

# N A C J O N A L I Z M Y W Ś W I E C I E S P E C I F I C N A T I O N A L I S M S

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## ABOUT THE THEORY OF ASSIMILATION PROCESSES: CONSTRUCTION OF SLOVAK MINORITY COMMUNITIES

### INTRODUCTION

The problems surrounding minorities of Slovak ethnicity abroad form an inseparable part of ethnic issues. This contribution deals with acculturation processes based on the theoretical aspects of the causes and conditions for migration and emigration. Considering present possibilities and our expertise we concentrate on the problems of Slovak minorities in Low-Land (*Dolná zem, Alföld*). This geographical term indicates the area of middle and south-eastern Europe situated southward of the present-day southern border of the Slovak Republic and includes Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Bulgaria.

The culture of Slovaks living abroad is significantly determined by the culture on the Slovak territory. At the same time, however, it is influenced by the lifestyle of the majority population in terms of geography and politics. The most important factor that secures the development of minorities is the preservation of ethnic identity, minority culture, and language. The existence of immanent culture, and language as its significant expression, is crucial for shaping the survival of a minority when surrounded by people of different ethnicities.

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This identity preservation is critical in today's world when modernisation and the use of new technologies significantly accelerate assimilation processes.

State policies and the attitudes of the majority population towards the minority population are important. The basis for the functioning of minority on the state's territory is formed by the way the state regulates its minorities and by the rights and duties that are imposed on them. The aforementioned minority culture can only be developed with an understanding from the majority population represented by the government. The extent of acceptance depends on the economical and social prosperity of the state and other factors. We stress the importance of finance in this process. It determines the organisation of minority structure as well as practical contribution to different parts of the system and its functioning.

The attitude of the motherland toward their enclaves and diasporas surrounded by different ethnicities also has an influence on the survival of a minority. In the case of Slovak minorities, this would mean the attitude of the Slovak republic. It is necessary for sufficient support in terms of cultural activities as well as finances to be presented. When looking at present-day ethnic policies in Europe, we can say that most European countries try to support their minorities living abroad.

The presented contribution requires the selection of basic theories and the reviewing of several terms from culturology, ethnology, sociology, social anthropology and psychology. These terms include: culture, ethnicity, ethnic consciousness, ethnic identification, enclave, diaspora, assimilation processes, and any combination of these terms. We must also point out that our effort is not to present a dispute about the topic theoretically, but to determine methods which will be the most suitable for research and will allow the presented problems to be solved in the most exact way.

## THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE EXAMINED ISSUES

Global society can be divided into smaller parts based on different criteria such as geographical location, sources of subsistence, way of life, language, mutual political or family relations, religion, nationhood or belonging to a certain ethnic group, or ethnos. We often divide population according to ethnicity; in other words, we see communities as ethnic. The first identification or self-identification works through the antithesis we – they. According to Soukup<sup>1</sup>, we can see many communities trying to conceptualise the world according to this antithesis.

A similar type of thinking can be applied to culture as well. Global world culture can be looked at as an aggregate consisting of smaller cultures (considered a distributive approach<sup>2</sup>). We define most of these cultures as ethnic, ethno-religious, or cultures based on political and/or technological principles.<sup>3</sup> When we study culture from Eagleton's<sup>4</sup> point of view, *Culture* with a capital C pertains to the world population. There are two philosophies which characterise world *Culture*. The world from the conceptual point of view

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<sup>1</sup> SOUKUP, V.: *Dějiny antropologie*. Praha 2005, s. 273.

<sup>2</sup> It considers culture on levels of culture, subculture, contraculture. It is focused to particular sociocultural system, local cultures. Culture means individual configuration of artefacts, sociocultural regulatives and ideas. SOUKUP 2005: 640.

<sup>3</sup> LENOVSKÝ 2008: 99.

<sup>4</sup> EAGLETON 2001: 23.

is seen “as one social system with a wide range of interactions, distribution of goods, ideas, money and values between society levels (individuals, companies, conglomerates, ethnic groups, states, etc.). The system is driven by a complex of a multilayer competence structure.”<sup>5</sup> The second approach, called cultural universalism, composes world culture from generally used or usable elements which are common and globally universal (e.g. physical and natural principles) and which we insist are universal, despite reality (e.g. human rights, equality of men and women).<sup>6</sup>

Nowadays it is evident that the ethnic aspects of culture are weakened by globalisation, electronisation, or change of lifestyle. Traditions, norms and cultural models stemming from ethnicity are nowadays transculturally substituted by global ones. Political and technological aspects prevail over religious and ethnic ones. This is evident in the unionisation of Europe, which unified different ethnic and religious elements within Europe. The characteristics related to “national” have gained new meanings in recent decades.

As a result, ethnicity in culturological understanding does not have as significant a position and is not a significant subject when compared to ethnology (or anthropology). It is only one of many factors and dimensions in forming culture. The phenomenon of ethnicity is a dynamic ethno-psychological and ethno-cultural concept; ethnic processes including the processes of ethnic unification and thus ethnic assimilation can be perceived as acculturation – the process of exogenous cultural change with its accent on ethnic parameters.

The problem of ethnicity can be perceived from different points of view. The definition of this term is determined by the field of research which studies it.

We considered the approach of Slovak ethnologist J. Botík to be the key one. He states that a group of people with the most intense ethnic features, such as common origin, common language, and common culture, is most commonly considered the basis of ethnic unit classification. At the same time, these people realise their unity and fellowship that are represented in the same ethnonym and ethnic consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

The study of social anthropologist M. Kanovský is also interesting. From his point of view, the members of an ethnic group are represented as people who share an “essence”, i.e. something essential, a hidden and determining identity, carried from generation to generation. He does not specifically say that the “essence” consists of some specific features, which are used when we distinguish members of an ethnic group. Kanovský does not consider Botík’s factors of identity relevant and argues that one single factor cannot determine ethnicity sufficiently. He considers them to be only the consequence or attribute of identity, not the determinant.<sup>8</sup>

On the contrary, G. Kiliánová looks at ethnic identity from an ethnologic point of view. She also stresses the philosophies of social and cultural anthropologists. The determination of criteria, which distinguish a member from a non-member of a particular ethnic group, i.e. forming an invisible border, is different in each ethnic group. Identity is created according to different features and it reveals different transmittance, or conversely, separation from one group to another as well as within one group in different periods of time according to the economic, political and social situation.<sup>9</sup>

Ethnologist M. Botíková states that the basis for ethnic consciousness, and thus a differentiating sign can be any real or imaginary feature. In particular, conditions of ethnicity,

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<sup>5</sup> LECHNER – BOLI 2005: 17.

<sup>6</sup> LENOVSÝ 2008: 100.

<sup>7</sup> BOTÍK 1991: 17-20.

<sup>8</sup> KANOVSKÝ 2004: 11-24.

<sup>9</sup> KILIÁNOVÁ 1998: 9-15.

national consciousness are the result of a historic practice of people who are interconnected through common economic relations, language, territory and culture.<sup>10</sup>

If we think about ethnicity, it is necessary to connect this term with traditional culture. The work of M. Benža helps us in this aspect. He considers ethnicity to be a complex system of signs, which consists of culture and thus also traditional culture. It is precisely this traditional culture which carries the ethnic characteristics of each nation. On the other hand, the territories of traditional culture are not compatible with language or ethnic territories.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this, P. Slavkovský states that members of ethnic groups are able to distinguish details and accurately recognize the ethnic value of certain cultural phenomena, especially on a local level. These selected cultural phenomena can even become ethnic attributes.<sup>12</sup>

Italian politologist G. Sartori claims: „Our identity is the same as *we*; *they* represent different identities which specify our identity. An inevitable supplement of identity is being different; who and what we are depends on who and what we are not. Each community implies separation, inner consistence, which is exclusion. Unless they aren't surrounded by *they*, *we* will not come into existence.”<sup>13</sup> We can use this way of thinking when speaking about ethnicity borders.

From our point of view, ethnicity represents a group of mental and objective attributes, on the ground of which an individual is integrated into a group of people. He considers himself to be a part of the ethnic group and he gains ethnic consciousness.

Ethnicity can become a reason, cause or even consequence of different problems which can be defined as ethnic. The former Yugoslavia or the Hutu versus Tutsi conflicts are examples of ethnicity causing genocide.<sup>14</sup> Ethnicity is thus not only about belonging to an ethnic group, sharing a common language, etc., but it can become the determining instrument of ethnocide, demagogy, and the manipulation of people or whole societies. This fact supports the relevance of ethnic issues within the present-day multicultural world.

There are other terms which are closely connected to this topic. Ethnic consciousness is a sign of ethnicity. It encompasses belonging to a nation, common origin, common historical development as well as the notion of features and cultural signs of one's own ethnic group.<sup>15</sup>

Characterising ethnic identification is more difficult, especially in a minority background. Theories from social psychology can be used in this case. An ethnic group can be viewed as a big social group with automatic membership, to which a relationship is later formed.<sup>16</sup> Identification depends on the group's strength of ethnic consciousness. The basic condition for forming an ethnic attitude is reaching a certain level of ethnic identification development. It is a gradual, complex process comprised of differentiation and the integration of knowledge concerning interethnic relations. It is completed in late adolescence, when we can expect a relatively distinctive ethnic attitude to be formed.<sup>17</sup>

When studying this topic, it is important to clarify the meaning of the terms enclave and diaspora – the basic types of settlement and localisation of a minority population on state territory. Enclave, in ethnography, means a group of people surrounded by a com-

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<sup>10</sup> SIGMUNDOVÁ 1983: 4-16.

<sup>11</sup> BENŽA 1994: 63-67.

<sup>12</sup> SLAVKOVSKÝ 2004: 149-156.

<sup>13</sup> SARTORI 2005: 32.

<sup>14</sup> Genocide is the highest level of collective violence. It is an attempt to destroy a different ethnic group physically. TESAŘ 2007: 205.

<sup>15</sup> KOLEKTÍV 1995: 125.

<sup>16</sup> BOROŠ 2001: 71.

<sup>17</sup> LOVAŠ – VÝROST – ZELOVÁ 1996: 135.

munity with a different ethnicity and culture. The members of enclaves preserve their own culture and consequently develop a certain level of seperatness toward the majority population. Enclaves are based on an ethnic, religious or language principle.<sup>18</sup> Čukan<sup>19</sup> stresses a functional viewpoint, the significance of cultural reproduction, and the size of the minority community, according to which we can call a minority an enclave. Diaspora is a term which denotes any group of refugees or emigrants living dispersed in a different ethnic background. In the past, it was used in connection with a different religion.<sup>20</sup>

People living in enclaves and diasporas are exposed to the influence of assimilation processes. After the initial contact, there are three phases: adaptation, acculturation and assimilation.

Adaptation is a process in which an individual or a group of people modify their behaviour so that it is in accordance with the surrounding cultural and social environment. Culture is one of the means of adaptation.<sup>21</sup>

Acculturation represents the mutual influence of cultures bringing new elements into a certain existing system. It can exist between two or more groups. The basic condition for acculturation is a long term symbiosis of the groups with different cultures.<sup>22</sup>

Assimilation is the process of merging of two or more groups, usually ethnic, into a single unit with a common culture. Having cultural contact between original inhabitants and immigrants means that minority members lose some of their own attributes and gain the attributes of the majority culture.<sup>23</sup>

The term naturalisation is also connected with assimilation processes. It is the acceptance of a nationality by a foreigner and her adjustment to a culturally and socially different environment.<sup>24</sup> It is important to emphasize that the first three phases are followed by one another but naturalisation does not mean their completion; it can occur during any of the three phases.<sup>25</sup>

Migration creates the basic condition for acculturation. It is closely connected with the existencie of mankind. In prehistoric times, man was forced to migrate due to food. Phaleolithic man did not have a permanent settlement and he moved constantly. The first settlement is connected with the neolithic era, when man became a shepperd/peasant and settled and started growing crops and domesticating animals. Morgan calls this period an early state of barbarism.<sup>26</sup>

Migration, and its specific form colonizations, is happening constantly, even after settlement, due to many reasons. The territory of Slovakia and central Europe is connected with the migration of big groups of people – Dacians, Germans, Celts, Avars, Slavs and Hunes.<sup>27</sup> In the more recent history of our territory, we have seen German colonization, colonization based on Walachian law, immigration of Habans, Huncokars, Croatians or Bulgarians. There were also some migrations of inhabitants from present-day Slovakia, such as the emigration of Slovaks to the Low-Land or overseas.

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<sup>18</sup> KOLEKTÍV 1995: 121.

<sup>19</sup> ČUKAN – GARAJ – JÁREK 2005: 9-23.

<sup>20</sup> KOLEKTÍV 1995: 92.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 401.

<sup>25</sup> Naturalisation is sometimes not connected with ethnic identity at all. In the present-day multicultural world an example of naturalization is an athlete who accepts a citizenship of a country only to represent this new country. It is not important whether the athlete is living in that country or not.

<sup>26</sup> SOUKUP 2005: 318. Morgan marks the previous era as savageness and next era as civilization.

<sup>27</sup> BADE 2005: 47.

Integration in the European Union is usually connected with work-related migration from the countries of the former eastern block to economically better developed states of west, south or north Europe. The present-day migration of inhabitants proves the fact that migration is an inseparable part of life, not something obsolete, or something only from the past. It is only the form, reasons, causes, intensity, range and size of migrations changes in this process. According to the mentioned factors, we can describe a particular migration based on certain periods, individuals and groups of people, causes and consequences, starting points and final destinations, and durations.

Through this scheme we can identify key migrations in the context of this contribution – migrations to the Low-Land. They become bases and conditions for the creation of cultural environments in particular localities and geopolitical backgrounds.

The process of colonization is not always without conflict, as it was in the Low-Land. History gives us many examples of settlement causing ethnocide in the colonized territory. This happened in America, where colonization caused the mass killings of native inhabitants. We can also mention the colonization of European powers in Africa or Asia. For many ethnic groups, colonization brought the end of their existence and thus the end of ethnocultural development and cultural processes.

Migration of inhabitants is characterised as a "movement of inhabitants in a geographical area connected with a change of place of residence outside the settlement unit. It can be an inner migration of inhabitants within the state territory, or an outside foreign kind of migration. The migration of inhabitants is connected with settlement processes (settlement – colonization), with the movement of inhabitants when looking for job opportunities, or exodus caused by political, cultural or religious motivation (emigration). Settlement processes contributed to foreign migration. The migration of inhabitants is an important characteristic of demographic, economical, historic, and cultural development of a country."<sup>28</sup>

#### *TEMPORAL AND SPACIAL FACTORS OF ASSIMILATION*

The present state of Slovak minorities in Low-Land is determined by the attitude of the majority population to the minority. Field research proves that this relation can be studied from two aspects. The first is represented by valid legislations in different fields (education, culture, etc.), created by the state through the government, regulating ethnic minorities. Members of a certain ethnic group on foreign territory are only allowed to do what the majority enables them to do. This can be put into effect by aforementioned legislations or provision of financial resources, the distribution of which is usually a part of these rules.

The second aspect represents the relationship between individuals on a local level. This mutual partnership is not limited by any legal means; it takes a long time to form and is influenced by the different identities and social roles of each person as well as the whole community. It is important to distinguish between urban and rural backgrounds, which influence the relations of the inhabitants. As we have found out, the mutual relation between individuals is not always in accordance with legislative tendencies. Local environment is not usually burdened with the stereotypes of legislation on the state level, and

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<sup>28</sup> KOLEKTÍV 1995: 355.

thus the contacts, attitudes and cooperation have developed through experience with members of other ethnic groups.

Both of these aspects are important for minority members. Everyday life is influenced by relations in a community or village. Every community or village functions as a hierarchical system influenced by individuals with the highest positions (usually elected today), and as a system controlled by a valid legislation. A minority community, if it is an enclave, also usually represents a system with certain rules, institutions, authorities, etc. These are subsequently hierarchised to a nationwide level (although not all of them), and have the ability to communicate with highest state authorities or contribute to the creation of a minority legislation (or at least analyse it critically).

And here we can find the connection between the legislation, its opportunities, and an individual (a member of a community/minority). This relation, as well as other assimilation factors, caused differences in the level of aculturation of Slovaks in different countries of the Low-Land. It is also important to take into consideration the power of different enclaves, their size, production of minority culture, bringing up the youth in accordance with the nation's spirit, etc.

The possibility of minority culture production and the socialization of youth are determined by the relationship of a majority to its minorities, which is manifested in legislation. It is evident that this relationship, encoded in legal norms connected with minorities, is one of the most important assimilation and aculturation factors, determining development for many years.

In an equally important context, that lies opposite to the aforementioned relation, is the attitude of the majority nation to its enclaves and diasporas abroad. It can, to a certain extent, compensate the negative influence of antiminority legislations, namely financial support of developing projects or other support, which are mentioned above.

Except for the influence of legal norms on a minority we can observe an interesting fact in minority communities. It is the ability or inability to use guaranteed rights in the aforementioned laws. Not only do we need to take financial support into consideration, but also individuals and institutions which can implement the use of these rights. We point out the importance of a cultural coordination office, which would have good knowledge of legislation and would be able to maximize the outcome for the minority.

According to our field research and study of relevant resources and mentioned contexts of assimilation/aculturation factors, we tried to classify these factors.

Assimilation factors can be divided into groups. Subsequently, it is important to create several concrete subgroups within the groups of assimilation factors. These consist of particular assimilation factors. Their number is unlimited and their identification is possible only through their application in a concrete area. We would like to point out that groups and subgroups of assimilation factors are the same in each locality but their occurrence, importance, intensity and its influence of particular factors change according to the area.

Each territory is unique and original when we consider its development. Assimilation factors can affect a local area directly or indirectly. An example of an indirect influence is the banishment of Turks; by contrast a direct influence can be seen in the repatriation of inhabitants from a particular village to former Czechoslovakia. None of the factors of assimilation function separately, but in interaction with other factors. They influence each other.

The first big group of factors consists of economic and political development. The course of history has had a crucial influence on the current make-up of Europe. The event, which practically started the migration to Low-Land, was the final defeat of the Turks.

After their departure, it was necessary to populate the empty areas they left behind and to start using them economically. When considering the most general point of view, the defeat of Turks proves to be the condition for further acculturation processes, after the migration of Slovaks and members of other nationalities to unpopulated areas. World War I and consequential breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy also had a specific impact, because it resulted in the creation of new state formations in the geo-political environment of Central and South-East Europe. World War II proves to be influential in the same way. It was the driving force behind the grouping of individual countries into strategic units (winners – losers, East – West), which influenced the post-war development for a long time. An essential factor was also the repatriation, whose effects are observable even to this day. It changed the development in various enclaves; some were changed into diasporas. An example is the post-war collapse of Slovaks and their culture in Bulgaria or other former Slovak villages in southeastern Hungary. The legislature concerning minorities has also had a determining influence. It constitutes and manifests the relation of a majority towards a minority, gives rights to communities and defines the mechanisms of the financing of minority systems. It manifests itself latently in more localities; however, it is possible to identify it in the context of long-term development as either a positive (e.g. in former Yugoslavia) or negative influence (e.g. in Hungary).

Administrative structuring can also be interpreted as a subgroup of acculturation factors. A clear example is the modification of state borders after World War I, which determines the character of the area even to this day. An interesting factor is the multiple, regular or irregular reorganization of civil service and public administration. It could be related to the revitalization of its components, to the changes in political system or country direction. This was the case in the change of a municipality into a system of departmental villages in Romania or former Yugoslavia. Natural regional centres and the creation of new ones, whose importance is still growing, are connected to it. As an example, it can be mentioned that in the past, Arad was the natural centre of the stream territory of Békéscsaba, but after the border modification, Segedin became the centre. In other cases we can observe the arrangement of closely neighbouring villages into various units, as is the case in the Romanian Borumlak (belongs to the centre Siplak) and Varzali (belongs to the centre Popesti).

An important subgroup of assimilation factors is economic-social development in individual countries. The economical situation depends on the overall conditions in the country and directly affects the life of its inhabitants. Its fluctuations consequently underlie the attitudes and actions of people. For example, in the Romanian town of Butin, young Slovaks, after nationalization, preferred moving into the centre of Rešice over working in a cooperative farm or in agriculture because of their unwillingness to work for a low salary. The second assimilation factor is social situation. It is represented by the level of health services, pension systems, educational systems, etc., and is directly related to the economical situation. A practical example is the era of communism, during which there was a doctor in each village. After the transformation into a market economy, health care was reorganized to be more effective, and its accessibility varies according to the conditions of an area, region, or state.

Geographical conditions form a large group of assimilation factors. In some cases, they significantly influenced the course of acculturation processes, mainly when we compare the geography of the original and new home.<sup>29</sup> They can be divided into the fol-

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<sup>29</sup> CHRASTINA 2005: 346



lowing subgroups: terrain, climatic conditions, hydrologic conditions and soil conditions. Similarly to other subgroups, they are closely interconnected. The terrain of a country fundamentally affects the character of life in the given area. Not only employment and civil engineering are affected, but also the disposition to centres, their accessibility, etc. We can contrast the natural surroundings such as the mountainous Bihar in Romania with the lowlands around Békéscsaba or Bački Petrovac. Climatic conditions determine the ways of farming and agricultural production. Hydrological conditions and water flow often create an impassable natural obstacle that separates, and together with other requirements also creates, culturally different areas (e.g., the river Danube in its whole length of flow). Lakes and subterranean streams have their significance when new communities settle; for example they influence the routine life of inhabitants in a positive as well as negative way (in Békéscsaba it was not possible to bury their deceased due to the high level of downstream water). Soil, as well as climate conditions, affected the types of cultivated crops and consequently the type of livestock production (sandy soil in Kiskőrös affected folk architecture as well as the kind of vegetable production).

The ethnic structure of a population represents one of the most important groups of assimilation factors. It is necessary to bear in mind two subgroups: the phase of colonization and characteristics of other ethnicities in the territory. The phase of colonization influences the degree and rate of assimilation processes. The more advanced the phase is, the quicker the progress of processes. However, it is necessary to also consider some other specific factors such as the size of a community and its structure in terms of age and education (more numerous enclaves produced more educated people, e.g. Bački Petrovac, Nadlak, etc.). It is also important to take into account the influence of ethnic diversity. The presence and size of other ethnicities are the factors here. The higher the number of nationalities within an area and its environment, the bigger the presumption for a longer preservation of traditional culture. The size of the majority ethnicity and its characteristics (denomination, language, employment, etc.) is crucial.

Another group of assimilation factors is the denomination structure of ethnic minorities and the majority nation. We distinguish two subgroups, the denomination of Slovaks and of other ethnicities. However, each religion should be treated as an individual factor, in regard to the environment in which it is practiced. Religion is very important when looking at migration, because its unrestrained worshiping was one of the primary reasons for leaving one's old homeland. The denomination of other ethnicities, mainly of the majority, should also be taken into account. While evaluating the influence of this factor, there arise interesting situations resulting from the confrontations of different religions, which are dealt with further in this contribution.

Employment represents the determining assimilation factor in many areas. Slovaks, after their arrival to the Low-Land, devoted themselves to traditional employments such as agriculture or felling. In some areas, they had to find work in mines (as in 'Zadunajsko', which represents the area between Győr and Székesfehérvár in Hungary), or in glass works (Pilis mountain), which had both positive and negative effects on the course of ethnic processes. Later on, employment choice was related to the economical situation, which forced people to also look for employment other than the traditional ones, even outside of the local area they lived in. Factors of employments of other ethnicities in the given area are relevant as well. In areas with numerous Slovak populations almost purely Slovak cooperative farms have been formed (Butin), but in other areas mutual cooperation forced workers to adopt foreign influences (Erdevík).

A key factor of assimilation is traditional culture. Its preservation and presentation is one of the basic conditions for the resistance of assimilation processes. Its most significant subgroup is non-material culture. In the minds of people, it is mostly interpreted as folklore, as well as various traditions and local customs.<sup>30</sup> When looking at resistance to assimilation, the reproduction of culture is important, although it is many times modified by foreign cultural influence. Further subgroups are social and material-technological culture. Social culture exhibits itself in community organization and its functioning, which can have a markedly anti-assimilating function when they work together with geographical conditions. A good example is provided by Slovaks in Butin who worked in civil engineering. Their houses had mostly green facades. In the Serbian town of Erdevik, our countrymen used a blue colour. The distinguishing feature was also the processes of production, which Slovaks brought with them in the period of colonization (e.g. the preparation of food, clothing, weaving, and embroidery).

Within the evaluation process of assimilation factors, it is interesting to monitor the variability of their influence. This variability is influenced by the uniqueness of each area and non-recurrence of its conditions of development. We try to prove that these different circumstances affected the degree of acculturation of local Slovak communities in the Low-Land. We emphasize not only the combinations of acculturation factors, but also the importance the historical development.

In times of migration to areas vacated by the leaving Turks, we probably cannot speak about the ethnic identity of migrants. The confessional (Lutheran, Catholic, "Orthodox") or local<sup>31</sup> identity (region or village, from which they came) stood in the forefront. The significance of denomination identity is, in some communities, more important than ethnic origin. For example, in Békéscsaba, Slovak protestants used the term *pápež* (pope) to refer to Slovak catholics. In Butin, the original Slovak inhabitants call the Slovak immigrants from the north of Romania *Bihorčan – Bihorčanka* (inhabitants of the Bihor area).<sup>32</sup> These examples show that it is necessary to deal with, i.e. to make a provision for, acculturation processes, because they are not always directly related to ethnic identity.

An important assimilation factor, frequently occurring in the acculturation analysis of a specific area is its geographical conditions. It is interesting to observe the influence of, for example, repatriation within the economic-political development together with geographical conditions. It should be noted that repatriation has affected local communities more than entire regions or states. The Lowland villages, from which the Slovaks migrated to Czechoslovakia, were afterwards populated by members of the majority nation and other ethnicities, thus changing the ethnic structure of community. The opposite development can be observed in mountainous areas, where there was less interest in inhabiting the empty houses after Slovaks due to lower soil fertility and unfavourable climatic conditions. In this way, the ethnic structure was modified less markedly; only the number of ethnic minority members decreased. Therefore it can be concluded that unfavourable geographical conditions caused the deceleration of acculturation processes.

Terrain and the geological structure of sub-soil, together with the employment of inhabitants, function as an assimilation factor. Mountainous areas were rich with different kinds of ores, which, in the majority of cases, meant a shift of primary employment towards

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<sup>30</sup> ZUSKINOVÁ 2008: 131.

<sup>31</sup> We can see the importance of local identity through the surnames of migrants, e.g. Plachtinský (village Plachtince), Očovský (Očová), Huťan (Huta), Môtan (Motovce).

<sup>32</sup> In Low-Zemplín (eastern Slovakia region) inhabitants do not differentiate We – Slovaks, You – Ukrainians, but We – Slovaks, You – "Orthodox."

mining. In lowland areas, agriculture remained the main source of livelihood for a longer period of time. Acculturation was quicker in mountainous areas. However, nowadays, people leave seeking better jobs regardless of the social conditions in individual areas.

The logical connection of factors is created by the social situation of minority members and the phase of colonization. If the desires of migrants did not match reality, or if the area was overpopulated, they decided to leave to another area. The process of adaptation of colonists within secondary or tertiary migration becomes shorter, which facilitates quicker acculturation. There are, however, also other factors that take part, such as denomination, employment, the ethnic structure of a community, etc., which affect situational variability.

An important determinant of assimilation is also the number of people belonging to other coexisting ethnicities. In Erdevik, for example, there was a significant German minority, which outnumbered the Slovak one. Its presence meant that Slovaks resisted the pressure of acculturation with greater ease and gained more favourable conditions. Here we would like to emphasize the influence of an administrative division. When the system of village mayors was in effect in Romania, the villages remained united. After the beginning of communism and the system municipalities with a single centre village, people were forced to create bonds to the new environment. The same process can be observed in Serbia.

A contrast to the examples given is represented by Hungary, where each village is independent, but the acculturation factor of minority legislature also has effect as a manifestation of attitude of the majority towards the minority. However, nowadays we can witness activity in the minority communities of Slovak enclaves being set in motion, even in this country.

The relationship between non-material spiritual culture as an assimilation factor and a minority's size and demographic structure can be identified, within acculturation processes, as a condition of minority culture development. The most populated enclaves should have the best position, but in this case, the importance of representatives and institutions comes to the forefront. They play a major role in the preservation and development of traditions and spiritual culture.

An interesting factor that is having an anti-assimilating effect is civil engineering within the traditional culture, in the context of geographical conditions. In the lowlands of Low-Land, e.g. in Erdevik, Butin or Jelisavec, Slovaks also differed from other nationalities by using different coloured houses. In Erdevik or Jelisavec the facade rendering was blue, in Butin it was green.

Similarly – from the influence of geographical conditions and clothing – the clothing of catholic and protestant women in Butin can be analysed. While catholic women from Bihor wear colourful skirts, blouses and aprons, the old protestant women from Butin prefer moderate dark colours.

Assimilation and acculturation factors influence the ethnic minority in two ways. Their influence can be either positive or negative. It is important to understand that the process of acculturation is irreversible, and the positive influence of factors can only stop or slow it down for a limited period of time. As we have already mentioned, the influence of assimilation factors is variable and innumerable combinations can be observed depending on the specified area or period of assessment. It is also possible to evaluate these factors from the standpoint of inhibition and acceleration of assimilation. We try to apply this evaluation directly to the offices and institutions connected to the ethnic minorities. Here

we can see the variability of individual representatives. While they can be regarded as a contribution in some cases, their effect can also be opposite.

Denomination stands for another important dimension of identity. In many cases, the culture of the members of ethnic minorities survived only thanks to their religion.<sup>33</sup> If we examine specific areas individually, we can evaluate the influence of denomination through the activities of the priest, religious community, or the diocese from different points of view. Catholics in Butin do not have a Slovak priest; in fact, they do not have any priest. Butin is a part of the Gataj parish. The local priest comes twice a month and mass is only partially celebrated in the Slovak language. During the remaining three weeks, "the mass" is held in the Slovak language by the inhabitants themselves (they sing religious songs and pray). If there was a proper, resident priest (of Romanian or Hungarian nationality), and he would not be able or willing to communicate in the Slovak language, the minority would lose even their last chance to celebrate liturgical service in their native language.

On the other hand, Slovak protestants in Erdevik or in Boľovce have their own priest who is, however, not very active and divides the community into two groups. This can also be observed in the Slovak protestant church in Serbia in general, which also tries to recruit members outside the Slovak community.

The priest in the Borumlak–Varzal' parish, until recently, represented a positive influence on minority members. He had a substantial influence on the preservation of the Slovak language, culture and identity of worshippers in his parish thanks to his natural authority and work on the behalf of Slovaks not limited to his vicarage and church. This kind of influence is possible due to the strong faith and confessional identity of Bihor Slovaks.

The situation in Békéscsaba is also quite interesting. Protestant services are celebrated in the Slovak language, and afterwards in Hungarian as well. While there are only a handful of Slovaks participating in the Slovak service, the Hungarian service is attended by several times as many people. This is also proof that the size of the ethnic population is an important parameter, but not the most important one.

A similar situation can be observed with teachers. Many teachers are able to teach their native language. However, according to the laws of the country, the lessons must be held in the official state language. Thus only a few lessons weekly are devoted to the Slovak language, which is not sufficient to become proficient in a language. Despite this, there are still some areas where children have problems with the majority language because they communicate almost entirely in Slovak from childhood. This is the case in Butin for example. Romanian children can even learn and use colloquial Slovak fluently while playing games in the streets with other children.

Another problem also emerges here. Teachers directly from Slovakia work in some areas (e.g. Bodonoš, Stará Huta). Their language is significantly different from the language used by Slovaks living abroad, who employ a modified Slovak language of regional Slovak dialects. In my opinion, it is important to preserve the colloquial language and favour it over the correct standard pronunciation.<sup>34</sup> The pronunciation can represent a barrier between the acquisition and non-acquisition of native language. Last but not least, the personality of the teacher and his personal interest to teach children is also important. In the past, the teacher also took an active part in the social life of a village as well. These days, this occurs less frequently, but it varies depending on the particular village.

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<sup>33</sup> LENOVSÝ 2005: 537.

<sup>34</sup> In Békéscsaba, inhabitants are of the opinion that only a man who speaks standard literary Slovak can be considered as a true Slovak. It is an example of a very easy manipulation with ethnic identity.

Life in organized groups depends, to a certain extent, on the current legislation, which allows people to establish municipal governments, unions, or cultural associations (civil associations). However, as a rule, the communities, in which these institutions work, present their minority culture more than those, in which this is not present. On the contrary, we can associate Erdevík or Pivnica with more ethnic organizations and Butin with a paralyzed branch of the Democratic Union of Slovaks and Czechs in Romania (this only works formally). An important fact is that, at the present time, these organizations can apply for financial support through projects and grants of the European Union, their homeland, or their domestic government. If the ethnic organizations are active, it causes great deceleration of acculturation processes, mainly if every age group, and especially the young members, of communities take part in their activities.

Nowadays, the negative effect of sects on the development of Slovak communities comes forth. Participation in national, social, and cultural events is thus weakened. The situation in Erdevík, Pivnica, or Butin can serve as an example, where sects such as Pentecostals and Jehovah witnesses have recruited many families. They consequently stayed away from the other minority members and thus cannot be further considered to active community members.

## CONCLUSION

The issue of ethnic assimilation and acculturation processes is quite complex. The aim of this article was to contribute to the development of the theory of ethnicity by outlining and identifying the main groups of assimilation factors. These assimilation factors have an influence on members of a minority in minority communities. The examples of assimilation factors which we have presented were obtained through the study of literature and field work, especially in the areas of Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Croatia.

We described individual factors and introduced examples to verify them. The research of these issues and the outlined factors of ethnic assimilation and their contexts certainly cannot be considered as definitive. It will be important to monitor their positive or negative influence, dependant on the specifics of the observed area. In the future, it will also be necessary to account for the areal and historical aspects of development in the researched areas. It will be necessary, but also interesting, to conduct research on minority communities other than Slovak ones in the geopolitical space of central Europe with the goal of creating valid cross-minority generalizations.

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#### Summary

This contribution focuses on the problems of ethnic identity and assimilation processes in minority background, and concentrates on the problems of Slovak minorities. The author presents the classification of assimilation factors, which he designed on basis of the theoretical aspects of ethnicity. These assimilation factors have a vast influence on members of a minority in minority communities. This approach is guided results of the author's field research and review of relevant literature, especially in the areas of the Republic of Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Croatia. The paper contains new information that can contribute to the theory of assimilation processes. The research of these issues and the outlined factors of ethnic assimilation and their contexts certainly cannot be considered as definitive.

Keywords: ethnic identity, minorities, assimilation, Slovaks living abroad

#### O TEORII PROCESÓW ASYMLACYJNYCH: KSZTAŁTOWANIE SIĘ SŁOWACKIEJ MNIEJSZOŚCI NARODOWEJ

#### Streszczenie

Artykuł koncentruje się na problematyce tożsamości etnicznej i procesów asymilacyjnych zachodzących na gruncie wspólnot mniejszościowych, skupiając uwagę na mniejszości słowackiej. Autor przedstawia swoją klasyfikację czynników asymilacyjnych, opierającą się na teorii etniczności. Pokazuje, jak sprzyjające czynniki asymilacji oddziałują na członków wspólnot mniejszościowych. W swoim ujęciu zagadnienia uwzględniła wyniki przeprowadzonych przez siebie badań terenowych oraz litera-

ture przedmiotu, zwłaszcza w odniesieniu do Słowacji, Węgier, Rumunii, Serbii i Chorwacji. Artykuł zawiera nowe dane, które mogą przyczynić się do poszerzenia teorii procesów asymilacyjnych. Badania autora oraz przedstawiony w artykule zarys czynników asymilacji etnicznej i ich kontekstów z całą pewnością nie mogą zostać uznane za definitywne.

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