

# Space and ethnic identity transmission: case study from Galanta district in Slovakia

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## Abstract

One of the most elementary issues of ethnicity is its reproduction. In exogamous families is such reproduction challenged and there are many other factors influencing intensity of transmission of ethnic identity. This paper analyzes how ethnic identity is transmitted in such families according to censal data. We constructed the space of geographical ethnic boundary, where there is higher potential of interethnic interaction between Slovaks and Hungarians in Galanta district in southwestern Slovakia.

**Key words:** ethnic identity, transmission, ethnic boundary, exogamous marriages, Galanta district

## Introduction

Research of spatial patterns of ethnic identity is one of the aims of social geography. Yet, ethnic identity is essential issue for many other social sciences. New social geography has shifted its object of interest from the analysis of place to the analysis of representation and meaning of place. According to Ceri Peach from the University of Oxford it seems that new cultural geography is interested more in culture than in geography<sup>1</sup>.

The core issues of ethnicity and ethnic identity are the aspects of its reproduction. Perhaps it seems that pondering over ethnic identity of coming generations is not that important for majority of people, but there are many cases proving, that such question becomes sometimes crucial. There are many circumstances expressing the importance of maintenance of own ethnic identity and how it is “tested” under many challenges. Such cases can be found in Central Europe area that is utterly diverse from the ethnical point of view. Therefore; this region becomes good field for studying intergroup interaction having its roots in rather stirred history of this area. Variety of types of intergroup interaction emerges under such circumstances. One of the outcomes of such interactions are ethnically exogamous marriages, which might be considered as an example of the most positive interethnic interaction.

In this paper we analyze intensity of ethnic identity transmission in ethnically exogamous families. Basis for this analysis was sample of full censal families where parents have different ethnic identity declared in census in 2001. Intensity of transmission was

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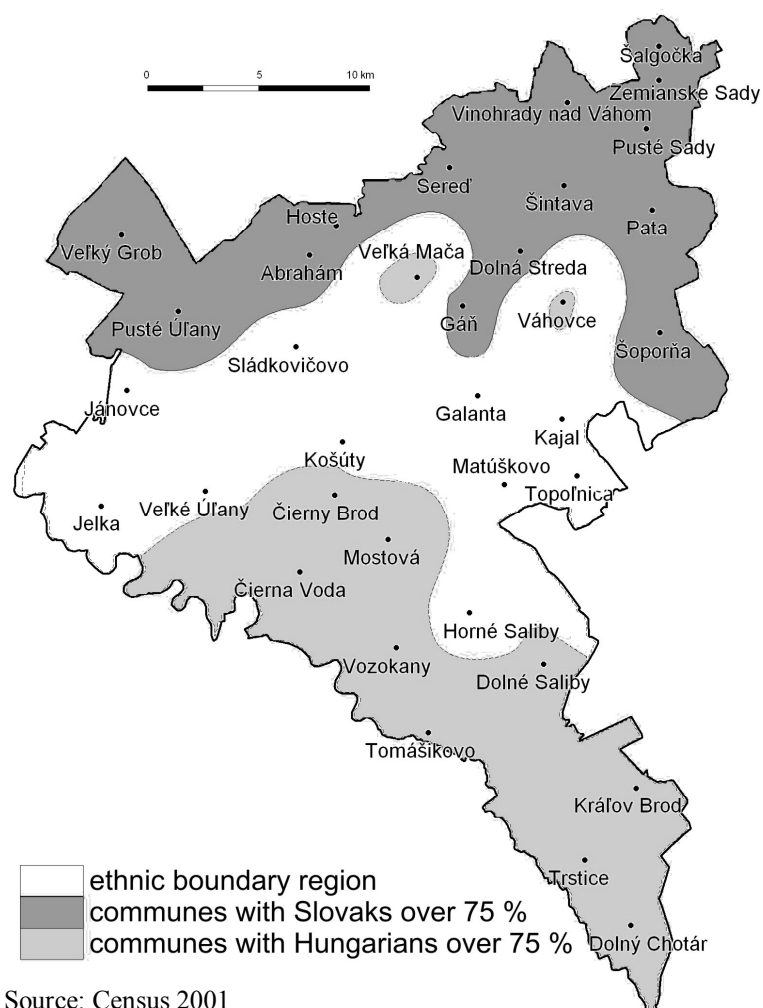
<sup>1</sup> Peach, C., ‘Social geography: new religions and ethnourbs – contrasts with cultural geography’, *Progress in human geography*, vol. 2 (2002), p. 257.

measured by intergenerational growth index between generation of parents and children. We aimed at communities at ethnic boundary in Galanta district in southwestern Slovakia. Areas of dominantly Slovak communities meet in this space with areas with communities consisting of Hungarian majority. This area had potentially the highest possibilities of interethnic marriages that would indicate intensity of positive intergroup interaction.

## I. Ethnic boundary concept

Generally, ethnic boundary is perceived as constructed social boundary, and the continuity of ethnic group depends on maintenance of such social boundary<sup>2</sup>. However, there

**Map 1** Ethnic boundary in Galanta district in 2001



Source: Census 2001

are authors stating that there is neither any ethnic boundary nor need to construct it as a scientific abstraction<sup>3</sup> or some see ethnic boundary as "social mediums through which association transpires rather than as territorial demarcations"<sup>4</sup>. There might be hint of ethnic boundary from the geographical and cultural point of view constructed in space. We see ethnic boundary as a spatial projection of social boundary that can be constructed in certain space where ethnic groups' areas meet. Ethnic boundary in such cases represents space of

<sup>2</sup> Barth, F, 'Ethnic groups and boundaries', *Ethnicity* (Hutchinson, J., Smith, D.A eds.) (Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), p.78.

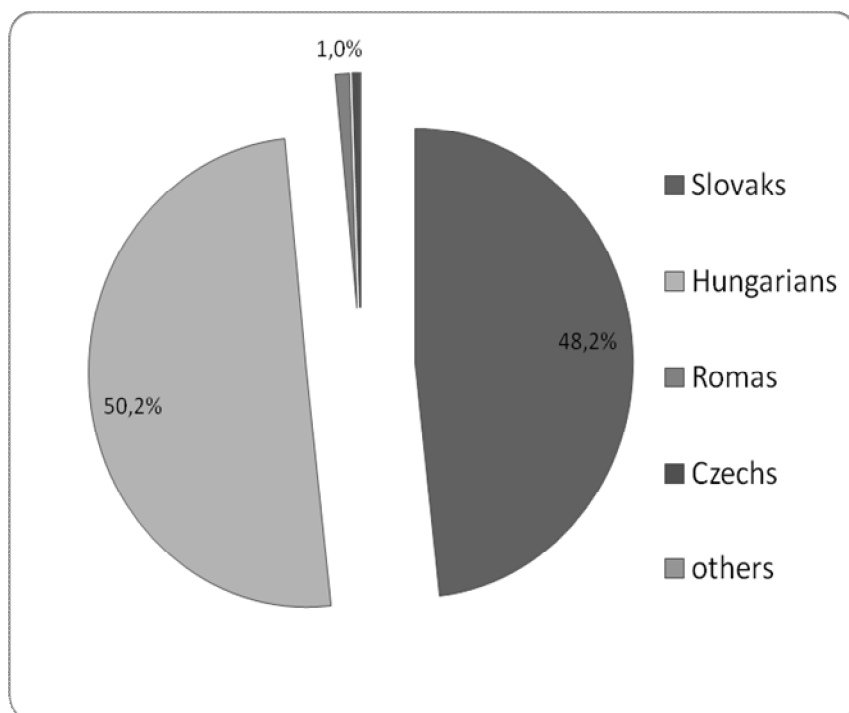
<sup>3</sup> Kaľavský, M., 'Etnicita alebo etnické vedomie?' *Slovenský národopis*, vol. 3-4 (1991), p. 357.

<sup>4</sup> Sanders, J.M., 'Ethnic boundaries and Identity in Plural Societies', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol 28 (2002), p. 327.

potentially higher intergroup interaction leading in specific cultural and social patterns and customs in this area<sup>5</sup>. In ethnic boundary region there would also be presupposed higher rate of exogamous marriages than in the areas of mostly homogeneous ethnicity. Although the concept of boundary connotes dividing line generally, and attempts to find “our” area and “their” area, in this case it might be perceived as uniting element between ethnic groups. Adopting constructivist comprehension of ethnicity, ethnic boundaries can be constructed and maintained by members of small community in cases where ethnic group lives concentrated in one part of settlement. That type of boundary can be evident in space when social boundary includes more evident signs of ethnicity that might have also spatial aspects and then spatial distribution.

The process of ethnic boundary region allocation was described earlier.<sup>6</sup> In this area we have included municipalities of not having share either of Slovaks or Hungarians over 75 %. Communities below such rate might be considered as ethnically rather heterogeneous. In this area there were allocated 10 communities, while 8 of them were rural municipalities and

**Chart 1** Ethnic groups in the ethnic boundary in Galanta district in 2001



Source: Census 2001

two were statutory towns

(Galanta and Sládkovičovo; they are underlined in maps). This region was historically known for its position where the areas of dominant Slovak and Hungarians areas meet in one place. Censual data since 1880 also proved relative stability of this boundary<sup>7</sup>. Due to rural character of this area with no urban settlement at that time, there were rather insignificant interethnic

<sup>5</sup> Majo, J., Kusendová, D, ‘Vývoj etnickej hranice v okrese Galanta’, *Geografický časopis* vol 3 (2007), p. 253

<sup>6</sup> detto

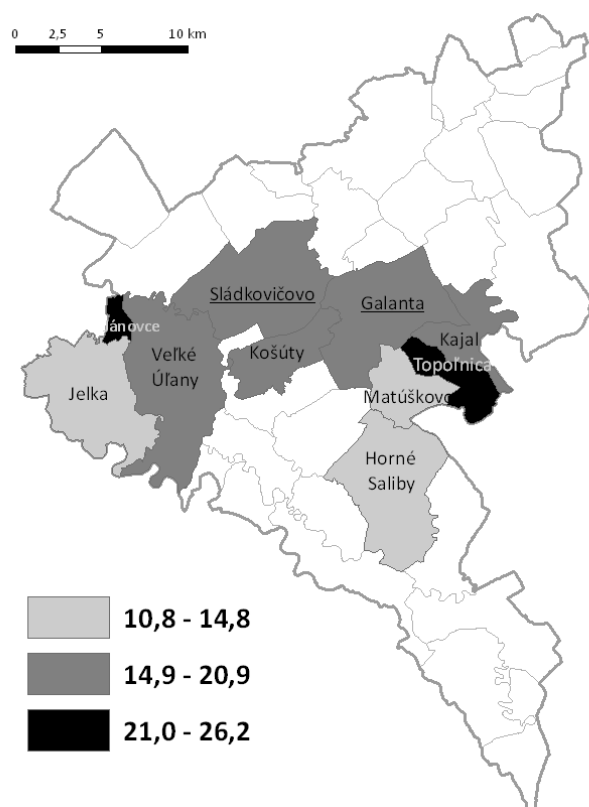
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contacts and communities were composed mostly by one ethnic group. Remarkable exception was town Sládkovičovo consisting of two formerly separate settlements of Hungarians and Germans<sup>8</sup>. More evident broadening of ethnic boundary area started after 1950. New groups of Slovaks, who mostly repatriated from Hungary, were settled in this area and since then ethnic and religious (they were mostly Lutherans) composition of communities has become diversified. More immigrants came in the urbanization period. Social boundaries in this area then slowly started to weaken.

Ethnic composition of this area proves that there is no dominant ethnic group – share of Slovaks and Hungarians is almost equal. Complementary ethnic groups are Romas, Czechs and others. These communities are presumably sites of the most intense interethnic interaction. Do all children follow ethnicity of one parent belonging to ethnic majority, or not? Who is the main “transmitter” of ethnic identity, mother or father? Response to this and

many other related questions are in data that come from Census 2001.

**Map 2** Share of ethnically exogamous marriages (full censal families) in ethnic boundary settlements in Galanta district in 2001



Source: Census 2001

## II. Full censal endogamous family analysis

Intermarriage and exogamic spouses is the sign of interethnic interaction and its prevalence reveals the existence of interaction across group boundaries as well as it proves that members of different social group accept each others as social equals<sup>9</sup>. Crossing boundaries of own ethnic community was not very common in mostly rural area of Central Europe. The amount of acceptance such marriages reflected intergroup

<sup>8</sup> Liszka, J., *Národopis Maďarov na Slovensku* (Komárno, Dunajská Streda: Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín, Lilium Aurum, 2003) p. 112.

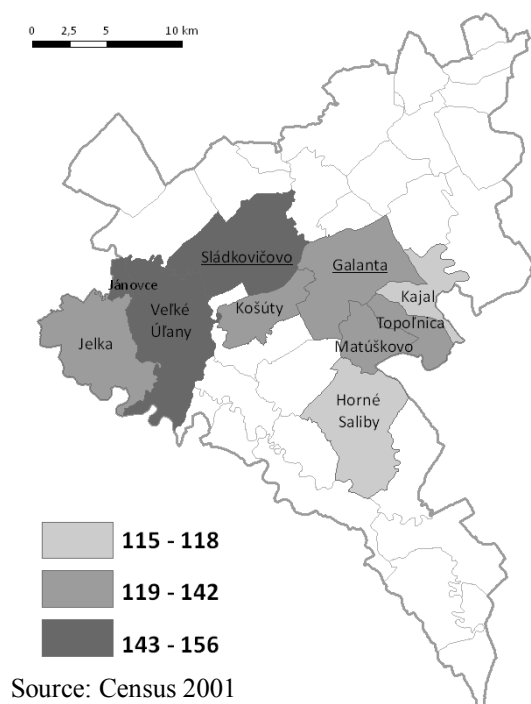
<sup>9</sup> Kalmijn, M., ‘Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns and Trends’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol 24 (1998), p. 396.

relationship between such groups usually within one community or neighboring communities. Lesser acceptance for such marriages was therefore in the areas of unified ethnic structure rather in the areas lying at the real ethnic boundary or at the contact zone of areas with prevailing ethnic group.

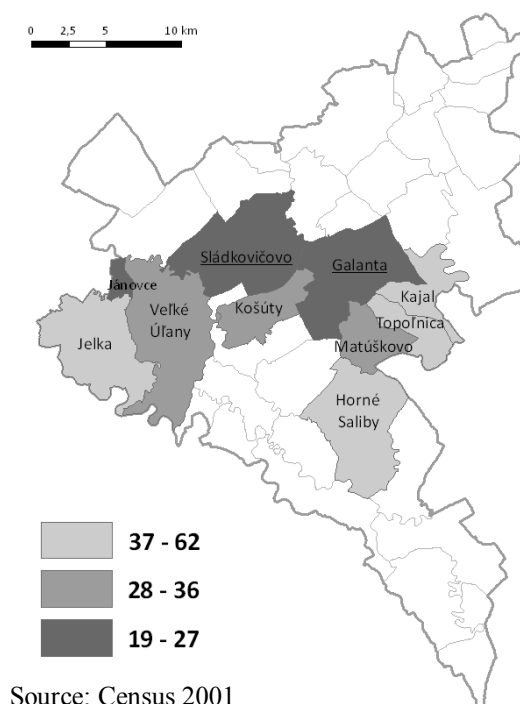
Ethnically exogamous marriages in Slovak society were not very common. One of the oldest data from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century states that in 1903 there were only 4.2 % of all marriages of spouses with different mother language in Hungarian empire. Such number was much lower than the number of religiously exogamous marriages (11.5%). Author states, that such different numbers between religious and ethnic intermarriage rates are due to more compact settlement of ethnic groups<sup>10</sup>. Growth of intermarriage share emerged more after the WWII. New immigration waves within Czechoslovakia appeared due to massive industrialization and urbanization, especially in Slovakia. According to data from seventies, the share of interethnic marriages in Czechoslovakia was 10.1%<sup>11</sup>

Selected area consists of 9.040 full censal families, which represents 56% of all censal families. Other censal families represent mostly divorced parents living with children. This number includes 1.558 ethnically exogamous families which is only 17.2% of

**Map 3** Intergenerational growth index of Slovaks in ethnic boundary settlements in Galanta district in 2001



**Map 4** Intergenerational growth index of Hungarians in ethnic boundary settlements in Galanta district in 2001



<sup>10</sup> Stodola E., *Štatistika Slovenska* (Martin: s.l, 1912), p. 62

<sup>11</sup> Konečná A., 'Národnostní homogamie a heterogamie v ČSSR', *Demografie* vol.1 (1977), p. 1.

all families. This number indicates rather conservative nuptial behavior of population living in the area where ethnic identity is challenged. Vast majority therefore prefers marriage with spouse of the same ethnicity. Comparing to the national share of ethnically exogamous marriages (16% in 2006)<sup>12</sup>, such numbers are therefore surprising denying hypothesis of higher number of intermarriage. This tendency also proves, that only 15% of population of this area lives in families where are more than one ethnic identities present. Only minor group of people is experiencing crossing ethnic boundary in such an intimate sphere of life that family represent.

Distribution of exogamous marriages in this area does not indicate expected discrepancy between urban and rural areas. Most of the municipalities have average share of interethnic marriages including both towns. Above average share of such families is evident in rather small communities of this area. Urban areas, due to their heterogeneity of their population and different social space from rural areas, have conditions for higher acceptance of such marriages but such situation might indicate that population of cities is formed mostly of families that moved there from rural areas lately, or that the structure of town resembles more rural community with its social networks. It is not surprising; both towns were in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century still typical rural settlements.

### **III. Intergenerational transmission of ethnicity**

Intensity of intergenerational transmission of ethnic identity has been measured by simple growth rate between two generations of parents and children. Ethnic composition of generation of parents living in interethnic marriages and families was significant with almost equal share of Slovaks and Hungarians. (In later analysis we put stress on only those two ethnic groups, since they are totally dominant here). Totally different was the generation of their children. Important factor that goes hand in hand with demographic changes of Slovak society is that generation of parents did not “replaced” themselves, since the generation of parents is numerous than the generation of children, even though that most of the exogamous families have two children (51%) followed by one-child families (39 %). Only 10% families have three or more children.

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<sup>12</sup> According to data sheet: Sobáše podľa národnosti snúbencov. *Prehľad pohybu obyvateľstva v roku 2006*. (Bratislava: Štatistický úrad, 2007) . (Marriages according to ethnicity of couple. *Population movement overview in 2006*. (Bratislava:Statistical bureau, 2007).

More evident changes are in the number of intergenerational “replacement” according to ethnic identity. In exogamous marriages in this region there is one pattern - most of the children have ethnic identity of **Tab.1** Intergenerational growth of ethnic groups in ethnic boundary in Galanta district in 2001

Slovak parent, either mother or father. Intergenerational growth of Slovaks is 43%, while number Hungarians decreased between two generations over 35%. Identity of parent belonging to non-Slovak ethnic group does not stand the test of being surrounded by Slovaks either in own family or community and is not then transmitted. There are several factors that intensity of

	generation of parents	generation of children	growth index
<b>Slovaks</b>	<b>1492</b>	<b>2133</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Hungarians</b>	<b>1475</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>35</b>
Romas	14	7	50
Bulgarians	3	2	67
Czechs	82	26	32
Greeks	1	1	100
Ruthenians	1	1	100
Russians	2	1	50
Ukrainians	5	3	60
Vietnamese	3	2	67
not declared	16	13	81
others	20	6	30

Source: Census 2001

intergenerational transmission can be analyzed against – family size, education of parents and urban vs. rural community where family lives.

### *Family size*

There were no significant differences between family size of families where children were either Slovaks or Hungarians. As stated above, the most common are two-children families, where grow 58 % of all Slovak children and 53 % of all Hungarian children. Families of three or more children are slightly more common among families where children are Hungarians (17.5 %) than in families of Slovak children (17.2%). Single model is more common in families with Slovak children (23%) than in families with Hungarian children (21%). Even there are some differences between families with Slovak or Hungarian children, they are not so evident, allowing us concluding that there is relationship between transmitted ethnic identity and number of children that Slovak or Hungarian ethnicity is passed on.

### *Education level of parents*

We tried to confirm hypothesis that parent who transmits ethnic identity in exogamic marriages has higher education. This presupposition was not so real and there were no significant differences between Slovaks or Hungarians too. In almost half of families (both in families where Slovak or Hungarian ethnicity was transmitted) parents with equal education level was most common (44% Slovak and 45% Hungarian). If Slovak ethnic identity was transmitted, then in 33% of families it was the identity of parent, who had higher education, and similarly if Hungarian ethnic identity was transmitted, then in 30% the Hungarian parent acquired higher education.

### *Urban vs. rural areas*

There are no considerable differences between urban and rural space, just like the share of exogamous marriages. In case of Slovaks, the intensity of transmitting Slovak ethnic identity does not show any extremes, although somehow higher is in western part of the district. Differences between urban and rural space are higher in case of transmitting Hungarian ethnic identity. In both towns (Galanta and Sládkovičovo) is the decrease of Hungarians above average. This is probably the only indication of differences between urban and rural space in this area. Concluding the differences between those two fields, in both towns live 50% of all families, where children had different ethnic identity (e.g. first born child was Slovak, but second child was Hungarian).

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have tried to analyze basic processes that happen in ethnically exogamous marriages and families. Family is one of the most important factors that form ethnic identity of personality, revealing the power of social networks where parents live and slowly portraying the importance of belonging somewhere. Maintaining own ethnic identity with its cultural contents is salient in the region where belonging somewhere means a lot. Ethnic identity is then challenged factor in such types of families. Two people marry each other accepting the possible problems that different ethnicity might bring, especially during raising their children. Our interest was to portray how is ethnicity transmitted in families living in the ethnically contested space.

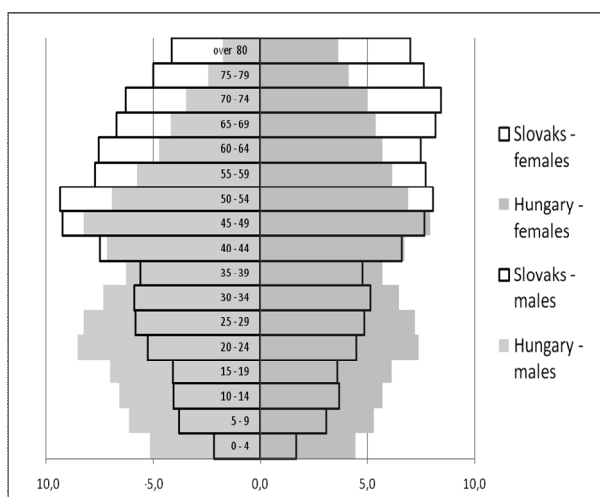
Censual data as a source for such research is quite unusual in social sciences in this region. Although the census is quite thorough in questions of cultural background including ethnicity, mother tongue, and religious affiliation, they mostly seem inaccessible. Since they



are stored in database digital systems, there are vast possibilities of their combining and querying according to research needs. However; censal data cannot be alpha and omega of social research but the information they provide makes outstanding startpoint for subsequent research. Dealing with numbers and census categories and engagement in “real” world seems to be considered “old” social geography, while new cultural geography is dealing with hybridity, in-betweenness, and flexibility<sup>13</sup>. This paper stands somewhere in the middle. Engagement in censal data might seem obsolete, but even such objective data discover fluidness of ethnicity, possibility of choice in families with ethnically different parents and shows intersection between space, culture, and social networks. Censal data also help to allocate the space of possibly higher intergroup interaction with possibility of ethnic conflict, intersections of multiple social spaces and identities (ethnicities).

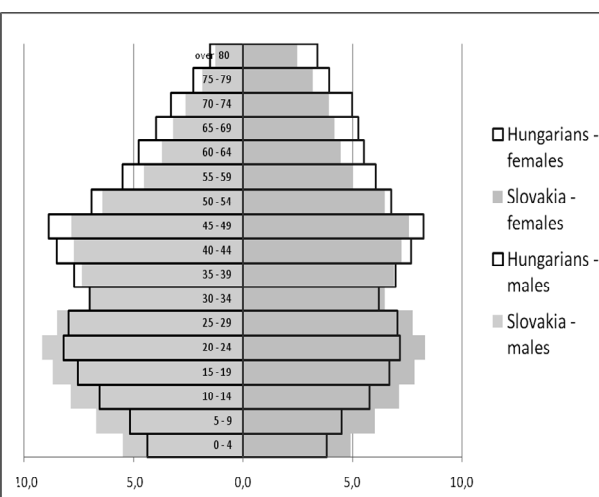
Issue of sustainability is the issue of culture and ethnicity as well. Sustainability from this point of view includes dominantly reproduction, not only physical but cultural too. If members of ethnic group do not pass on their values, traditions, language and other signs, it certainly starts to die off. Important factor for sustainable development of ethnicity is also social and cultural space. Further structuring of ethnic composition of communities across time might slow the intensity of ethnicity reproduction if social boundaries are weak, but on the other hand might create new culture and identity combining more traditions and

**Chart 2** Age structure of Slovaks living in Hungary in 2001



Source: [www.nepszamlalas.hu](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu)

**Chart 3** Age structure of Hungarians living in Slovakia



Source: Census 2001

<sup>13</sup> Peach, C., ‘Social geography: new religions and ethnourbs – contrasts with cultural geography’, *Progress in human geography*, vol. 2 (2002), p. 252.

ethnicities. Certainly assimilation happens in each ethnic group, but we think their intensity in this region, even if the minor ethnic groups are not reproducing in exogamous marriages, is not threat. Sustainability and stability in interethnic marriages proves also fact, that less than 20% of all families are ethnically mixed. If there is interethnic cooperation and interaction, it happens within community, in work, church, or through neighboring ties more often than in families.

From the more global point of view, not transferring ethnic identity could be perfectly portrayed in graph of age structure of population. The age structure of Hungarians at the national level does not show evident discrepancies between generations. On the other hand, excellent example represents Slovaks living in Hungary. Their age structure concentrating almost all Slovaks in older age is the sign of how is the ethnic identity not transmitted in the region of Central Europe. This is mostly status of minor ethnic groups living scattered throughout countries and concentrated more in urban areas.

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