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INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE INTEGRATION OF MINORITIES INTO THE MAJORITY SOCIETY: THE CASE OF CROATS IN SLOVENIA

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ABSTRACT

Intergenerational Differences in the Integration of Minorities into the Majority Society: The Case of Croats in Slovenia

Starting from the conceptual basis, grounded in the theory of segmented assimilation, that there is the possibility of the existence of several ways in which different generations of minority communities can be integrated into the society of the country of immigration, this paper aims to determine whether there are intergenerational differences in the integration of Croats in Slovenia. Through participants' self-reflection on their own perceptions of their integration across the structural, cultural, interactional, and identification dimensions, the results of a 2022 survey (N=300) confirmed the existence of intergenerational differences.

KEYWORDS: Croats in Slovenia, intergenerational differences in integration, theory of segmented assimilation, quantitative research

IZVLEČEK

Medgeneracijske razlike pri integraciji manjšin v večinsko družbo: Primer Hrvatov v Sloveniji

Namen prispevka je na konceptualni osnovi, utemeljeni na teoriji segmentirane asimilacije, da je mogočih več načinov, na katere se lahko različne generacije manjšinskih skupnosti vključijo v družbo države priseljevanja, ugotoviti, ali so pri integraciji Hrvatov v Sloveniji prisotne medgeneracijske razlike. Rezultati raziskave, izvedene leta 2022 (N=300), so na podlagi samorefleksije sodelujočih glede lastne percepcije integracije s strukturnega, kulturnega, interakcijskega in identifikacijskega vidika potrdili obstoj medgeneracijskih razlik.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Hrvati v Sloveniji, medgeneracijske razlike pri integraciji, teorija segmentirane asimilacije, kvantitativna raziskava

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INTRODUCTION

Representatives of the segmented assimilation theory argue that different ethnic communities can follow distinct integration paths within the same country of immigration and that there can be distinct intergenerational integration pathways within the same community (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). According to this theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993), three primary trajectories of immigrant and second-generation incorporation into the host society can be delineated. The first is upward assimilation, which involves gradual integration into the mainstream through the adoption of dominant cultural patterns, accompanied by a simultaneous loss of interest in preserving one's own culture, language, and traditions. The second is downward assimilation, denoting incorporation into marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged segments of society, often accompanied by processes of exclusion and precarity. The third is plural integration, whereby immigrants and their descendants achieve successful incorporation into the mainstream while simultaneously retaining and reproducing salient elements of their ethnic and cultural identities. Differences between the communities themselves can influence the appearance of such differences, for example, their demographic, socioeconomic, or cultural characteristics (Simon, 2006), but also by changed socioeconomic and political circumstances in relation to the time of the immigration of the first generation of a minority group (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997).

When discussing factors that are important to consider when interpreting the differences in the way the first generation of Croats in Slovenia was integrated compared to their descendants, the changed sociopolitical context after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia (hereafter, SFRY) and Slovenia's independence is considered key to the increased vulnerability of members of this minority community (Kralj, 2008; Plantak, 2021). The newly established Slovenian national model for the integration of minority communities, particularly its legal and institutional framework for the realization of minority rights, is characterized by a multilayered structure (Žagar, 2001). This implies that not all communities present on its territory at the time of independence were able to fully exercise the same rights. It is further characterized by polysemy (Bertossi, 2010), that is, variability in the realization of certain rights and resources depending on the region and local authorities, exemplified by the uneven availability of minority instruction within the education system (Roter, 2007; Medvešek & Bešter, 2012; Novak et al., 2022; Mlinar & Peček, 2024).

Until Slovenia's independence, Croats were an equal nation alongside Slovenes, after which they became one of the most numerous minority communities that today, despite significant differences in numbers, has no status as a national minority in relation to so-called "indigenous national minorities" (Žagar, 2001) such as Hungarians and Italians. The fact that they did not realize legally guaranteed collective minority rights in the newly formed state led to their facing numerous challenges in preserving their language, culture, and customs, and consequently

to an unfavorable impact on their complete integration into various spheres of contemporary Slovenian society (Petričušić, 2004; Perić, 2005; Žitnik, 2004; Kralj, 2013; Mlekuž & Vršnik Perše, 2019; Klun & Skubic Ermenc, 2022). The changed political circumstances and consequently the changed legal position of Croats in Slovenia resulted in discriminatory practices within the educational system and the labor market (Kralj, 2008; Lesar et al., 2006; Bajt, 2023; Mlinar & Peček, 2024), weak financial support for national associations (Medvešek, 2007), and the ethnic cohesion as well as the possibilities of studying this minority community is additionally adversely affected by the fact that after 2002 the population censuses no longer contain data on the ethnic structure of the population of Slovenia (Pirc et al., 2024).

From all the above, it can be concluded that the circumstances in which the second generation of Croats form a sense of belonging to their community and wider Slovenian society and make decisions about whether they will be personally involved in preserving and nurturing their language, culture, and customs have changed significantly after Slovenia became independent in the 1990s.

In this context, this paper views the legal status of Croats as a reference point for explaining the differences in the interpretations of the meanings of the integration processes that the actors involved in them attach to it (Bertossi, 2011). In the wake of the previous unsuccessful efforts of this minority community to recognize the status of a national minority and realize collective rights (Perić Kaselj et al., 2016; Novak et al., 2022), which consequently led to numerous discriminatory practices in the public space of Slovenian society toward this community, this article aims to extend existing discussions on the position of Croats in Slovenia by taking a more comprehensive approach. To understand their perception of their position, as well as the perception of Slovenian society's relationship to them, we will study the functioning of their integration, not at the institutional level, but through the meanings it takes on in social and private life for the actors involved.

Observing integration as a multidimensional process, this paper applies a four-dimensional integration model (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2007) and presents data on selected indicators of structural, cultural, interactional, and identification dimensions of integration. Applying the ideas of the theory of segmented assimilation about the existence of different cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors that can shape how the first and later generations integrate into the host society, the work aims to determine intergenerational differences in the perceptions of Croats about their integration in Slovenia. The second generation is defined as individuals born in Slovenia, while the first generation refers to those who migrated to this area at some point in their lives.

The following section, therefore, provides a brief overview of the research's contextual framework. The first subsection presents the most recent available statistical data on the number of Croats residing in Slovenia. The second subsection offers a concise overview of the legal and institutional framework of their integration. The third subsection reviews the findings of previous studies, with particular emphasis

on those addressing intergenerational differences in the integration of Croats into Slovenian society. The subsequent two chapters present the applied theoretical and methodological framework, as well as the descriptive indicators of the observed intergenerational differences. Finally, we reflect on the implications of these findings for the future position of Croats in Slovenia.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Croats in Slovenia—selected demographic and statistical indicators

Slovenia's last population and housing census was carried out in 2002.[1] A decade later, in 2011, to be exact, the first registration census was conducted, followed by three more in Slovenia (2015, 2018, and 2021).[2] This circumstance is significant for this research because official and complete data on the ethnic composition of Slovenia's population exist only until 2002, meaning that the registration lists no longer collect data on ethnic, linguistic, and religious composition (Josipovič, 2015; 2019b). Considering this fact, it is not possible to determine the current ethnic-demographic picture of Slovenia, and thus neither the recent quantitative nor qualitative characteristics of the Croatian community in that country.[3] In addition, there are significant methodological differences between previous censuses, which make demographic analyses difficult (Josipovič, 2015; 2019b).

Based on the official and available results of the housing population censuses conducted in Slovenia after World War II, it is clear that the total population of that country throughout the second half of the twentieth century was characterized by a relatively high degree of homogeneity of the ethnic composition of the population, with an important note that over time gradually weakened. Namely, in 1948, declared Slovenes accounted for 97.0%, in 1953, 96.5%, in 1961, 95.6%, in 1971, 94.0%, in 1981, 90.8%, in 1991, 88.3%, and 2002, 83.1% of the total population of Slovenia (Source: Religious, linguistic and ethnic composition of the population of Slovenia, Censuses 1921–2002, Special publications, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, 2003, p. 141.). Although the number of Slovenes was on a continuous increase from 1948 to 1991 (for that period the index of inter-census change was 125.1, which means that the number of Slovenes increased by a quarter), the demographic increase of the rest of the ethnically declared and undeclared

1 More precisely, the 2002 Census was already carried out by a combination of "classical" field enumeration and downloading of data from individual registration databases.

2 The registration list does not include the collection of data in the field but only the connection/combination of data from different registration databases.

3 More details on the demographic characteristics of the Croatian community in Slovenia can be found in: Josipovič, 2006; 2016, pp. 44–50; 2023, pp. 1–16; Mesarić Žabčić et al., 2023; Domini & Antić, 1997, pp. 127–138; Klemenčič & Klemenčič, 1997, pp. 139–162; Perić, 2005, pp. 743–756; Škiljan & Perić Kaselj, 2018.

population in that period was much stronger (the index of inter-census change was as high as 536.1). The reasons for this can be found in a marked increase in immigration of the non-Slovenian ethnic population from other areas of the former SFRY, in which a significant number of Croats also participated. Immigration from other areas of the former SFRY to the territory of Slovenia, especially after World War II, was motivated by significant differences in the level of development, that is, the fact that the economic development of Slovenia generally took place faster than the economic development in other parts of the then Yugoslav state, especially its central parts (Bosnia and Herzegovina), eastern (Serbia) and southeastern areas (then Macedonia) (Josipovič, 2015; 2016). Consequently, the relative share of that non-Slovenian population (including ethnically undeclared persons and the "unknown" category) increased from 3.0% (1948) to as much as 16.9% (2002) (Mesarić Žabčić et al., 2023).

It is an important fact that the number of Croats in the territory of Slovenia generally increased from 1948 to 2002. The absolute increase was 19,753 inhabitants,[4] while the inter-census change index was 221.8. However, it should also be noted that within this half-century of general demographic growth, two sub-periods can be identified, each with opposite demographic dynamics for the Croatian community in Slovenia.

The first sub-period (1948–1981) was demographically expansive. From 16,069 people recorded in 1948, the number of Croats increased to 53,882 as recorded in 1981. This means that the absolute change was 37,813 inhabitants, and the index of inter-census change in the mentioned sub-period was a noticeable 335.3. The second sub-period (1981–2002) was demographically regressive. The number of declared Croats in the lists decreased from 53,882 (1981) to 35,642 persons (2002), resulting in an absolute decrease of 18,240 persons and an inter-census change index of 66.1 (Mesarić Žabčić et al., 2023).

It is very interesting to note that, as of the 1991 Census, the Croats, both in terms of numbers and relative share of the total population, were dominant among other non-Slovenian ethnic groups, such as Serbs, Hungarians, Muslims, Italians, and so forth. Only in the 2002 Census results were Serbs (38,964)[5] more numerous than Croats (35,642), with, of course, Slovenes as the most numerous ethnic group (1,631,363). This is the result of differentiated numerical dynamics. However, the sign of the inter-census change is the same (negative), so that in the inter-census period 1991–2002, the number of declared Croats decreased by 32.6%, the number of declared Serbs decreased by 17.8%, and the number of declared Slovenes decreased by 17.4%. On the other hand, between 1991 and 2002, the number of people who

4 For 1948–2002, the censuses show the following absolute increases in the number of inhabitants by declared affiliation: Slovenes +281,214, Italians +800, Roma +3,200, Albanians +5,970, Montenegrins +2,146, Macedonians +3,606, Serbs (at most) +31,916. In contrast, Hungarians in the territory of Slovenia in that period recorded an absolute decrease of –4,336.

5 Even the total number of Bosniaks and Muslims together in the 2002 Census was smaller (32,009) than the number of declared Croats (35,642).

did not declare their ethnicity in the censuses, including the "unknown" category, increased significantly. Their number increased from 68,333 to 197,054 inhabitants, an absolute increase of 128,721 people, with an inter-census change index of 288.4.

The position of Croats in Slovenia: the legal and institutional framework of their integration

Data indicate that Croats have been present in the area of "Bela Krajina, the Slovenian part of Istria, Pomurje and around the Sutla River" for several centuries (Mlačak, 1997; Majstorović, 1997; Brezinščak Bagola, 1997), while they began to settle in Slovenia more intensively after World War II (Perić, 2005; Petričušić, 2004; Kralj, 2013), when for Croats, especially residents of border areas, Slovenia becomes an attractive migration destination in search of employment, family reunification, and study. As mentioned in the introduction, following Slovenia's independence, Croats faced significant changes in their legal status, primarily relating to the loss of their position as an equal nation alongside Slovenes (Petričušić, 2004). With the adoption of the Constitution in 1991, Slovenia introduced a multilayered framework for the protection of the human rights of minorities (Žagar, 2001), according to which indigenous national minorities become Italians and Hungarians, thus enjoying all collective and individual rights, while Roma gain the right to enjoy only a small part of special, legally regulated rights. For example, legislation gives Italians and Hungarians territorialized language and educational rights that Roma do not enjoy. Instead, there are only occasional initiatives to include Roma culture and history in the curriculum (Sardelić, 2022).

On the other hand, members of all other minorities, above all people from the territory of the former SFRY (Albanians, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Croats, Macedonians, and Serbs), do not receive the status of national minorities and therefore do not enjoy any collective rights in the newly formed state. The current legal position only allows them to receive certain supports in the field of culture, media, language, and education, which are often unsatisfactory and do not contribute to the preservation and promotion of their identities, languages, and cultures (Medvešek, 2007).[6] To illustrate this, the Ministry of Culture approved €485,630 for Hungarians and €356,191 for Italians from the budget funds in 2021 to support cultural programs, while the following amounts were allocated to members of other former SFRY communities: Albanians: €3,100; Bosniaks: €21,362; Croats: €22,122; Macedonians: €13,582; Montenegrins: €8,358; Serbs: €56,644[7]. The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe (hereinafter: ACFC) has repeatedly warned about the uneven financial support from Slovenia for the cultural activities of the aforementioned communities

6 Compare Fourth Opinion on Slovenia (2018).

7 Fifth Opinion on Slovenia (2022), pp. 14. (hereinafter: Fifth Opinion).

and pointed out that this support is disproportionate to their share in Slovenian society. Although Slovenia has ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and, based on Article 5, which states that the Member States of the European Union must ensure the protection of all national minorities in the field of preservation and development of minority identities, languages and cultural heritage (Council of Europe, 1995, Article 5), it is evident from the example presented that recognized national minorities receive the most financial support, that is, despite their small size, they receive significantly more funds than minority communities from the former SFRY.

The failure to resolve the legal status of Croats in Slovenia has also created an unfavorable situation in the educational system, where there is no opportunity to learn the Croatian language in primary education as part of the compulsory curriculum. Consequently, the current educational policy negatively affects not only the preservation of the language but also the maintenance of Croatian culture and ethnic identity (Mlinar & Peček, 2024). Although the ACFC has repeatedly issued recommendations to Slovenia—such as in its Fifth Opinion on Slovenia (2022)—to introduce Croatian and Serbian "as foreign languages within compulsory optional subjects in primary schools," as well as to "take into account the proposals of representatives of these communities regarding the need for bilingual education in Slovene and their minority language at the preschool, primary, and secondary levels," the possibility of learning Croatian is currently offered only through elective courses. Existing research indicates that such forms of instruction depend on school provision, student interest, and teacher availability, resulting in limited access to Croatian language classes across areas inhabited by Croats. Furthermore, the current institutional framework poses challenges, including a shortage of qualified teaching staff, inconsistent instructional quality, insufficient systemic support, and limited interest among children and parents. This disinterest is often linked to processes of assimilation and to fears of stigmatization, marginalization, and discrimination from teachers and classmates (Roter, 2007; Medvešek & Bešter, 2012; Mlinar & Peček, 2024).

In addition to the above, members of the Croatian community do not even have the possibility of "effective participation in public affairs and decision-making procedures, which means that they are not enabled to represent their interests in certain bodies at any level of government."[8] So, even though in recent years the criticism of the representatives of the Croatian community on the discriminatory practice of the Slovenian authorities toward them[9] has intensified, as well as the proposals for amending the Constitution and recognizing Croats as a national minority, the situation remains unchanged. Croats still do not have the special constitutional protection enjoyed by the Italian, Hungarian, and Roma communities. Although,

8 Fifth Opinion on Slovenia (2022), pp. 26–27.

9 Fifth Opinion on Slovenia (2022), pp. 10.

as stated in the 2022 ACFC, the Slovenian authorities have recognized that "the Croatian national community, the German-speaking ethnic group, and the Serbian national community are autochthonous in certain parts of the country," therefore the legal provisions on autochthonous national communities do not apply to them which consequently leads to the absence of a legal framework for the "promotion of their languages and culture in public life."[10] Solving the current difficulties in protecting the rights of Croats is often deemed impossible, with spatial dispersion and the heterogeneity of their members, as well as rapid assimilation due to their close similarity to the majority, cited as key factors (Perić, 2005).

Previous research on the integration of the first and second generations of Croats in Slovenia

Previous, mostly fragmented, research on intergenerational differences in the integration of Croatian immigrants and their descendants, which largely deal not only with Croats in Slovenia, but also with other minority communities from the area of the former SFRY, already suggest that the aforementioned changed sociopolitical circumstances influenced the emergence of differences in the integration of the second generation of Croats in relation to their parents who immigrated before the breakup of the SFRY. While first-generation immigrants from the Croatian community were considered equal to Slovenes before the breakup of the former SFRY, the creation of a Slovenian national identity after independence in 1991 led to discrimination, marginalization, and stereotyping of people whose parents had immigrated from other countries of the former SFRY (Plantak, 2021). Existing research indicates that the first generation of Croats is recognized as having a high degree of integration into Slovenian society, and that, following Croatia's independence, an increased need to preserve their own ethnic distinctiveness emerged among them (Perić, 2005; Perić Kaselj et al., 2016; Pirc et al., 2024). However, in later generations born in Slovenia, a stronger orientation toward Slovenian culture has been observed, along with weaker maintenance of the mother tongue except within the family circle, as well as a lower level of involvement in association activities and public engagement (Perić, 2005; Perić Kaselj et al., 2016; Novak et al., 2022). The alienation of the second generation from their ethnic community is linked to "mixed marriages, the absence of classes in the Croatian language within the Slovenian education system, the heterogeneous emigration of their parents, large dispersion on the territory of Slovenia, motives for permanent stay, the cultural and religious similarity of the two countries and near the territory" (Perić, 2005, p. 751).

Current knowledge about the integration of the second generation of Croats in Slovenia also indicates that they face socioeconomic, political, and civil discrimination in their everyday life, which is primarily related to their "rootedness deep within

10 Fifth Opinion on Slovenia (2022), pp. 9–10, 24.

the institutional level" (Kralj, 2013, p. 69). Thus, the research by Žitnik (2004) and Kralj (2008) reveals the numerous difficulties faced by members of the second generation of Croats in public and private spaces, as well as other minority communities from the territory of the former SFRY after the independence of Slovenia, whereas regarding factors that adversely affect their successful integration cites unequal social position, social and ethnic discrimination, the hidden aversion of the majority population toward members of these ethnic communities, and their undesirability as neighbors and friends of Slovenian children.

Another study (Kralj, 2013) also indicates the existence of open and covert discrimination against members of these communities, and the numerous difficulties they face in everyday life, such as problems due to the use of the mother tongue in public spaces or at the workplace, exposure of the second and third generations to the threat of identity crisis and inferiority based on their surnames, their non-acceptance and unequal status in society, consequently connected with the so-called process of self-assimilation or silent assimilation which can result in changing their names and surnames. Kralj also states that members of these generations of unrecognized national minorities from the territory of the former SFRY "due to the need to be accepted by the majority population, as well as to provide better employment opportunities, have an aversion to other members of their ethnic community" (Kralj, 2013, p. 73), as well as that the fear of not being accepted and discriminated against is also reflected in the experience of organizing additional classes for learning the Croatian language in certain primary schools, which in the end was weak due to reservations, that is, parents fear that their children would be marked, ghettoized as a result response.

Although recent research indicates that there are signs of improvement in the position of these minority communities in terms of social integration and the reduction of discrimination, it also shows that they continue to face certain challenges, such as experiences of exclusion and marginalization in the areas of education, the labor market, public and political participation, the preservation of their own culture and identity, as well as in their everyday relations with the majority population (Bajt, 2016; Sedmak, 2018; Plantak, 2021). Plantak (2021) also points out that members of the second generation of Croats, as well as those of other national groups from the former SFRY, perceive discrimination as less prevalent. However, it cannot yet be said that integration has been fully achieved.

Here, it is also important to highlight the problem of studies that combine data from all people originating from the former SFRY and draw generalized conclusions, which may yield distorted or misleading results for each minority community individually. This issue is underscored by research demonstrating specific outcomes for each community, which, in the case of the Croatian community, differ to some extent from the general trends previously mentioned. These findings indicate that the Croatian community is well integrated in the socioeconomic sphere compared to members of other national groups who first resided in the countries of the former

SFRY (Medvešek et al., 2022; Pirc et al., 2024). Specifically, Croats have "a higher share of individuals with tertiary education, belong to financially better-off population groups in Slovenia, have a smaller proportion of persons receiving social benefits, and a lower share of recipients of social transfers intended to alleviate poor financial circumstances" (Pirc et al., 2024, p. 310). Bešter likewise reports that Croats are the least likely among these groups to perceive their ethnic affiliation as affecting their monthly income, housing situation, or employment and promotion opportunities compared to other groups from the former SFRY. Regarding intergenerational differences, Croats born in Slovenia are more likely than first-generation Croats to believe that their ethnic affiliation affects their household income. In contrast, they are less likely than first-generation Croats to perceive unequal employment opportunities compared to Slovenes (Bešter, 2007).

Generational Differences in Integration: Predictions From Segmented Assimilation Theory

In contrast to classic assimilation theory, which assumes that "there is a natural process during which different ethnic groups reach the level where they begin to share a common culture and gain equal access to the opportunity structure of society, gradually abandoning old cultural and behavioral patterns, which overall leads to assimilation" (Zhou, 1997, p. 976) representatives of the theory of segmented assimilation already in the 1960s pointed out certain anomalies in this process and the fact that different ethnic groups can experience different intergenerational trajectories, as well as that the ways of integration can differ in different dimensions and within the same community (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Although the creators of the theory of segmented assimilation interpret their findings based on research conducted in the USA, several studies have confirmed the applicability of this approach in Europe as well (e.g., Crul & Vermeulen, 2003; Simon, 2006; Vermeulen, 2010; Heath & Schneider, 2021). As an example, a study conducted on Greeks and Italians living in Germany will be mentioned, which found that intergenerational differences are influenced by numerous factors, that is, that a positive role for the successful integration of later generations is played by the connection with the country of origin, as well as the financial support of the home country, social capital of the minority community, where ethnic cohesion through dense networks of voluntary associations, on the one hand, positively affects the level of education and economic achievements of their descendants, and, on the other hand, on ethnic identification, participation in ethnocultural practices, maintenance of ethnic friendships and nurturing of the mother tongue (Vermeulen, 2010). Such a way of integration, which manifests itself in the "growing economic advancement of community members while at the same time intentionally preserving community values and solid solidarity" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 82), is called pluralistic integration. In addition to this form, it is possible that the integration of "the second

generation (and subsequent ones) can also lead to growing acculturation and parallel integration into the culture of the majority population (upward assimilation), with the simultaneous loss of their own identity characteristics." It is also possible that their integration "can lead, in the opposite direction, to permanent poverty and assimilation into the lower class, in the so-called downward assimilation" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 82).

Although the representatives of this theory direct considerable attention to the intergenerational integration processes of several ethnic groups in different countries, with a focus on social mobility and structural integration (Crul & Vermeulen, 2003), giving great importance to the cultural differences between the ethnic group and the majority people, many agree that it is necessary to pay more attention to "internal differentiation within ethnic groups" (Simon, 2006, p. 975).

Likewise, although they do not pay much attention to the effect of integration policies in the way of integration of the second and later generations, it has been observed that general national institutional frameworks, such as educational policy and the system of transition to the labor market, have an influence and can, in addition to the previously mentioned factors, influence the appearance of three different ways of their integration (Vermeulen, 2010).

Thus, the way of integration of the second and later generations, as well as whether they will be possible to combine socioeconomic integration with the preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage (Zhou, 1997), that is, whether and which variants will appear in their integration in certain dimensions may be influenced by several factors, such as the specific characteristics of immigrants and the environment in the society in which they immigrate (Kalter, 2022). Precisely starting from the assumption that general socioeconomic and political circumstances influence intergenerational differences in integration, primarily structural opportunities (exposure to discrimination, exclusion, and constraints in the economy) with the influence of social and economic capital embedded in the ethnic community (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Kalter, 2022) this paper aims to investigate intergenerational integration patterns among Croats in Slovenia.

METHODOLOGY

Research objectives and hypotheses

Enco uraged by the fact that Croats, despite their abundance and indigenous presence in part of Slovenian territory, are "only a part of the immigrant population" (Perić, 2005, pp. 751), this paper, applying the theory of segmented assimilation, aims to determine more comprehensively how the current legal position of Croats in Slovenia was reflected in how the integration of the second generation and the attitude toward their own community. Within this framework, this research aims to

determine the intergenerational differences in the perception of participants' own integration as Croats in Slovenia in relation to the structural, cultural, interactional, and identification dimensions of integration, and thus, in accordance with the applied theoretical framework, the dominant way of integration between the first and second generation of Croats in Slovenia.

Based on previous research and theoretical considerations of the topic, the initial hypothesis is that there are intergenerational differences in the integration of Croats in Slovenia, with the assumption that the observed differences indicate upward assimilation of second-generation Croats. In contrast, the first-generation Croats will have a pluralistic integration.

Data collection and sampling

The data used in the analysis were collected as part of the project "Croatian community in the Republic of Slovenia: between assimilation, integration, and promotion of Croatian national identity" (Mesarić Žabčić et al., 2023). The survey was conducted between October and November 2022 on a convenience sample (N=300), and the questionnaire comprised 6 open-ended questions and 55 closed-ended questions. Given the lack of recent statistical data on the number of Croats in Slovenia and the impossibility of applying probabilistic sampling methods, the snowball sampling method (Milas, 2005) was used, and the research was conducted in cooperation with 10 societies and associations of the Croatian community in Slovenia.[11] Their members participated in the survey. Geographically, the project covered the following settlements: Ljubljana, Novo Mesto, Lendava, Velenje, Piran, Maribor, and Škofja Loka. The face-to-face method was used to collect data.

GENDER	N	%	HOUSING STATUS	N	%
Female	132	44	Owner of an apartment or house	212	70.7
Male	161	53.7	Holder of tenancy rights	18	6
No answer	7	2.3	Lives with parents	43	14.3
AGE	N	%	Tenant / Renter	21	7
18–34	52	17.3	No answer	6	2
35–50	56	18.7	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	N	%
51–60	62	20.7	Permanently employed in the public or state sector	70	23.3

11 Croatian cultural society (hereinafter HKD) Pomurje Lendava, HKD Međimurje Velenje, HKD Maribor, Croatian culturalartistic, educational and sports association Istra Piran, the Croatian Cultural Union in Novo mesto, the Croatian club Komušina in Škofja Loka, Croatian association Ljubljana, the Ivan Car Međimurje Culture & Arts Society of Ljubljana, HKD Velenje and HKD of Croatian Heritage Foundation (Matica hrvatska) in Maribor. For more detailed information, see: Mesarić Žabčić et al., 2023.

61–70	78	26	Permanently employed by a private employer	62	20.7
71 and over	40	13.3	Self-employed as a craftsman/private entrepreneur	28	9.3
No answer	12	4			
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	N	%	Temporarily employed	8	2.7
No schooling / Incomplete primary education	8	2.6	Farmer / in agriculture	1	0.3
Completed primary education	24	8	Pupil or student	11	3.7
Completed secondary education	107	35.7	Retired	105	35
Completed higher education / College or university degree	120	40	Unemployed	10	3.3
Master's or doctoral degree attained	17	5.7	Other	2	0.7
No answer	24	8	No answer	3	1
SELF-ASSESSMENT OF LIVING STANDARD	N	%	MARITAL STATUS	N	%
Worse than average	38	12.7	Single	58	19.3
Average	139	46.3	Married	175	58.3
Better than average	115	38.3	Cohabiting/Living in a partnership	25	8.3
No answer	8	2.7	Divorced	11	3.7
No answer			Widower/Widow	23	7.7
8			2.7		

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of research participants.

As shown in Table 1, the sample comprised 300 participants. Females accounted for 44% of the sample, while males represented 53.7%. In terms of age distribution, 17.3% of respondents were between 18 and 34 years of age, 18.7% were 35–50, 20.7% were 51–60, 26% were 61–70, and 13.3% were aged 71 and over, whereas 4% of respondents did not disclose their age. Regarding educational attainment, the majority of participants were highly educated: 40% had completed college or university, and 5.7% held a master's or doctoral degree. Respondents with completed secondary education accounted for 35.7%, those with only primary education for 8%, while 2.6% had no formal schooling, and 8% did not state their level of education. Regarding housing status, most participants resided in their own property (70.7%). In terms of employment status, 23.3% were permanently employed in the public or government sector, 20.7% in the private sector, 9.3% were self-employed entrepreneurs or craftspeople, 2.7% were temporarily employed, 3.3% were unemployed, 0.3% were farmers, 3.7% were pupils or students, and 35% were retirees. Regarding marital status, the largest proportion of respondents was married (58.3%).

The largest group of study participants is the first generation of immigrants (N = 214), that is, those who migrated to Slovenia at some point in their lives. In contrast, the second generation, born in Slovenia, comprises 81 participants (5 participants did not provide this information). First-generation participants primarily migrated to Slovenia between the 1960s and 1980s (N = 162). Only three participants migrated earlier, while 49 migrated after the 1990s. By place of birth, two-thirds of the participants migrated from Croatia, predominantly from the counties of Međimurje and Varaždin and the City of Zagreb, while one-third migrated from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The limitations of this research are related to the applied convenience sample, which resulted in an unequal distribution of the sample across educational levels. Likewise, although the authors are aware of the limiting effect of the selected concepts of "first" and "second" generation (Josipovič, 2019a), these categories are consistent with the survey question in which participants indicated whether they had migrated to Slovenia at some point in their lives or had lived there since birth.

After entering the collected data into the SPSS database, the data were subjected to a univariate (calculation of frequencies and response percentages) and bivariate analysis (chi-squared test).

INTEGRATION MEASURES

To operationalize the complex issue in question, in this research, the multidimensional approach of Bosswick & Heckmann (2007) was applied, which, in the process of integration, separates four dimensions: structural, cultural, interactive, and identification as follows:[12]

- Structural integration, which implies "rights and access to basic institutions in society, such as employment, education, housing, health, and civil rights" (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2007, p. 9), was measured using sets of variables providing insight into occupational structure, housing status, and self-assessed living standards (measured on a five-point scale, later recategorized into three levels: worse than average [1], average [2], and better than average [3]), as well as satisfaction with the current position and realized rights of Croats (measured on a five-point scale, later recategorized into three levels: satisfied [1], neither satisfied nor dissatisfied [2], and dissatisfied [3]).
- Here, it is important to note that the authors recognize the role of education in integrating minorities, in further interpreting the possibilities it offers for upward mobility, and in reducing inequality between majority and minority populations. However, in this research, this important indicator was not included in the analysis for the reason that, through the applied convenience sample, an unequal distribution of the sample was subsequently observed according to the educational structure in which among the participants of both generations higher professional education dominates, which can result in a distorted interpretation of the current situation in terms of intergenerational differences in the educational structure. The last available data from the 2002 population census suggest reasonable caution, from which the share of higher professional education is visible at 11%, while their share in this research is 45%.
- Interactive integration refers to the "creation of social ties and networks in the host society" (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2007, p. 10), and was examined by studying spatial segregation among Croats. Participants were asked whether Croats primarily populated their neighborhood or whether there were residents of different nationalities, that is, were Slovenes dominant? They were also asked with whom they hang out most often (with other Croats, with members of other nationalities, or with Slovenes), and the assessment of inter-ethnic relations

12 One part of the applied research instruments was taken from previous related research, while the remaining instruments, in accordance with the given research objective, were independently constructed (cf. Živković et al., 1995; Babić, 2015). For more detailed information on the instruments used, see: Mesarić Žabčić et al., 2023.

between Croats and Slovenes, as well as the perception of problems due to nationality,[13] were also examined.

- Identification integration, which occurs at the personal level and relates to the sense of belonging to society and one's own community, was examined through attitudes toward the importance of national belonging – measured on a five-point scale ranging from very important (1) to completely unimportant (5) – as well as through ties to the country of origin. Indicators for these ties included attitudes toward the frequency of following Croatian media and press, and the frequency of communication with family members and friends in Croatia.
- Cultural integration, which refers to the opportunities for immigrants to express their culture and religion in the public sphere, was examined based on perceptions of the threat to Croatian culture, language, and customs; attitudes regarding current opportunities for learning Croatian in Slovenia (measured on a five-point scale: excellent [1] to very poor [5]); frequency of communication in Croatian within the family, with response options on a scale: daily, occasionally, and do not communicate in Croatian; and frequency of participation in Croatian community gatherings, measured on a three-point scale: regularly [1], sometimes [2], never [3]. Participants were also asked whether they are personally involved in the activities of any association.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structural Integration

Studying the integration of Croats in Slovenia, as a multidimensional concept, complex in the operationalization of variables, in addition to the difficulties that arise when conducting quantitative research, especially if researchers are forced to use non-probabilistic sampling methods, is a complex task that should enable insight into "attitudes and outcomes actions of migrants," as well as in the "opportunities and limitations that immigrants face in the host society," which are related to the "results of integration policy and general economic and social conditions in the new country" (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2007, p. 11).

In the context of three decades since the independence of Slovenia and the growing up of new generations of Croats in unchanged circumstances of legal status, based on the results obtained on the perception of the research participants about their own integration, it will be pointed out how such circumstances

13 It is defined as belonging to a particular national community with which one identifies—in this case, Croats (Kržišnik-Bukić & Josipovič, 2014).

influenced the differences in certain dimensions of integration between the first and second generations Croats in Slovenia. Starting first from the obtained results on structural integration, which is crucial for "achieving parity with the main group, in terms of economic resources and professional position" (Heath & Schneider, 2021, p. 7), as well as establishing the existence of discrimination on the labor market, the following insights into the work structure are initially provided.

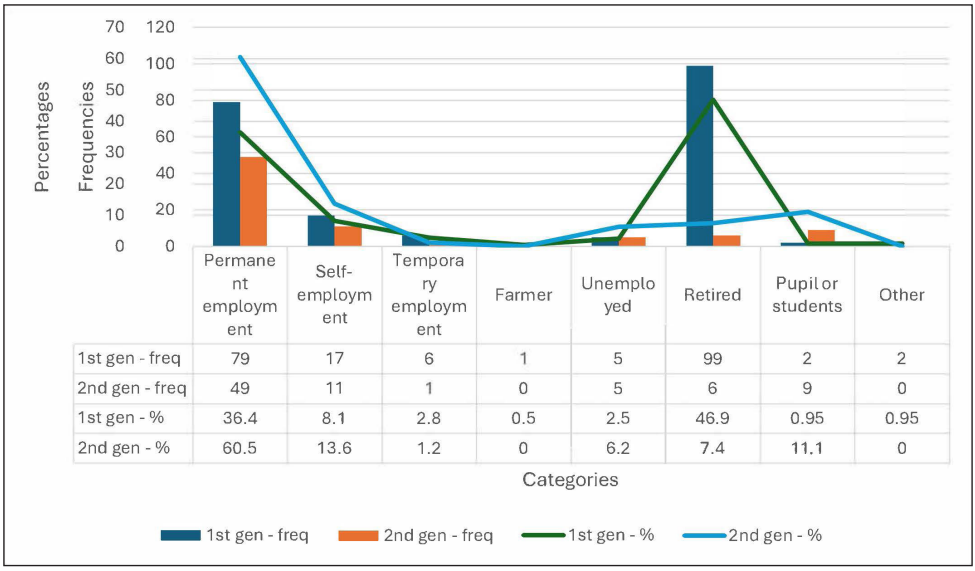


Figure 1: Work status.

Figure 1 shows that second-generation Croats are in a slightly more favorable position, reflected in higher shares among full-time employees in public and state services, as well as among private individuals and the self-employed. The data obtained generally suggest that discrimination against Croats in the labor market cannot be established. In contrast, the data on the proportion of self-employed participants also point to a favorable environment—in terms of social climate as well as economic and institutional factors—for business investment, which improves both the position of members of this minority community and overall labor-market conditions. Additionally, the increasing share of the second generation among these two key categories indicates that they are not at risk of downward mobility and socioeconomic marginalization (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Housing status also confirms the favorable socioeconomic position of Croats in Slovenia (Figure 2), and it is evident that over 80% of first-generation research participants own their own real estate.

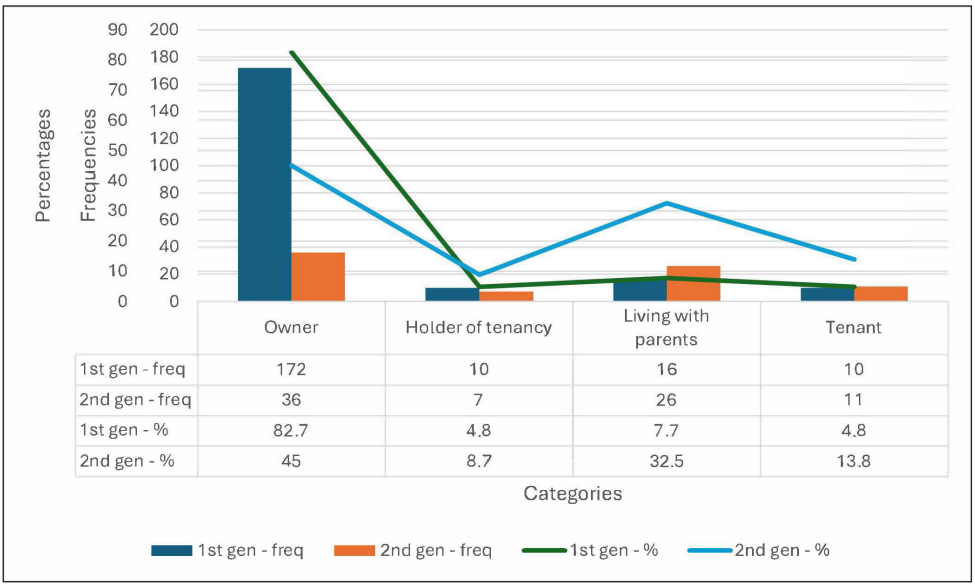


Figure 2: Housing status.

As expected, in a certain sense, primarily because the second-generation members are generally younger, a statistically significant intergenerational difference emerged.[14] Among the second generation, a significantly smaller share of people own the real estate in which they live, while a noticeably larger share live with their parents or are tenants.

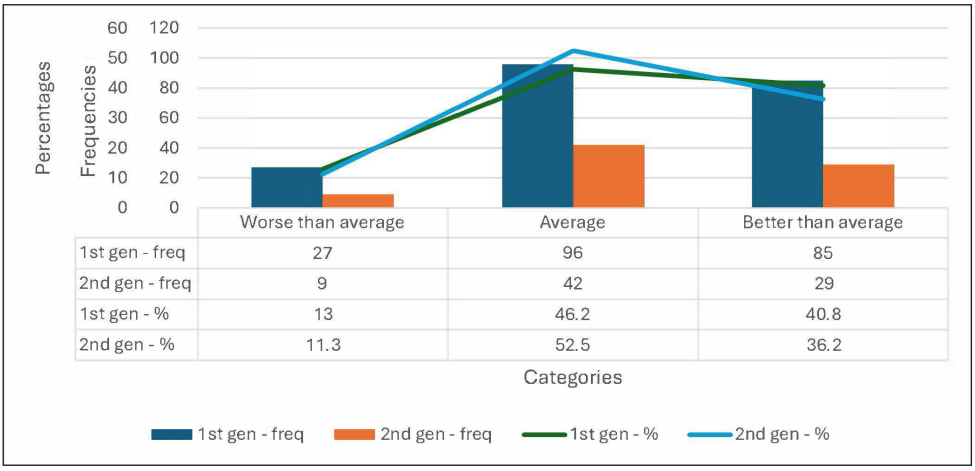


Figure 3: Perception of own standard of living.

14 $p < 0.01$

It is identified that most Croats are not in a socioeconomically disadvantaged position, which is also confirmed by Figure 3, which shows that there are only slight intergenerational differences in attitudes; that is, almost half of the members of both generations perceive their standard of living as average, and almost 40% perceive it as better than average. In contrast, only about one-tenth perceive it as worse than average. These findings support previous research indicating the relatively favorable socioeconomic position of Croats within Slovenian society, as well as their lower perception of labor market discrimination compared to other ethnic groups originating from the former Yugoslavia (Bešter, 2007; Pirc et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the last important indicator of this dimension, the perception of one's own legal status, shows somewhat less favorable data, which is expected given the current legal position (Figure 4). The data indicate that there are no statistically significant intergenerational differences in attitudes;[15] that is, they are almost equally distributed, both in attitudes toward satisfaction (present in only one-third of the participants) and in attitudes toward dissatisfaction with realized rights (present in about 40% of the participants). The data also show that about one-third of Croats from both generations show indifference to this issue, and what is even more significant is that almost 44% of first-generation participants are satisfied with their current position, with a not much smaller share among second-generation participants. Satisfaction with the current situation is the most prevalent among retirees, who, in the largest proportion, consider themselves equal to Slovenes, which is probably a consequence of the fact that they have lived for a long time in the former state (SFRY), where they were equal in terms of civil, social, and political rights. However, a higher level of satisfaction is also evident among those with permanent employment in state and public services. Such findings may also indicate the assimilation of a portion of the first generation, as suggested by earlier studies showing that this process had already begun during the period of the SFRY, when the political and ideological climate across the state was not favorable toward individuals of Croatian nationality or the expression of their national identity (Medvešek et al., 2022).

Additionally, a slightly smaller proportion of satisfied and a larger proportion of dissatisfied individuals can be observed among members of the second generation, which may indicate a certain deterioration in social position as a consequence of their current legal status, but possibly also greater subjective dissatisfaction stemming from their search for identity, accompanied by feelings of insecurity and lack of acceptance (Sedmak, 2018).

15 $p > 0.05$.

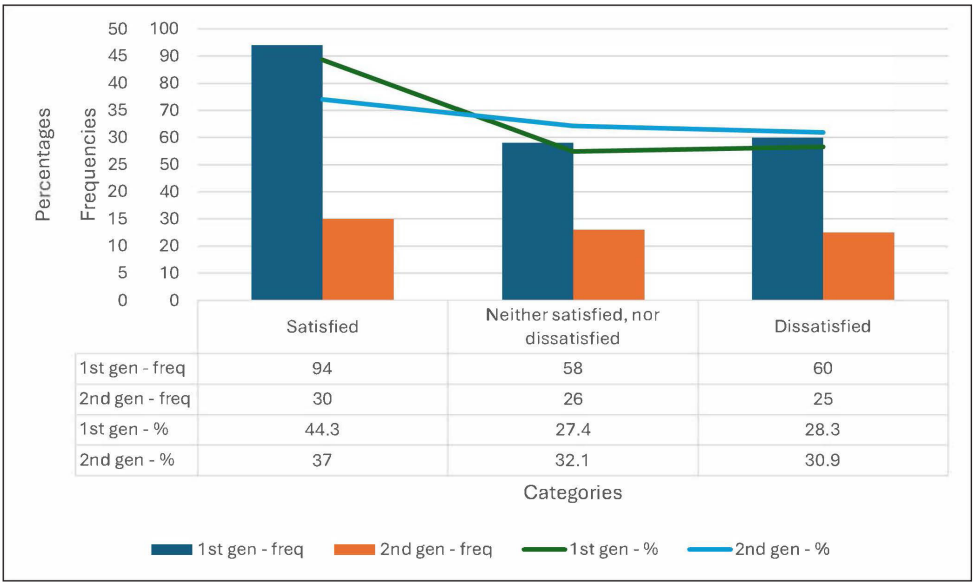
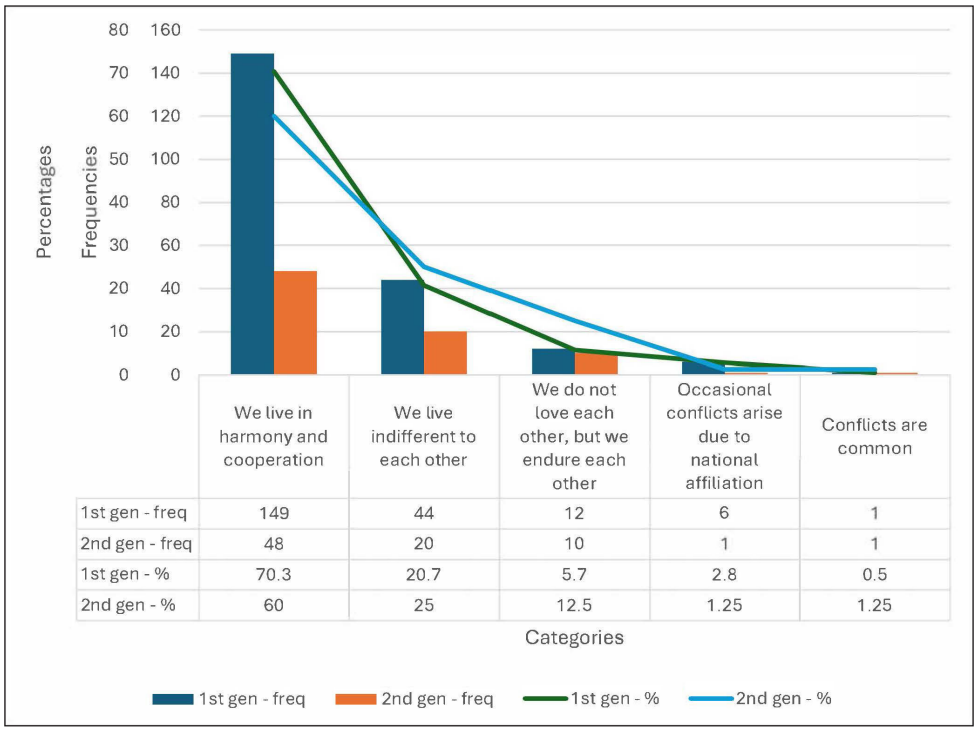


Figure 4: Satisfaction with the current level of realized rights.

INTERACTIVE DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION

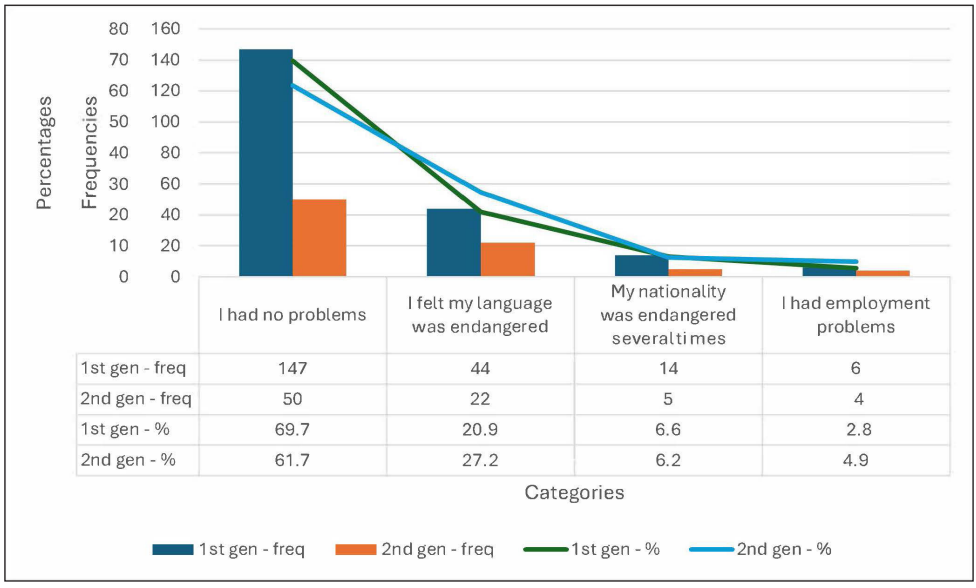
The results of the interactive dimension of integration also indicate certain difficulties in social relations between the majority population and Croats. This dimension is important primarily for observing the spatial and social segregation of a minority community in an immigration society. Although no statistically significant intergenerational differences were observed in the assessment of inter-ethnic relations, nor in the experience of problems due to national affiliation, which was positively assessed by two-thirds of the research participants, it can still be seen from Figure 5 that the proportion of the second generation who rate inter-ethnic relations as less favorable is slightly increased, who believe that Croats and Slovenes live indifferently next to each other and that they do not like each other, but tolerate each other, as well as a slightly smaller share of those who stated that they live in harmony and cooperation with the majority population.[16]

16 $P > 0.05$



	We live in harmony and cooperation	We live indifferent to each other	We do not love each other, but we endure each other	Occasional conflicts arise due to national affiliation	Conflicts are common
1st gen - freq	149	44	12	6	1
2nd gen - freq	48	20	10	1	1
1st gen - %	70.3	20.7	5.7	2.8	0.5
2nd gen - %	60	25	12.5	1.25	1.25

Figure 5: Assessment of inter-ethnic relations.



	I had no problems	I felt my language was endangered	My nationality was endangered several times	I had employment problems
1st gen - freq	147	44	14	6
2nd gen - freq	50	22	5	4
1st gen - %	69.7	20.9	6.6	2.8
2nd gen - %	61.7	27.2	6.2	4.9

Figure 6: Experience of problems due to nationality.

Similar findings are indicated by the data on differences in the perception of problems due to one's nationality (Figure 6), based on which it is evident that participants of the second generation experienced such difficulties in a slightly increased proportion, as well as that they felt that their language was threatened, that is, difficulties during employment. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that, despite improvements, partial discrimination persists in the workplace regarding language use and hiring practices (Plantak, 2021).

However, the data on the type of neighborhood in which Croats live in Slovenia do not indicate segregation: the largest share of Croats live in neighborhoods with residents of different nationalities (62.3%). In comparison, 33.7% of them live in settlements predominantly populated by Slovenes. Only a small share (3.3%) lives in an area predominantly inhabited by Croats. The results also indicate that there are no statistically significant intergenerational differences in the type of neighborhood in which Croats live in Slovenia.[17] However, when discussing the existence of friendly relations between Croats and the majority, the data indicate that Croats are not a closed community; rather, only a minority socializes exclusively with Slovenes. The data also indicate statistically significant intergenerational differences in the relationship between Croats and the majority nation: members of the second generation socialize more often with members of the majority nation, or significantly less often only with other Croats, than members of the first generation (Figure 7).[18] These findings confirm that Croats in Slovenia maintain mixed social contacts and are not excluded from the majority society (Bešter, 2007; Medvešek et al., 2022).

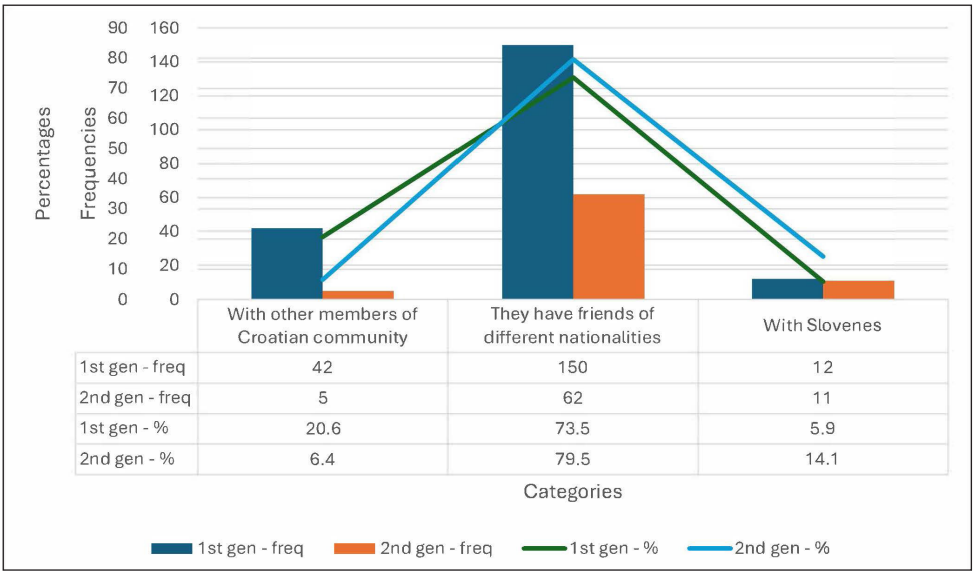


Figure 7: Who do Croats in Slovenia socialize with most often?

17 $p > 0.05$
18 $P < 0.01$

IDENTIFICATION DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION

The third dimension of integration under study allows us to further examine whether current sociopolitical circumstances negatively affect the sense of belonging to one's own ethnic group at the subjective, identificational level.

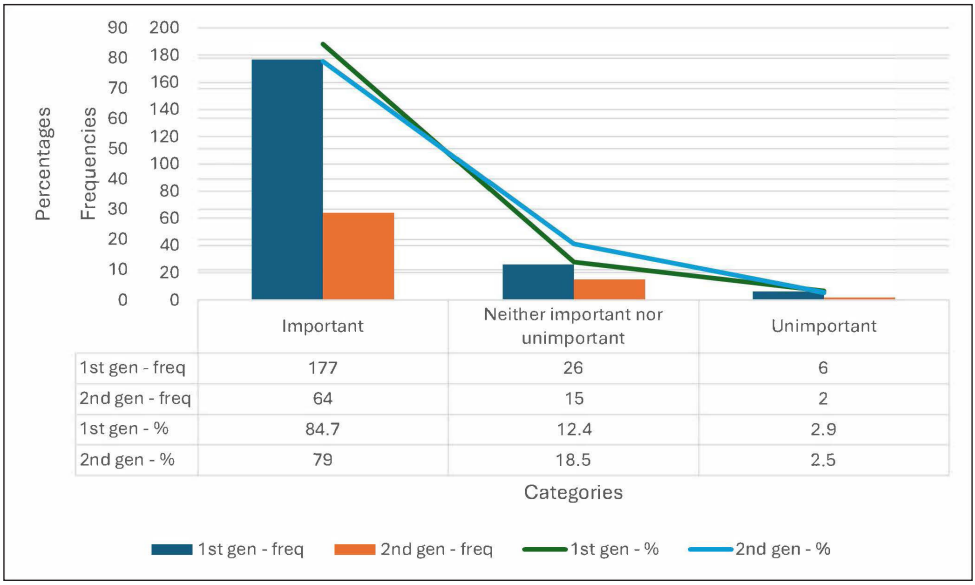


Figure 8: Importance of nationality.

The answer to this question can be obtained by examining the collected data on the importance of national affiliation for Croats in Slovenia, as shown in Figure 8, which, given the high percentages of 84.7% and 79% under the "important" category, indicates that national affiliation is extremely important to both generations, without observed intergenerational differences.[19]

The frequency of maintaining ties with the homeland, as an important factor in preserving one's cultural, national, and linguistic identity, also underscores the great importance of national affiliation for Croats in Slovenia. Among the first generation, 96.3% of survey participants have friends in Croatia, while among the second generation, this share is slightly lower (88.9%) but still significantly high.

19 $p > 0.05$

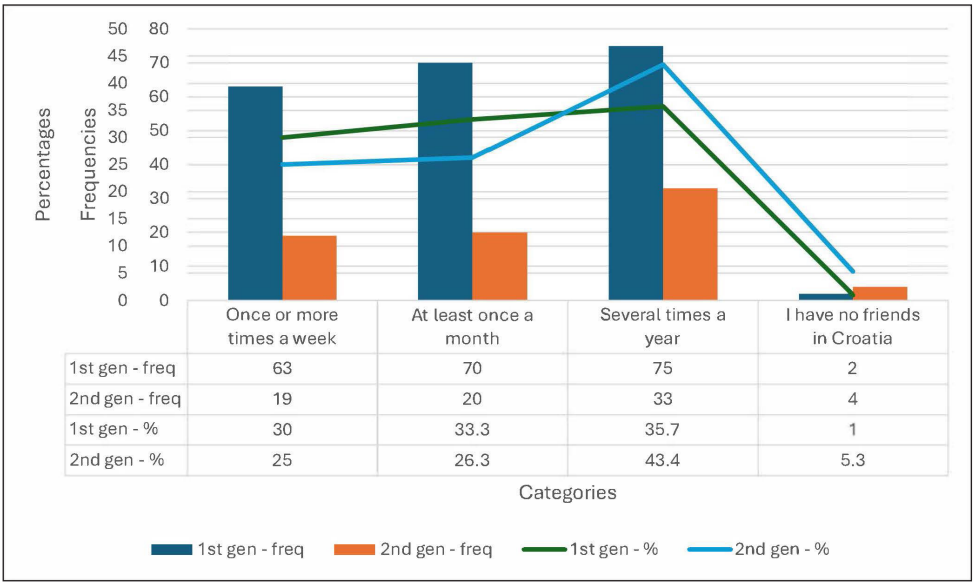


Figure 9: Frequency of communication with friends in Croatia.

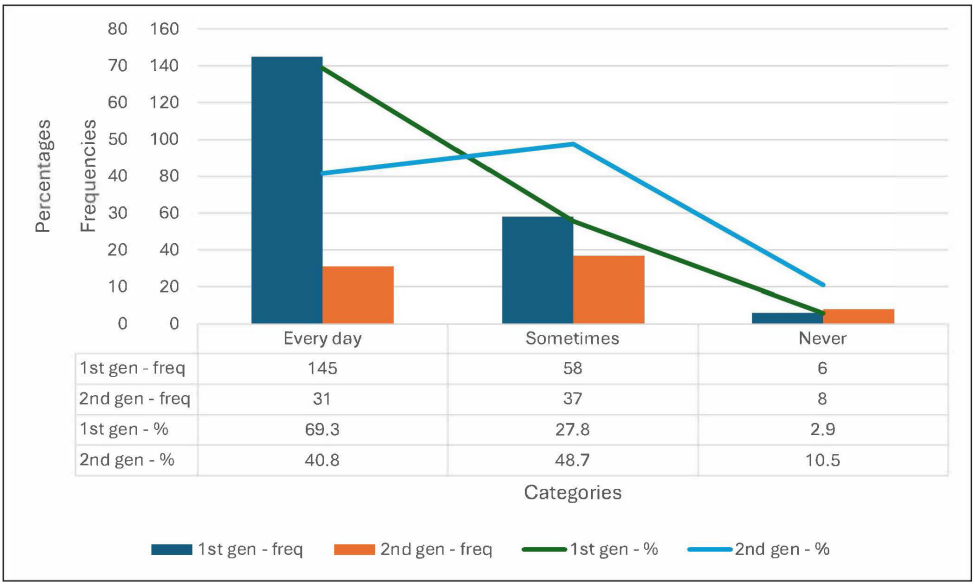


Figure 10: Monitoring of Croatian media and press.

While there were no statistically significant differences in the frequency of communication with family members in Croatia, and over 90% of participants of both the first and second generation stated that they communicate with family members

in Croatia once or more times a week,[20] differences appeared in the frequency of communication with friends (Figure 9)[21] and the first generation communicates more often with friends from Croatia.

Statistically significant differences also appeared in the frequency of following Croatian media and press[22] (Figure 10), where it is evident that the second generation sometimes follows Croatian media and press in the largest proportion. Overall, these findings confirm that members of the second generation maintain weaker ties with the homeland (Perić Kaselj et al., 2016).

CULTURAL DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION

The last observed dimension is considered crucial to draw certain conclusions about the dominant mode of integration and the possible existence of intergenerational differences.

The findings on cultural integration are extremely unfavorable and indicate that two-thirds of participants from both generations perceive a threat to Croatian culture, language, and customs (Figure 11).

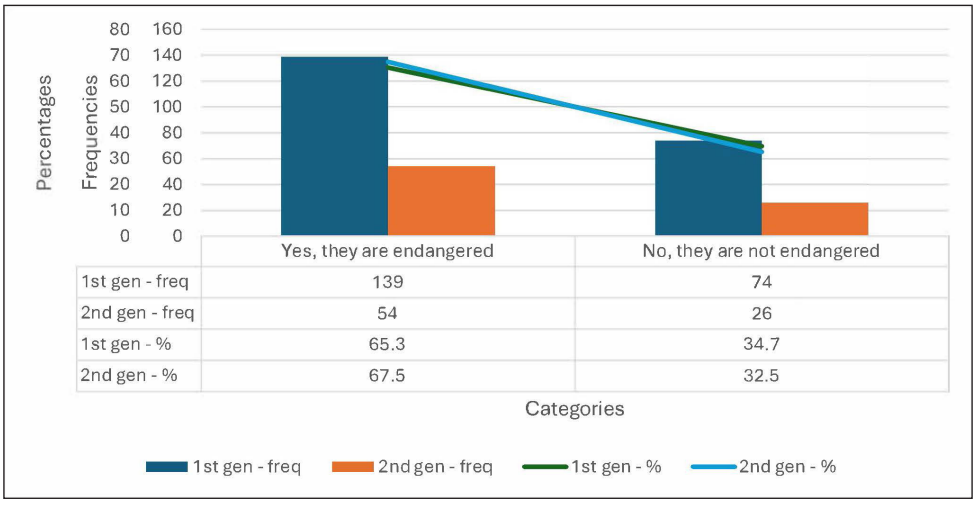


Figure 11: Perception of the threat to the culture, language, and traditions of the Croatian community in Slovenia.

Similarly, only 0.9% of first-generation participants and 2.5% of second-generation participants rated the current opportunities for learning Croatian as excellent (Figure 12).

20 $p > 0.05$
21 $p < 0.01$
22 $p < 0.01$

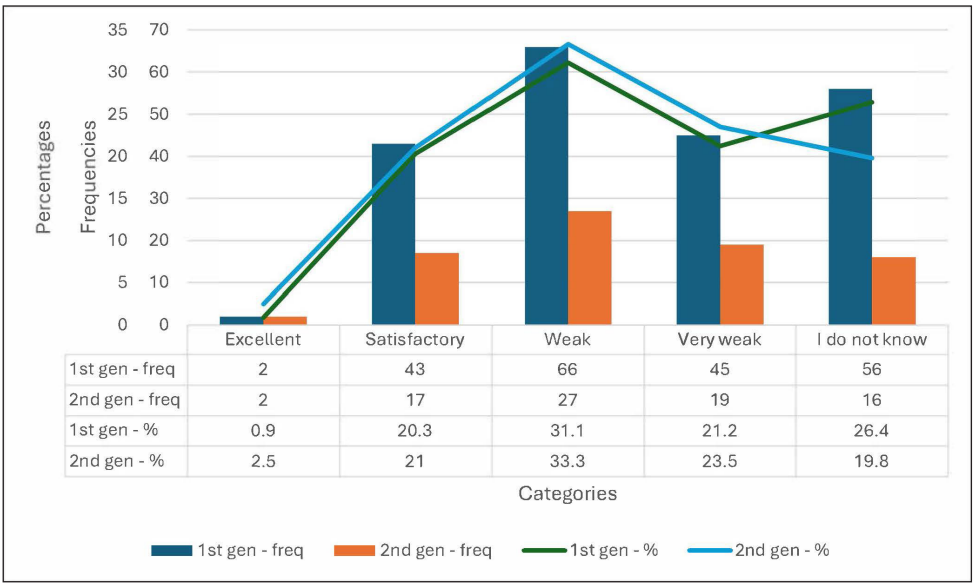


Figure 12: Assessment of the current opportunities for learning the Croatian language in Slovenia.

Such findings are unfavorable for several reasons. First, giving minorities the opportunity to be educated in their mother tongue is important for preserving their identity and for learning about their own culture (Mlekuž & Vršnik Perše, 2019). On the other hand, a poorly regulated educational system can contribute to socioeconomic inequalities between Croats and the majority population, possibly leading to different patterns of their integration. Additionally, the existing legislative framework also generates inequalities between the so-called "new minority communities" and the recognized minorities who are granted the opportunity to learn their own language within the regular educational curriculum. In contrast, Croats—as well as other members of the new national minorities—are offered this possibility only through elective courses, which previous research has already identified as being accompanied by numerous organizational challenges (Roter, 2007; Medvešek & Bešter, 2012; Mlinar & Peček, 2024). The data (Figure 13) indicate that the unfavorable circumstances within the educational system have already produced consequences. Although both the first and second generations express notably negative assessments of current opportunities for learning Croatian, as well as of culture and traditions within the educational system, a statistically significant intergenerational difference has emerged regarding the second generation's own involvement in preserving Croatian culture, language, and traditions. Considering that, in addition to the primary socialization environment—which includes family, friends, and peers—school is regarded as "the second most important factor in shaping ethnic identity" (Roter, 2007, p. 309), it is clear that the absence or inadequacy of existing

curricula, programs, and content within the educational system intended for this minority community may adversely affect the formation of their own identity and create difficulties in identifying with their minority group. Such circumstances may also have an unfavorable impact on participation in cultural association activities, as evidenced by the data presented, which show significantly lower involvement of second-generation Croats in such gatherings[23]—only one-third participate regularly, one-quarter never participate, and nearly half participate only occasionally.

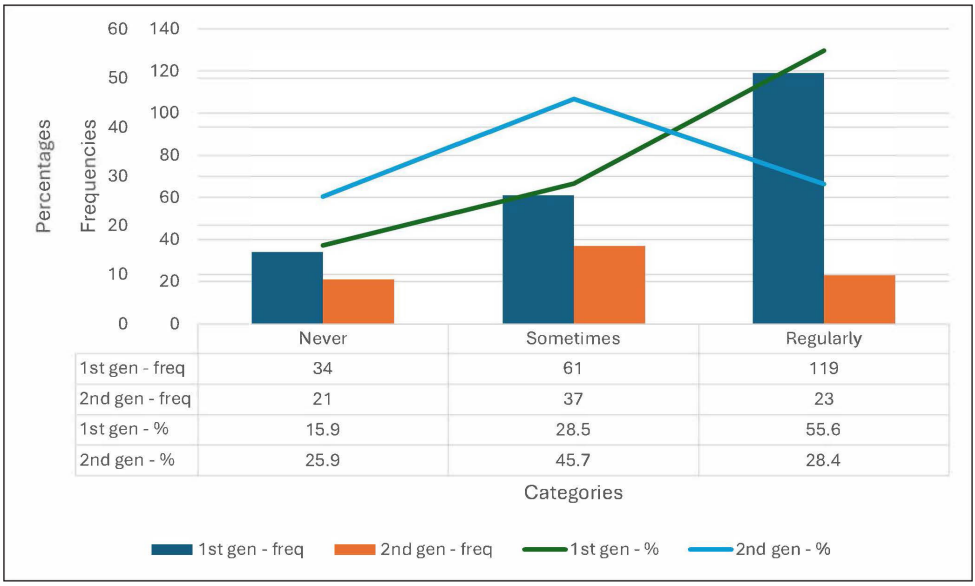


Figure 13: Participation in gatherings of Croats in Slovenia.

A statistically significant intergenerational difference[24] also appeared in terms of personal involvement in the work of associations, with the second generation being significantly less personally engaged in such work (Figure 14).

23 $p < 0.01$
24 $p < 0.01$

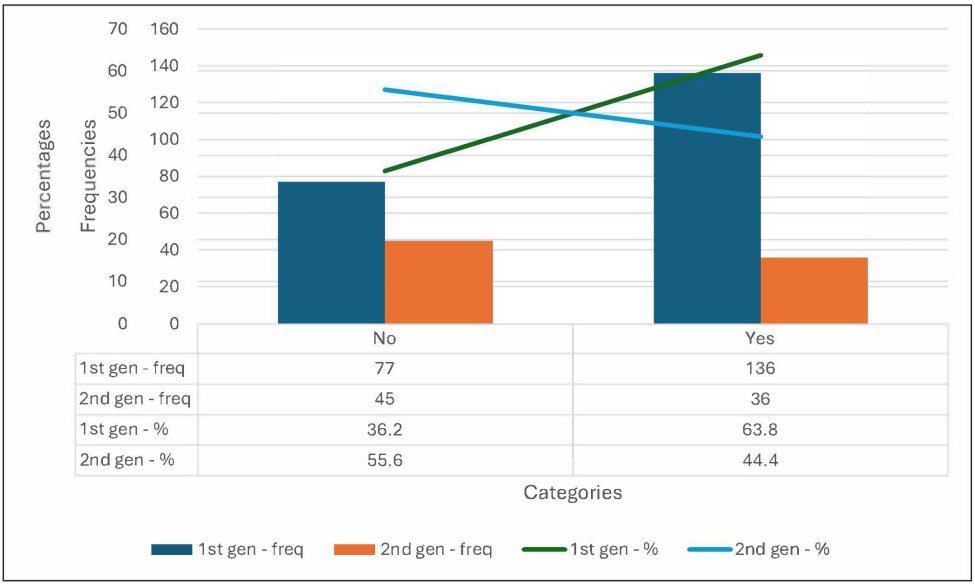


Figure 14: Personal involvement in the work of Croatian associations in Slovenia.

Also, an intergenerational difference emerged in the frequency of communication in the Croatian language with other family members (Figure 15).[25] While two-thirds of first-generation Croats communicate in Croatian daily, only slightly less than half of second-generation Croats do so, and almost one-fifth of them do not communicate in Croatian at all, while one-third do so only occasionally.

Less frequent participation in the activities of Croatian community associations, as well as reduced communication in Croatian, have been confirmed by several of the previously mentioned studies (Perić Kaselj et al., 2016; Novak et al., 2022).

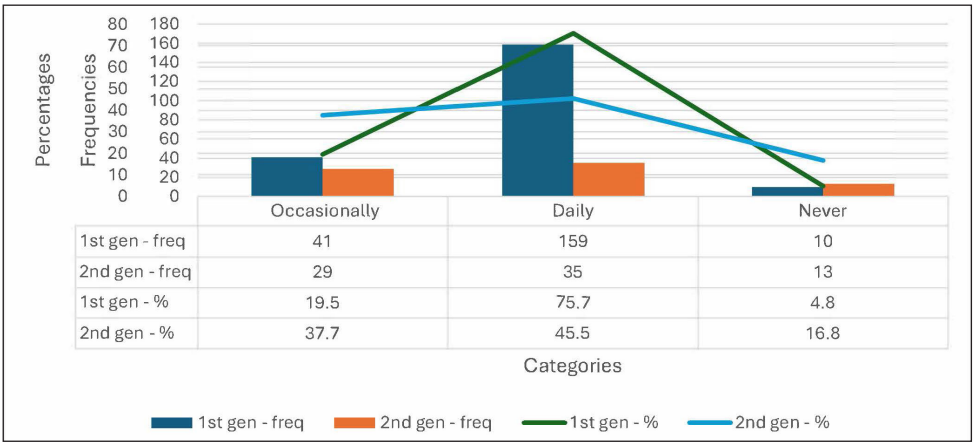


Figure 15: Frequency of communication in the Croatian language.

25 $p < 0.01$

CONCLUSION

The studied intergenerational differences in the integration of Croats in Slovenia, through the application of a four-dimensional integration model and a total of 18 selected indicators of structural, cultural, interactional, and identification integration, confirmed the concept which is grounded in the theory of segmented assimilation about the existence of different patterns of intergenerational integration, and the hypothesis of a different way of integration of first- and second-generation Croats in Slovenia.

Compared to previous findings on the structural dimension of integration, which show that members of ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia were over-represented in lower-prestige and lower-paid occupations according to the 2002 Population Census (Pirc et al., 2024), and that over time they became a minority community well integrated into the socioeconomic sphere, the findings of the present study confirm a favorable socioeconomic position for both generations, with a notable upward mobility trend observed among the second generation. The data on the high share of those dissatisfied with the existing legal status is expected. However, the high share of those indifferent to this issue across both generations is surprising. It can be concluded that signs of upward assimilation are observable even among a smaller segment of the first-generation members. This is further indicated by their lack of interest or indifference toward improving the status of Croats and toward preserving and nurturing their own language, culture, and traditions—most notably among those who rate their socioeconomic position more favorably. Among these participants, who constitute one-fifth of the first-generation sample, it is also evident that they do not habitually communicate in Croatian daily and never participate in the activities of Croatian community associations or organizations.

On the other hand, the results regarding the interactive dimension of integration indicate that the majority of Croats consider themselves to live in harmony and cooperation with the majority population. However, it was observed that members of the second generation are slightly more likely to assess inter-ethnic relations as less favorable, and slightly less likely to believe that Croats and Slovenes live side by side indifferently and do not like each other, but merely tolerate one another. These findings also confirm an overall improvement in the situation, despite the partial persistence of discrimination in the workplace regarding language use and in hiring practices (Plantak, 2021).

The data obtained on the identificational and cultural dimensions of integration most significantly reveal the dominant patterns of integration among the first and second generations of Croats in Slovenia. The results show that both generations attach great importance to their national affiliation and maintain frequent contact with family members in the homeland. However, among the second generation, ties with the homeland are weakening, as evidenced by less frequent communication with friends and less frequent consumption of Croatian media. Similarly,

while among the first generation the importance of national affiliation is reflected in undertaking independent activities to preserve and nurture Croatian culture, language, and customs, in strengthening ethnic cohesion through frequent social contacts with other members of the Croatian community and participation in Croatian gatherings, as well as in maintaining the use of the Croatian language, this is not observed among the second generation. Although they also perceive the possibility of preserving and nurturing Croatian culture, language, and customs as unfavorable, their own engagement aimed at improving the current situation is lacking. Maintaining social contacts with other Croats, participating in gatherings of Croatian community associations, and practicing communication in Croatian are poorly represented among the second generation, which suggests that their nationality is important only on a symbolic level.

From everything presented so far, it can be concluded that the first generation of Croats in Slovenia is dominated by plural integration. In contrast, upward assimilation is observed in the second generation. According to the applied theory of segmented assimilation, the pluralistic pattern of integration of the first generation of Croats in Slovenia is reflected in successful socioeconomic integration and efforts to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage (Zhou, 1997), as well as in the pursuit of improving their legal status and "achieving equal rights in all spheres of social life" (Costoiu, 2008, p. 4), which has also been confirmed by previous research. On the other hand, the obtained data on the second generation for the first time more comprehensively indicate their views on the current position of Croats in Slovenia and complement the previous findings on how the current structural opportunities in Slovenia are reflected in their own involvement in the preservation of the Croatian language, culture and customs, as well as the future of ethnic cohesion in this minority community. In this generation, there is a sense of incomplete belonging to their minority community, with previous research indicating that, given current circumstances, they face an identity crisis (Kralj, 2013; Perić Kaselj et al., 2016; Sedmak, 2018), meaning that feelings of insecurity and non-acceptance accompany their search for personal identity. Therefore, it is important to provide them with more adequate education in their mother tongue, as well as learning about their own culture, and to strengthen the community by offering sufficient financial support (from both the homeland and the host country) to the work of associations that can significantly contribute to maintaining social relations with other members, as well as preserving the mother tongue, culture, and customs. Otherwise, if certain circumstances remain unchanged, it can be concluded that upward assimilation will predominantly characterize Croats in Slovenia in the future.

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POVZETEK

MEDGENERACIJSKE RAZLIKE PRI INTEGRACIJI MANJŠIN V VEČINSKO DRUŽBO: PRIMER HRVATOV V SLOVENIJI

Ivana Bendra, Dražen Živić, Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić

Avtorji v študiji medgeneracijskih razlik pri integraciji Hrvatov v Sloveniji, temelječi na štiridimenzionalnem modelu in 18 kazalnikih, potrjujejo teorijo segmentirane asimilacije ter razlike v načinih integracije med prvo in drugo generacijo. Obe generaciji imata dober družbeno-ekonomsko položaj, pri čemer je pri drugi generaciji opazna jasna mobilnost navzgor. Mnogi med njimi so sicer še vedno nezadovoljni s svojim pravnim statusom, a je znaten tudi delež tistih, ki jih to vprašanje ne zanima, kar kaže na delno prilagajanje in sprejemanje.

Najbolj očitna vrzel med generacijama se kaže v kulturnem in identifikacijskem vidiku. Za prvo generacijo je poleg uspešne družbene in ekonomske integracije značilno tudi aktivno ohranjanje jezika, kulture in socialnih mrež v okviru združenj in z vsakodnevno rabo hrvaščine, pri drugi generaciji pa so vezi z domovino šibkejše – redkeje komunicirajo s sorodniki, manj uporabljajo hrvaške medije ter manj sodelujejo v dejavnostih skupnosti. Zanje nacionalna identiteta pogosto deluje na simbolni, in ne na praktični ravni.

Kar zadeva integracijo v večinsko družbo, večina Hrvatov opisuje odnose s slovensko večino kot složne, čeprav jih druga generacija vidi malo manj pozitivno in poroča o občasnih izkušnjah diskriminacije, zlasti na področju zaposlovanja in rabe jezika. Kljub temu pa splošni trend kaže na vse večjo socialno vključenost.

V splošnem je pri prvi generaciji zaznati pluralističen vzorec integracije – ekonomsko vključevanje v kombinaciji s prizadevanji za ohranjanje etničnega izročila – medtem ko je za drugo generacijo značilna t. i. asimilacija navzgor. To kaže na prilagajanje družbi države gostiteljice ter postopno izginjanje etnične identitete. Med mlajšimi Hrvati so očitni občutki nepopolne pripadnosti in negotove identitete, kar je v skladu z ugotovitvami predhodnih raziskav. Za izboljšanje stanja na tem področju je nujno okrepiti izobraževanje v hrvaškem jeziku, spodbujati kulturno zavest ter zagotoviti zadostno institucionalno in finančno podporo za skupnostna združenja. Takšni ukrepi bi pripomogli k ohranjanju socialne kohezije ter maternega jezika in kulturnih običajev.

Če se ta prizadevanja ne bodo okrepila, bo verjetno še naprej prevladovala asimilacija navzgor, kar bo vodilo k nadaljnji asimilaciji Hrvatov v slovensko večinsko družbo ter k postopni slabitvi njihove etnične in kulturne identitete.

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