

**Jernej Zupančič.** *Slovenci v Avstriji. The Slovenes in Austria* Ljubljana: Inštitut za geografijo – Institute of Geography, 1999. (Geographica Slovenica 32). 246 pp., (paper). ISBN 9619044347.

On 30 April 2001 Slovenia and Austria signed a cultural agreement in which Slovenia recognized the existence of a German speaking minority on its territory. The text of the agreement also mentions the existence of Slovene speaking people outside the territory of the Slovene minority in southern Carinthia, which could be a first step towards the extension of minority rights for Slovenes living in Austria. It seems that the breakup of Yugoslavia and the creation of an independent Slovene state have led to an increased interest in Slovenes living in the neighboring country to the north. Meanwhile, a couple of articles on the Slovene minority in Austrian Styria, written by both Slovene and Austrian researchers, have been published. However, a synthetic and concise study addressing the Slovenes in Austria has until now been lacking.

Recently Jernej Zupančič, now director of the Inštitut za geografijo in Ljubljana (not to be confused with the Geografski inštitut Antona Melika), published his doctoral dissertation, which bears the simple and programmatic title “The Slovenes in Austria” and claims to fill this gap. This monograph appears to have provided the scientific basis for the demand by the Slovene government to include the entire Slovene population of Austria into the aforementioned cultural agreement. And it is not by chance that it was a geographer that was first to write a general study on the Slovenes in Austria, because Slovene geography has always been a leading discipline encompassing research on minorities. One might mention here the work of Anton Melik and Vladimir Klemenčič or, recently, Anton Gosar. Zupančič’s monograph is a novelty not only because of its scope, but also because the author applies different methods to address the social and demographic structures of the Slovenes in Austria, on the one hand, and to explain their complex (ethnic) identity, which in many cases can be described as a *multilevel* one, as the author puts it, on the other hand. Zupančič has not only interpreted previously published statistical sources from Austria, but he has also gathered data through extensive fieldwork. He carried out inquiries among 273 parents of pupils in Slovene grammar schools in Carinthia and among 266 pupils in these schools. In addition, he interviewed 104 persons from Carinthia and from the cities of Graz and Vienna.

The monograph consists of three parts: In the first part, which is a theoretical one, the author gives a survey of the various definitions of nations and ethnicity. To categorize the Slovenes in Austria, he divides them into members of the autochthonous minority, emigrants, and *zdomci*—immigrant workers that have permanent residency in their native country but temporarily stay abroad for reasons of work or education until their final return to their native country. While the territory where they live is of great importance for the members of autochthonous minorities, it plays only a marginal role for the members of the other two groups. This is relevant for the assessment of ethnic selfhood, which the author identifies as consisting of several elements, among the most important of which is space.

In the second part of the book the author gives a synthetic survey of the historical development of the Slovenes in Austria. Here he can rest on a variety of literature that has been published by Slovene and Austrian researchers. He then explores the demographic development and the social structure of the Slovene population in Austria. He refers to the well-known discrepancy between the actual number of Slovene-speaking persons and the figures on colloquial languages in the official censuses. According to official statistics, the number of Slovenes in their autochthonous area of settlement (southern Carinthia) is declining, whereas it has increased in the urban centers adjacent to and outside it (Klagenfurt, Graz, Vienna). Nowadays a quarter of the Slovene population in Austria lives outside the classical areas of settlement. This is not only a consequence of assimilation, but it is also connected with the complex process of de-agrarization, which has prompted many people to pursue social advancement in urban professions, mostly in the tertiary sector. In contrast, the traditional worker-peasant structure prevails in the original areas of settlement.

In contrast to the first and the second parts of the study, which primarily represent a convincing synthesis of previously published research on the Slovenes in Austria, the third part is the empirical core of Jernej Zupančič's analysis. It is here that he endeavors to present fact-based findings on the various ethnic identities of the Slovene population in Austria, and this is the point where the qualitative and quantitative methods that were used in the interviews stand out—all the more so because he has applied an intergenerational approach that reflects the process of socialization in the elaboration of ethnic identities. This approach enables an explanation of the difficulties that

members of the minority are confronted with if they wish to achieve the subjective value of “Slovene selfhood” in contrast to the values of the Austrian majority population. Zupančič differentiates cultural-linguistic, historical, spatial, socio-economic, and political elements that contribute to this “Slovene selfhood.” A considerable portion of the Slovene population adopts some of these elements from the majority population, and it is only those elements connected with origin, language, and culture that are most resistant to being thus adopted. According to the author, this process must not be only considered as a process of cultural assimilation, but it may also serve as a sign of successful integration into the society of the majority population. By applying the concept of multilevel identity to the results of the interviews, Zupančič succeeds in showing that simultaneous self-ascription as Austrian and as Slovene, as observed among several interviewees, need not be paradoxical. He pleads for a view that treats the co-occurrence of both self-ascriptions as feasible. He concludes that, in several cases, the Slovene identity covers bilingualism and origin, whereas the Austrian identity is an indicator of acceptance of existing conditions in Austria.

These results vividly demonstrate the complexity of the term *identity* among ethnic minorities. They can be compared to similar studies—for example, on the Russian population in Ukraine by Stephen Shulman, who uses the term *complementary identity*.<sup>1</sup> Ethnological research on border populations in Slovene Istria also shows how problematical an unambiguous assignation of nation-language-territory-identity can be.<sup>2</sup> It must also be noted that the third part of Zupančič’s monograph includes some interesting data on the use of language by members of Slovene and mixed families in various communications situations. The results are represented in lavishly colored diagrams and charts that are an ever-present complement throughout the book. For those that are not able to read Slovene, an English summary of more than twenty pages gives an overview of the study.

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Shulman, “Competing versus Complementary Identities: Ukrainian-Russian Relations and the Loyalties of Russians in Ukraine,” *Nationalities Papers* 26.4 (1998): 615–32.

<sup>2</sup> Borut Brumen, *Sv. Peter in njegovi časi: socialni spomini, časi in identitete v istrski vasi Sv. Peter* (Ljubljana: Založba /\*cf., 2000).

Altogether, the monograph shows the extent to which research on minorities in Slovenia has come close to paradigms that were recently developed by cultural anthropologists and ethnologists.<sup>3</sup> The main difference between research on minorities and ethnological approaches to research on ethnic groups lies in the categories from which the object of research is deduced. As Zupančič's work shows, the "Platonist" terms *Slovene* or *Austrian*, adopted from two successful historical nation-building efforts, remain the starting point and are applied to small groups that may never have fully taken part in those processes. In the case of the Slovene minority of Austrian Styria we can therefore even speak of several small local "hidden minorities" or—in a more cautious assessment—of "hidden identities." Zupančič has invested a great deal of labor into his approach and it promises to be quite useful in a political situation where—as in the case of the aforementioned cultural agreement—the expertise of a competent researcher is asked for. However, in the long term, research on minorities should orient itself toward the "nominalist" approach to cultural anthropology, insofar as the groups that are focused upon will then have a better chance to have their say as well as the possibility to contribute to the course of research.

*Christian Promitzer, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz*

---

<sup>3</sup> Sonja Novak Lukanovič, ed., *Compare Overlapping Cultures and Plural Identities* (Ljubljana: Slovenska nacionalna komisija za UNESCO/Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 1995).