, on this matter several law suits are pending at the EU courts in Strasbourg.

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, geographers have also continued to study other minority issues, in particular, that of the Roma (Zupančič 2007) in Slovenia and Slovenians in neighboring countries (Bufon 2006). The Slovenian Diaspora has continued to be a study subject as well; roots tourism has been placed among the priorities of this particular research topic (Koderman 2011). Before its closure in 2002, the basic research on the mentioned topics was initially based at the Institute of Geography in Ljubljana. The most cited articles from that research period are published in the proceedings of the conference »Political Geography in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Understanding the Place – Looking Ahead« (Gosar 2001). At present, interdisciplinary ethnic and migration studies are part of the geographical and sociological curriculum and research at the universities in Ljubljana and Koper within which co-operation with several recognized institutions of the same character in Europe and North America was established. Maribor colleagues concentrate research efforts on the cross-border co-operation in the Danubian/Pannonian lowlands and its hilly hinterland (Lorber 2004; Drozg 2001).

One of the tasks of geographers at the young University of Primorska in Koper, where the core of political geography is located now, was to promote their own research on several subjects of political geography through conferences and subsequently in related proceedings, including: »Globalized Europe« (2005), and »Development Opportunities of Slovenian Border Regions« (2009). As the titles suggest, the latest interest of Slovenian political geographers follows two paths: 1) Slovenia's regions/nation-state's position within the European Union (Bufon 2008; Berdavs and Kerma 2009; Kerma 2009; Vrtovec 2010), and 2) Western Balkans' political/economic consolidation and EU integration. The Sarajevo conference (in 2005) on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dayton accords, and the 2006 proceedings »The Western Balkans – A European Challenge« (Bufon et al. 2006), have gained attention of the international community of researchers, as there the path towards restructuring of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a viable nation/country was set. Several Slovenian authors have succeeded therewith in widening the East European Shatter Belt theory by discussing the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Rogelj 2006; Tunjič 2007). Within the frame of the »Adriatic Forum« – an annual meeting of political and human geographers of the region (Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Slovenia), initiated by Slovenian geographers in 2008 – discussions relate to the planning of cross-border co-operation and territorial integrity.

## 4 Conclusion

The contemporary political geography in Slovenia is alive and well. Political geographers have their own, about fifty members strong, association as part of the national association of geographers (Si. *Zveza geografov Slovenije*). Slovenian academicians are long-time members of the Steering Committee of the Commission on Political Geography of the International Geographical Union (CPG IGU); the author of this presentation is at present president of the CPG IGU. Slovenian geographers are members of several professional international institutions related to topics of political geography. Slovenia as a nation-state has several country representatives in international offices and in domestic political offices. If we look back on the one century old profession of political geography, we can conclude that Slovenian professionals have contributed a lot to their development and existence. Early geographic research has made the Slovenian ethnic component in Austria, Italy and Hungary a laboratory of studies on the minority-majority political relations within nation-states. Later, studies made during the »cold war era«, on the multiple development opportunities cross-border co-operation enables, have shown ways how to overcome political divisions and cultural diversity. Recently, the integration and disintegration processes within the frame of Europe and in particular in the Western Balkans have come into the spotlight of research. At the same time the multi-cultural aspects of border regions, the territorial identity and the ethnic components continued to play an important role in the studies of Slovenian political geographers.

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