

Dejan Valentinčič, *Medetnična integracija v lokalnem okolju. Primer Nove Gorice in Gorice*

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A couple of years ago, I tried to collect information about the ethnic policies in South-Eastern Europe for university teaching. Slovenian colleagues were very cooperative and supplied me with rich information about the social integration policies concerning Roma. This information was enough for resolving the tasks I had at that time. However, step by step, I learned more about the ethnic composition and inter-ethnic relations in Slovenian society. I was struck by the fact that the ethnic picture there was much more complex and complicated than the single case of the Roma minority. In addition, I received a lot of information about Slovenian ethnic minorities in the neighboring countries.

Then another surprise came when I noticed very few studies on the economic, political, and cultural integration of the one-tenth of the population of Slovenia that has a non-Slovenian or mixed ethnic identity. I wondered about this situation of the ethnic studies in Slovenia given the numerous, detailed, and very competent sociological studies on other areas of the country's social life. The explanation I received was that the topic was not particularly interesting since there were no noticeable interethnic tensions and conflicts in Slovenian society. The people with non-Slovenian or mixed ethnic identities were primarily migrants from the republics of the former Yugoslavia, having a similar historical experience and—at least partly—a similar mentality. The relations between the Slovenian minorities and the ethnic majorities in the neighboring countries were described in the same positive way, thus avoiding complications.

Now we have a pioneering work containing rich information about the reality of the interethnic relations in Slovenia with some reflections on the situation of Slovenian minorities abroad. Dejan Valentinčič has managed to discover, convincingly describe, and explain the major parameters of interethnic relations in Slovenian society by focusing on the situation in the municipality of Nova Gorica and adding a limited comparison with neighboring Gorizia in Italy. The choice is due to circumstances, but it is undoubtedly a lucky one. Interethnic relations in the area of Nova Gorica are particularly rich and interesting because of the very emergence of the town on green fields as an outcome of WWII. The migration due to the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the following economic and political turbulences has enriched the mosaic of ethnic groups in the municipality. However, wisely enough, the study's starting point is not the local interethnic situation in Gorizia/Nova Gorica but a theoretical elaboration on the fundamentals of Slovenian statehood. The second theoretical pillar of the empirical study is the juxtaposition of strategies for integrating ethnic minorities and the multiculturalist vision about the co-existence of ethnic groups. This conceptual framework shapes the orientation, ends, and means of the empirical study. They are transparent and productive.

The operationalization of the concepts of participation of non-Slovenians in the country's economic, political, and cultural life clearly shows the search for a theoretical and methodological balance between the extremes of the strategies of assimilation and multiculturalism. The logic of the face-to-face semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire for polling reveals the mutual support of theory and the methodology of empirical research. The statistical processing of the primary data follows the logic of the theoretical framework and the tools prepared for the field study.

The first stage in the implementation of the author's research strategy was a pilot study. Semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders were carried out in Nova Gorica and Gorizia. The author's target groups included civil servants at both municipalities, civil servants in the employment offices and centers for social affairs, police officers, and administrators in schools and humanitarian organizations. On this basis, Dr. Valentinčič prepared the tools for the major part of the study. He conducted sixty semi-structured interviews with migrants from former Yugoslavia and their descendants. Each of the six ethnic groups was represented by ten interviews. Twenty-five interviews were carried out with a control group of Slovenians. The interviews consisted of five blocks of questions. They cover the personal status, form and degree of economic, political, and cultural integration, and questions regarding the interviewee's minority status. This information is supplemented by the quantitative results of a survey of 149 non-Slovenians and 100 Slovenians from the control group. The questionnaire was structured in the same five blocks of questions as the interviews.

The comparison of the information about Nova Gorica and Gorizia is limited to the qualitative study data. In the study in Gorizia, immigrants from former Yugoslavia are included with immigrants from Albania, Romania, Bangladesh, China, and countries from the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. All in all, the information is based on forty-eight interviews with immigrants. The control group consists of eighteen persons. There are twelve Italians and six members of the autochthonous Slovenian minority. The field studies were conducted during 2015 and 2016. The analysis was carried out using a triangulation of methods, including calculations of communality, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test for Sampling Adequacy, Bartlett's test, variations, regressions, and combining the interpretation of graphs and tables and statements from the interviews.

The outcome of the theoretical and empirical work is the convincing picture of the often-neglected ethnic diversity of Slovenian society. Fortunately, unlike many other local situations on the territory of former Yugoslavia, there are no signs of noticeable interethnic tensions and conflicts in Slovenia. Nevertheless, some potential for future conflicts can be identified. The most important indicator for this is that second-generation immigrants feel less integrated into Nova Gorica. Some subsocieties have somewhat limited contacts and cooperation with the majority society. The most interesting findings and conclusions concern the three patterns of interethnic

integration. The level of economic integration is the highest, followed by political integration, whereas the level of cultural integration is the lowest.

There are hardly any conflicts between the different immigrant ethnic groups in Nova Gorica, while there are indications of conflicts between Italians and immigrants in Gorizia. In general, the interethnic integration in Gorizia is lower than in Nova Gorica, with one exception—the command of the majority language in Gorizia is better. Since the non-European immigration to Gorizia began, the relations between Italians and European immigrants have become less tense. Italians and members of the Slovenian minority in Gorizia predict the same to happen in Nova Gorica in the future. Still, some Italian interviewees see Southern Italians as the least favorable immigrants to their town.

One could only agree with the warning that this encouraging situation about Nova Gorica should not be interpreted in the sense that no policies for economic, political, and cultural integration of non-Slovenians into Slovenian society are necessary. The study shows that differences in the social status, dispositions, and action patterns of ethnic groups in Slovenia do exist and should be carefully considered in the social policies. The cross-border comparison with Gorizia in Italy helps to understand the situation from an additional angle and is also an important contribution of the book.

Dejan Valentinčič's monograph enriches the knowledge of the ethnic composition and interethnic relations in Slovenia in the context of the highly interesting ethnic compositions and interethnic relations in the republics of former Yugoslavia.

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