

DEMOGRAPHIC MOVEMENTS IN SLOVENE EMIGRATION TO ARGENTINA: THE SEARCH FOR LIVING SPACE*

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At the end of 1946, Slovene refugees in displaced persons camps in Austria and Italy – which were in the main supported by UNRRA, a charitable organization of the victorious Western allies – who at the beginning of May 1945 had fled from communist violence to Austrian Carinthia and were not forcibly repatriated by the English, began the search for new living space. The doors back home were shut for all those who chose freedom and intended to stay alive. In this search the only possible destinations were countries in North America and some in South America, and Australia. Only those refugees who had acquaintances or relatives in the United States who guaranteed that they could take care of them in case of need could emigrate to the United States. Canada and Australia were ready to accept only young and single people who were ready for any kind of work. The only option for other people with families, dependent children and the elderly was to emigrate to South America. Their representatives decided to request permission to settle in Argentina. A precedent had been set between the World Wars, when Argentina had accepted Slovene displaced persons and their families from the Italian-occupied Slovene Primorska who had been forced to leave the country due to fascist persecution.

In the hope that Argentina would again not refuse their application, Slovene emigrant priest Janez Hladnik and his colleagues succeeded in having the Argentinean President open the door to up to ten thousand Slovene refugees. Preparations, mainly the search for documents, were begun immediately. The first ships with Slovene refugees set sail from

* Most of the information found in this paper was published in a revised Slovene version of a paper by the same author entitled "Pogovor s številkami", in *Meddobje*, Buenos Aires, 1996, No. 1–2, pp. 147–155.

Italian ports at the end of 1947 and throughout 1948. At the end of 1948 and in 1949 ships with refugees from Austria arrived in Buenos Aires. By 1950 this migration was for the most part complete. The age distribution of the immigrants was quite heterogeneous.

TABLE 1 – AGE DISTRIBUTION ON SETTLEMENT¹

Age group	Males	Females	Total	%
up to 14 years	540	443	983	18.61
15 to 20 years	213	177	390	7.38
20 to 30 years	1 111	688	1 799	34.06
30 to 40 years	676	346	1 022	19.36
40 to 50 years	412	227	639	12.09
50 to 60 years	181	133	314	5.94
60 to 70 years	74	45	119	2.25
70 to 80 years and over	9	7	16	0.31
	3,216	2,066	5,282	100.00

Some refugees' wives and children who had not fled to Austrian Carinthia at the beginning of May 1945 stayed behind in the homeland. They were allowed to join their husbands from 1952 to 1955. They numbered around 200; in the meantime, some had emigrated to the United States, Canada, Venezuela, Chile and Australia, so the total number stated in the table bears further discussion.

DEMOGRAPHIC MOVEMENTS IN EMIGRATION

This paper presents almost all church weddings, both between Slovene couples and between Slovenes and persons of different nationalities (mixed marriages). All children who were christened and the dead who received Christian burials were also registered. Data referring to this matter is published in the weeklies *Oznanilo* and *Svobodna Slovenija*. Therefore we can say that the given data is fairly accurate.

¹ France Pernišek, *Svobodna Slovenija*, Buenos Aires, 1971/72, p. 354.

1. MARRIAGES

Due to inadequate material conditions there were only few marriages in displaced persons camps. There were, however, a handful of idealists who did get married. In some of the newly established families children were born, whose number is included in Table 1. In the new living environment, in spite of the meagre material conditions a number of couples got married, establishing Slovene families.

TABLE 2 – MARRIAGES OF SLOVENE COUPLES AND MIXED MARRIAGES

Period	Slovene marriages	Mixed marriages		
		Males	Females	Total
1948–1950	55	3	7	10
1951–1955	117	1	1	2
1956–1960	94	12	6	18
1961–1965	79	14	6	20
1966–1970	83	16	19	35
1971–1975	72	25	41	66
1976–1980	75	40	60	100
1981–1985	74	33	45	78
1986–1990	78	43	48	91
1991–1995	68	48	47	95
	795	235	280	515

The number of Slovene married couples as well as the number of mixed marriages is probably somewhat higher than stated, since those marriages that took place in the hinterland were not registered by the weeklies as they had not been informed of them.

The great majority of marriages entered between Slovene couples are permanent, with only a few broken and illegitimate marriages.

As is evident from the table there were some mixed marriages in the community as early as the first few years of settlement, but only a few. They were not welcome and the issue was covered in the press. This type of marriage was apparently to be avoided save for cases when there were very weighty reasons for it.² Nevertheless, many young persons opted for this type of marriage in the course of time, some of whom were graduate intellectuals. Some parents were much against the marriage of their sons or daughters to persons of a different nationality, but they gradually yielded. One father did not permit her young daughter to marry a local. The case was taken to court, which appointed a custodian for the girl up to her time of marriage on the grounds that the father opposed the marriage for racial reasons. It also became clear that the Latin influence prevailed over the Slovene as regards sentiments and that some youths can hardly resist it, girls often being afraid of remaining single. If they are not careful enough they even fall into the network of "procurers". The "suitors" they offer are not keen on being introduced to the girls' parents, who insist on getting to know them and are often forced to hire private detectives to determine the identity of the purported suitors. These are ascertained to be married libertines who have already abandoned their wives and children and cannot be legally divorced, or single men intent on changing their current partners.

Of importance among couples in mixed marriages is the fact that they do not want to appear in Slovene weeklies and want to remain anonymous, especially if their marriages are only civil. In addition to these there are also cases of cohabitation or occasional pairs, who particularly hide from the community. These are mainly the consequences of assimilation and with it a negative view of married life. Quite a few of the civil marriages have broken up, as have a smaller number of church weddings. The consequences are in every respect devastating, particularly for families with children left by fathers without any means of support.

Faith, and particularly the religious upbringing of the children, is an important issue for Slovene spouses in mixed marriages. In this regard

² Ignacij Lenček, "Iz etike narodnosti", *Vrednote*, Book II, Buenos Aires, 1952, pp. 24 - 25.

the Slovene spouse most often is forced to give in, since most families of locals or other nationalities do not practice religion. They claim to believe in God, but repudiate the Church on the grounds that an internal relationship with God is sufficient.

With mixed marriages a new problem arises in the Slovene family: communication in the local language when visiting. If the visits are frequent this can have a very negative effect on young members of the family and in quite a few cases Spanish is gradually becoming the language of communication in Slovene families. With this the knowledge of Slovene is on the decline, a fact manifested in Slovene school courses and conversations at local centres.

2. BIRTH RATE

As stated above, those born in the camps are included in the first generation of emigrants, those born in the settlements are included in the second. The question of the nationality of these new-borns appeared right from the start. Some held that they should be considered Slovene Argentines, but the majority were dissatisfied with this. They searched for a suitable solution and decided that the children would be legally and by place of birth Argentinean citizens, which, however, would not deprive them of their Slovene nationality. The children inherit their parents' mentality and culture with the awareness that they belong to the Slovene community and the Slovene nation. In mixed marriages the two mentalities and cultures are merged so that the mentality and culture of the children is a synthesis of both, from which the Argentine nation and culture gradually emerges. This is demonstrated by the children which the Spanish conquistadors had with Indians. To the Spanish, these were not Spaniards, but "Criollos". Also, Jews born into mixed marriages are not counted as members of that "nationality", but are considered members of the Argentine community. This community also excludes those who enter into mixed marriages. However, Slovenes in mixed marriages are counted as Slovenes, if they themselves do not deny it.

TABLE 3 – BIRTHS IN SLOVENE AND MIXED FAMILIES

Period	Slovene families			Mixed families		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1948–1950	107	83	190	2	-	2
1951–1955	141	140	281	6	1	7
1956–1960	167	169	336	7	6	13
1961–1965	130	140	270	8	21	29
1966–1970	114	115	229	21	10	31
1971–1975	92	98	190	19	23	42
1976–1980	121	100	221	41	37	78
1981–1985	129	99	228	39	25	64
1986–1990	132	124	256	60	48	108
1991–1995	95	99	194	66	76	142
Total	1,128	1,167	2,395	269	247	516

After 1971 we find a higher number of mixed marriages and more births in mixed families, which is attributed to marriages of members of the second generation, children born in the country to which their parents emigrated. It seems that this trend will continue in the coming years. Due to this fact there was a fall in the birth rate among Slovene families; there are fewer Slovene families than there were in the first twenty years of emigration, when the children of the first generation established families.

Not all baptisms in Slovene families were entered in the records, but most were, while those in mixed families were more poorly recorded. In the latter case Slovene spouses are more and more frequently endeavouring to have their children baptised in a Slovene chapel, or that a Slovene priest baptise them in another chapel.

In Slovene families and more frequently in mixed families, the question arises of which language to speak when talking to the children. In most Slovene families it is Slovene, in mixed families this would depend on the exceptional endeavours of the Slovene parent. A small number of mothers succeeded in this, and a much smaller number of fathers. Children from families in which Slovene is spoken are sent to

Slovene classes; most of them feel comfortable in the Slovene community.

3. DEATH RATE

The death rate is growing every year, as the first generation of emigrants is now getting older, despite having proved to be quite hardy. Most of them have borne the consequences of war and revolution, flight, homesickness and the difficulties of assimilation into the new environment fairly well.

TABLE 4 - DEATH RATE

Period	Males	Females	Total
1948 - 1950	20	5	25
1951 - 1955	36	8	44
1956 - 1960	57	23	80
1961 - 1965	79	47	126
1966 - 1970	150	72	222
1971 - 1975	153	95	248
1976 - 1980	170	122	292
1981 - 1985	183	135	318
1986 - 1990	197	140	337
1991 - 1995	225	181	416
Total	1,270	828	2,098

The figures shown do not include all deaths, especially if they did not receive a Christian burial, which should be taken into account in Slovene marriages as well as for couples in mixed marriages, especially those in which only a civil ceremony was held. The figures shown probably include some pre-war emigrants, but these do not essentially change the given figures.

Owing to the lack of organized housing and other poor living conditions there were many deaths among new-borns and children up to six

years in the first three years of settlement. When the living conditions improved, deaths among new-borns and children practically disappeared.

Although the age of the deceased is not always recorded in the records, we can state that the average life expectancy for men is 72 years, for women 76 years. There are a surprising number of people over 80 and even 90 years of age in the community. The majority of these are women.

4. NATURAL INCREASE

Natural increase is the difference in the birth rate and the death rate. It can be either positive or negative. If it is negative, this tells us that the number of members of the community is falling. In our case we are unable to take the comparison of natural increase into consideration, which is explained by the age distribution at the time of settlement. The most numerous groups were not children and youths, but men and women of medium age. Many of them were married and single women over 35, the age at which fertility among women declines.

TABLE 5 – NATURAL INCREASE

Period	Births	Deaths	Natural increase
1948 – 1950	190	- 25	165
1951 – 1955	281	- 44	237
1956 – 1960	336	- 80	256
1961 – 1965	270	- 126	144
1966 – 1970	229	- 222	7
1971 – 1975	190	- 248	- 58
1976 – 1980	221	- 292	- 71
1981 – 1985	228	- 318	- 90
1986 – 1990	256	- 377	- 81
1991 – 1995	194	- 416	- 222
Total	2,395	- 2,098	297

The natural increase for the 47 year period is just barely positive, due to the number of births in the first years of settlement up to around 1965, after which the birth rate began to fall and the death rate to rise. The natural increase at the end of 1995 is at the lowest point and will not increase in the coming years, owing to the number of elderly people. This situation is not an emergency, but is the logical consequence of the age distribution at the time of settlement and is a property of all emigrant communities. The number of births abroad does not substitute the number of emigrants.

5. POPULATION BY AGE GROUPS AT THE END OF 1995

The attempt to show at least the approximate age distribution of Slovene post-war emigrants in Argentina is fairly risky, but should serve as orientation for the work of the further organizing of the community and the inclusion of the younger generations. Here it will be necessary to pay special attention to the children in the third generation. This generation will chiefly determine the extent to which the community is considered Slovene.

TABLE 6 – POPULATION BY AGE GROUPS AT THE END OF 1995

Age group	Males	Females	Total	%
0 – 5	95	99	194	3.50
6 – 10	132	124	256	4.64
11 – 15	129	99	228	4.13
16 – 20	121	100	221	4.00
21 – 30	92	98	190	3.44
31 – 40	114	115	229	4.15
41 – 50	130	140	270	4.89
51 – 60	267	169	436	7.93
61 – 65	380	400	780	14.14
66 and over	1,795	980	2,775	49.17
Total	3,255	2,324	5,579	100.00

The above table shows that half of the community is above 65 years of age. The tree of life is roughly the same size up to the age of 50, and then it begins to branch out to include over half of the members of the community. According to the laws of nature these branches will dry out over the years and the tree will mostly remain at its present predominantly equally distributed size.

The reality calls upon the responsible members of the community to prepare for the future, especially in town centres, in Slovene foundations and organizations. It is necessary for the young and the not-so-young of the second generation to take leading roles and put to work the young of the third generation. Their elders must help them, with consideration of their differences, and lead them on the path to preserving their national awareness. The future teachers, their preparation and especially their national education programme are of the utmost importance. We must not forget that the largest age group includes most of the subscribers to publications put out by the community, and that these groups include most of those present at events organized by the Slovene community. We have to emphasize greater concern for connection with Slovenia and also with the children of Slovene war emigrants in Argentina.

RESUMEN

MOVIMIENTO DEMOGRÁFICO Y LA EMIGRACIÓN ESLOVENA EN ARGENTINA: EN BUSCA DEL ESPACIO VITAL

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Al terminar la segunda guerra mundial Eslovenia como parte del estado yugoslavo fue gobernada por el comunismo. Gran parte de la población eslovena, especialmente de las regiones Dolenjska, Notranjska y Gorenjska se refugió en el vecino país de Austria, ocupado por

las fuerzas armadas aliadas, que les reconocieron derecho de exilio y los ubicaron en los campos para refugiados en Austria e Italia. Las fuerzas armadas anticomunistas fueron forzosamente entregadas al ejército comunista yugoslavo. Después de dos años de permanencia en los campos, los refugiados empezaron dirigirse a los países de inmigración. En la mente tenían a los Estados Unidos, Canadá, Australia y Argentina.

Como Argentina recibió a todos sin tener en cuenta edades, salud y profesión, la mayoría se decidió emigrar a este país. Al desembarcar cada uno o cada familia tenía que ocuparse de la vivienda y del trabajo por sí mismo. La mayoría decidió quedarse alrededor de Buenos Aires, capital del país, otros pocos se establecieron en el interior, especialmente en la zona andina.

Durante los primeros años la vida era dura. Sin embargo empezaron a construir sus propias casas. Los jóvenes se casaron y formaron familias eslovenas, los matrimonios mixtos eran pocos. Como después de toda guerra, en los primeros tiempos hubo muchos nacimientos, así también ocurrió en la colectividad eslovena recién establecida. Posteriormente se los casamientos y nacimientos estabilizaron, pero creció la mortalidad que después de algunos años sobrepasaba a los nacimientos. Al aumento de la mortalidad se unió el incremento de matrimonios mixtos, especialmente entre los jóvenes de la segunda generación ya nacidos en el país de inmigración. Esto debilitó mucho la colectividad eslovena no solamente numéricamente sino también desde punto de vista de la nacionalidad.

Después de 47 años de la vida en el país, crecimiento demográfico es apenas positivo, pero en los próximos años será ya negativo. Duro golpe sufrirá la colectividad en otros aspectos como por ejemplo las jóvenes familias y los jóvenes en general están mostrando poco interés en las publicaciones de la colectividad y en las organizaciones culturales y por esto el futuro es muy incierto.

POVZETEK

**DEMOGRAFSKA GIBANJA MED SLOVENSKO
EMIGRACIJO V ARGENTINI:
ISKANJE ŽIVLJENJSKEGA PROSTORA**

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Ob koncu druge svetovne vojne so tudi v Sloveniji kot delu tedanje Jugoslavije prevzele oblast komunistične strukture. Velik del prebivalstva, še posebej z Dolenjske, Notranjske in Gorenjske, je zbežal čez mejo v Avstrijo na ozemlje, ki ga je zasedala zavezniška vojska. Ubežniki iz Slovenije so tam dobili begunski status in bili razmeščeni po begunskih taboriščih v Avstriji in Italiji, del protikomunističnih vojaških enot pa je bil na silo izročen v roke jugoslovanske komunistične vojske. Po dveh letih bivanja v taboriščih so begunci pričeli odhajati v tipične izseljenske države, predvsem v Združene države Amerike, Avstralijo, Kanado in Argentino.

Ker je argentinska država sprejela vse, ne glede na starost, zdravje in poklic, se je večina slovenskih političnih beguncev odločila prav zanjo. Od trenutka, ko je bodisi posameznik bodisi njegova družina stopil na argentinska tla, je moral za preživetje – za zaposlitev, streho nad glavo ... – poskrbeti sam. Večina slovenskih priseljencev se je nastanila v samem Buenos Airesu, prestolnici Argentine, oziroma v njegovi okolici, nekateri pa so odšli v notranjost dežele, večinoma v hribovito območje pod Andi.

Prva leta je bilo življenje težko. Takoj so začeli zidati lastne hiše, mladi so se poročili in si ustvarili slovenske družine, mešanih zakonov je bilo le malo. Znan je pojav, da se po vsaki vojni poveča število rojstev; to se je zgodilo tudi v na novo ustanovljeni slovenski skupnosti v Argentini.

Število porok in rojstev se je kasneje nekoliko umirilo, povečala pa se je smrtnost, ki je kmalu prerasla rodnost. Povečani smrtnosti se je pridružilo še večje število mešanih zakonov, najpogosteje pri potomcih izseljencev, že rojenih v Argentini. To je slovensko skupnost precej oslabilo, ne le po številu, ampak tudi s stališča slovenske narodnostne identitete.

Po 47 letih življenja v Argentini je demografska rast slovenske izseljenske skupnosti še pozitivna, verjetno pa bo kmalu upadla. Najhujši udarec je dejstvo, da mlade družine in mladi nasploh kažejo čedalje manj zanimanja za sodelovanje v družabnem in kulturnem življenju slovenske izseljenske skupnosti. Zato je prihodnost te skupnosti zelo negotova.