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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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The influence of geographical education on multicultural understanding and national identity in the Slovenian-Hungarian and Slovenian-Italian frontier regions

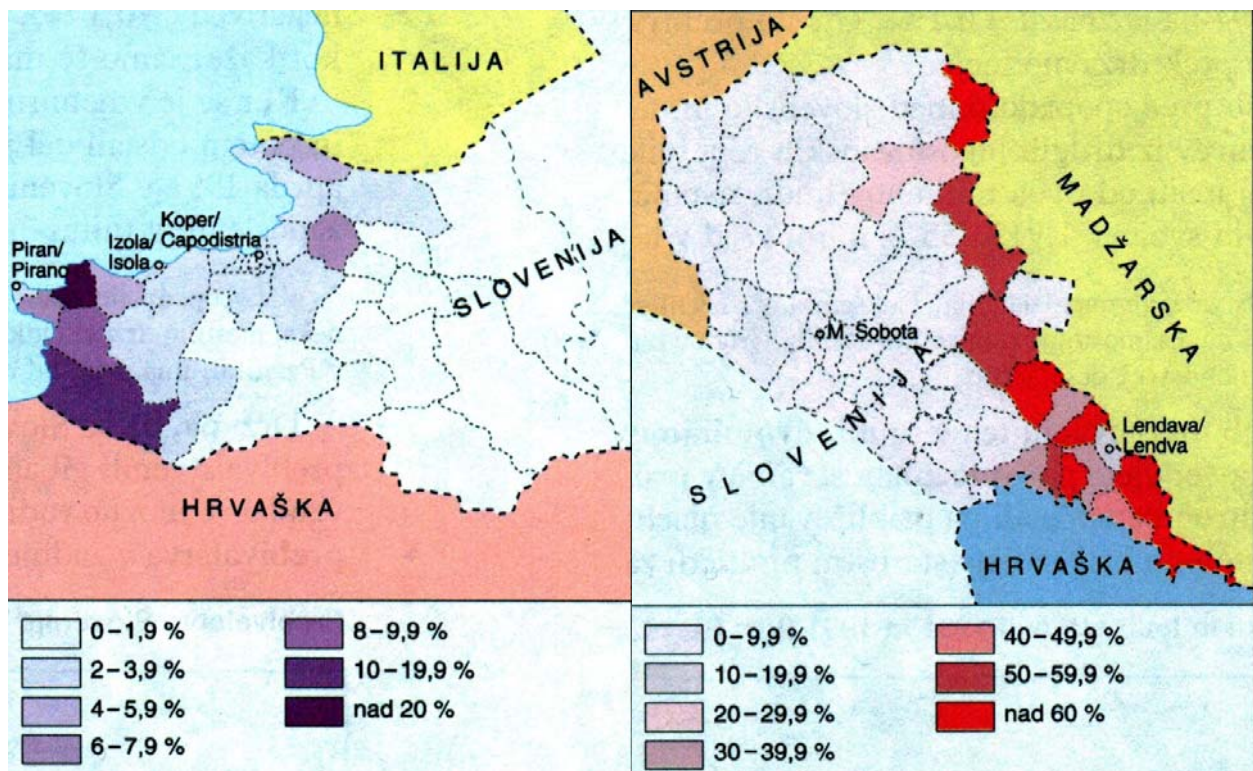
Karmen Kolenc-Kolnik
Univerza v Mariboru (Slovenia)

Introduction

The starting-point for our thinking is establishing links between the personal perspective of an individual's understanding of their cultural identity and both the individual and ethnic levels of living space and education. In multicultural areas, such as the two nationally mixed areas in the Republic of Slovenia, this should especially be directed to understanding, tolerance and mutual co-operation. This example of better multicultural knowing and understanding is presented through the teaching of geography.

The mixture of different cultural influences in Europe has been researched, as has the spatial effect, largely in the smaller border regions and in big cities. The main reason for this is that multicultural education was started in western European countries in order to better integrate young migrants. Slovenia was one of the first countries which tried to understand and respect the needs of minority members to preserve their cultural identity. This was achieved not only by assuring, but also by creating the legal basis to establish conditions for harmonising the life of the majority and the minority populations. One of the basic conditions for this harmonisation is the multicultural organisation of the school system.

Figure 1: Nationally mixed areas of Slovenia



Source: National Statistic Bureau, 1991

The political and social changes in the 1990's have meant our country has also been changing the aims and tasks of education. This has been especially important for Slovenia, a country with two national minorities living in its state, and with Slovenians living as national minorities in three neighbouring countries. For more than forty years the Italian and Hungarian minorities have legally been provided with the right to education in their native language as the basis for preserving their own identity. The main reason for this is that the whole educational process is especially important for developing equal inclusion of the minorities in the life and work of the majority. In Slovenia the special rights of the Italian and Hungarian minority in the field of upbringing and education are:

- establishing equal development of Italian, Hungarian and Slovenian nationalities;
- learning about the history, geography and culture of the native nation and encouraging pupils to develop their own creativity in their native language;
- developing multicultural understanding between the people of the Italian and Hungarian minorities and the Slovenian nation, and also increasing the development of bilingualism in nationally mixed areas;
- creating multicultural relationships in which the Italian and Hungarian minorities would be perceived as a demonstration of understanding between neighbouring nations and states and as indicative of creative national co-operation.

The national minorities are therefore given the right in law to education in their own language and the preservation of their own identity. This right is exercised differently by each of the minorities, as decided by themselves.

The Italian minority

Members of the Italian national minority receive education in the Italian language. Schools teaching in Italian are spread throughout the nationally mixed areas of Koper, Izola and Piran. In each community there is at least one primary school, some smaller schools with only four grades, and kindergartens in which Italian is spoken. There are also three secondary schools with Italian: two gymnasiums and one professional school. After finishing secondary school, the pupils are also able to continue their education in colleges or universities in Italy.

The Hungarian minority

In the bilingual areas of Lendava and Murska Sobota work in kindergartens and schools is carried out in both Slovenian and Hungarian. This enables pupils to know both languages and cultures: classes are held together for all members of the majority and the minority cultures. Through establishing active bilingualism in this way, the members of the majority can study from pre-school level the second language - the language of their environment. In recent years there have been several small changes, separating classes of native language and language of the environment. Other changes are planned for subjects especially important for forming national identity - geography and history. The only bilingual secondary school is in Lendava. Pupils can also continue their secondary education in Hungary.

Multiculturalism and geography education

The basic principles of geographical education come from the directives of the European Commission for geographical education, through the International Geographical Union (IGU), and establish that geographical education contributes greatly to international education. Changes in the last decade in the political, national and cultural condition of Europe, and further planned integration of the European Union, have accelerated the development of educational policies, towards a systematic emphasis on forming a multicultural community. In Slovenia we are proud to have already done much in the renovation of the geographical curriculum and our textbooks. The multicultural aspect in geographical education is seen in our geographical educational aims and contents, that are intended for all Slovenian pupils in primary and secondary schools, and in the adaptations made for nationally mixed areas.

Among the eleven global educational aims in Slovenian primary school is one that requires that pupils: 'learn about the rich diversity of nations and are brought up to respect differences and to be tolerant towards people of different religion, race, language and customs'. The importance of international understanding and co-operation is seen in practical educational aims at local, regional, state, European and global level.

In secondary gymnasiums the Slovene Examination Commission for geography has prepared adaptations of the examination syllabus for geography for students from the Italian and Hungarian minorities in mixed areas (RIC, 1994). In the Slovenian-Italian mixed area of Koper Primorje, the 35 school lessons that have been designated for discussion of the home province are used for discussion about the geography of Italy. For the bilingual pupils of the Slovenian-Hungarian Secondary School in Lendava taking the *abitura* examination in geography, these 35 lessons about the home province are used for discussion of the geography of Hungary. Pupils of both minorities studying for the *abitura* geography examination use additional geography texts written by Italian and Hungarian authors. Candidates in the *abitura* have the right to choose to work in the Slovenian, Italian or Hungarian language.

The research on international understanding and co-operation in the light of geographical upbringing and education

The research addressed the question of the rate and manner in which geographical education can form secondary-school pupils' spatial ideas, and contribute to the individual's education and upbringing in the nationally mixed areas in the state border regions. Particular attention was given to multicultural viewpoints in geographical education. The research took place between May 1995 and December 1996. Our basic aims were researching spatial ideas, understanding and the evaluation of the domestic frontier region in secondary school geographical education, using interdisciplinary methods. Our results have been at two levels.

The first level has been the establishment of the didactics of geography and secondary school geography, through the comparative analysis of the geographical curriculum. This has included the two neighbouring countries of Italy and Hungary, because of the need to know one another's viewpoint. In Slovenia there was also an analysis of the contents about Italy and Hungary found in secondary school textbooks, workbooks and atlases.

The second level has been at the individual level, selected from the secondary school populations and the frontier Slovenian-Italian and Slovenian-Hungarian regions. Results show many impacts on pupils' views and understanding of neighbouring countries. There has been a special stress on the role of geography learning in this.

Only a minor part of the research can be presented in this article, concerning the opinions of secondary school pupils on the characteristics of life in their domestic regions or border regions, and about the meaning of multicultural harmony.

Youth and life in nationally mixed border regions

What young people think about potential development and their perspective of life in the border area is a critical question in planning the development of the border regions. Today's young people will in the future either co-operate or become increasingly intolerant. The important question is what does his or her spatial and national identity mean to a young person in Europe today, particularly in areas of multicultural diversity and in border regions. An individual's diverse 'views of the space' are a mixture of concrete perceptions, experiences and abilities to understand, generalise and make abstractions of ideas of space. From this, 'knowing' and 'understanding' about a particular area is only partial and subjective. Among the most frequently found factors that influence young people's perceptions and evaluations of geographical space are: personal characteristics and individual experiences; the influence of primary reference groups, such as parents, relatives, schoolmates and friends; school teaching; mass media; and the broader social community (nation or state) that establishes the social system. In all of these are linked emotions, customs and information, which form and inform the pupils' values around what they accept and reject (Downs and Lynn 1991, Haubrich 1996, etc.).

Our main goal was to find out how much the views held by typical Slovenian secondary school pupils from the border regions compared with students living in the central part of the state. We studied the spatial identity of selected Slovenian secondary school pupils and their understanding of aspects of life in the border area. Two thematic goals and hypotheses were identified:

- a. *The understanding of life in the border area, and attitudes towards the border*
Hypothesis: Most pupils will see the state border as an unimportant administrative formality, but there will be differences in pupils' opinions, depending on which border regions they come from. Most will agree with the statement that life is more interesting in the areas in which different cultures, nations and races mix.
- b. *The feeling of 'belonging' to a certain space*
Hypothesis: Individuals will differ in their view of spatial belonging (local, regional, national, international), and in the extent of their wish to live elsewhere. The larger the size of their spatial area of belonging, the smaller will be the readiness to migrate.

This research is descriptive rather than experimental: it follows previous research of the phenomenon, and seeks causal connections between individual parameters. It is based on an anonymous survey of secondary school pupils, with a 14 point questionnaire. Only four of these questions will be analysed in this article. Data from the questionnaires was used to calculate the percentage of answers and the χ^2 test of statistical importance of differences. All statistical procedures are taken from Sagadin (1992). We used questions

of the type used in Slovenian public opinion research - SPO (94/2 and 94/4), because the results of that research could be used for comparison and explanation of the differences between sample groups. The research took place between the summer of 1994 and the summer of 1998.

Characteristics of the population

523 third year secondary school pupils from chosen secondary schools in Slovenia (average age 17.1 years) were asked to complete the questionnaires. The sample contained 298 girls (56.9%) and 225 boys (43.1%). 92.3% of them were of Slovenian nationality and 7.7% from other nationalities (Hungarian 19, Italian 4, Serbian 4, Croatian 7, and 6 pupils who did not provide this information). The pupils from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th groups lived in border regions, and those from the 5th lived in central Slovenia.

The characteristics of individual empirical groups were as follows:

- 1st group: 121 third year gymnasium pupils (Piran, Koper, G.K.C. Koper, Nova Gorica, Tolmin) who live and study in the Slovenian-Italian border region, mixed area;
- 2nd group: 103 pupils who are enrolled in the third year of gymnasium in the Slovenian-Hungarian border mixed area (Murska Sobota and Lendava);
- 3rd group: 96 pupils who live in the Slovenian-Croatian border area and come from three different gymnasiums (Brežice, Kočevje and Ptuj);
- 4th group: 83 pupils from areas close to the Slovenian-Austrian border from three secondary schools (Gymnasiums Jesenice and Ravne na Koroškem and Srednja gostinska šola Radenci);
- 5th group: 120 third year secondary school pupils from Celje and Ljubljana (Gymnasiums Lava and Šentvid). This group represents the central Slovenia, where the direct influence of the state border is supposed to be the lowest.

Analysis and findings

Understanding of life in the state border area, and attitudes toward the border. Students' level of isolation was shown in their attitudes to the border crossing, and also in their ideas towards the territorial confinement of their world view, and their personal feelings of the advantages and disadvantages of living close to the state border. 509 pupils answered the question about their attitude toward state border. They chose one of the five given options: was the border best described as a dividing line, a formality, unnecessary, as a door to neighbouring states or as a shield against foreigners. This question showed the highest level of significance in the responses given, with $\chi^2 = 24.00 > \chi^2 = 23,5$ ($P = 0.10$; $g = 16$).

Figure 2a: How school pupils in different areas of Slovenia view the state border

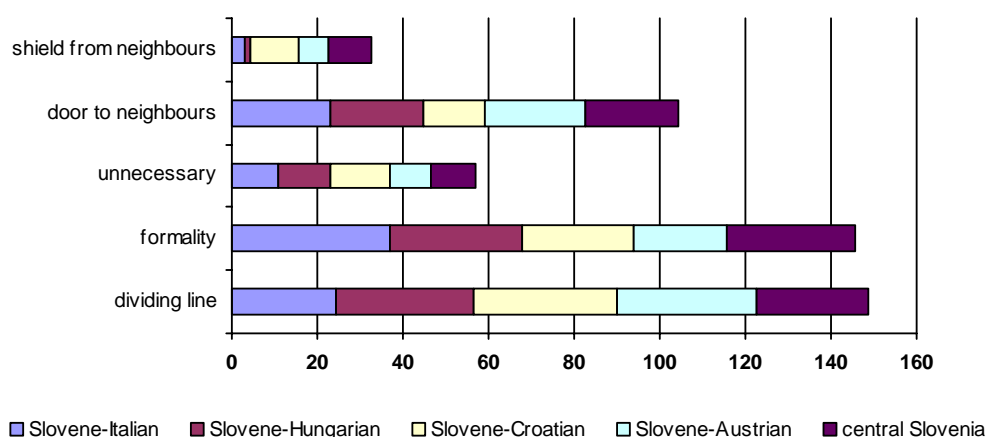
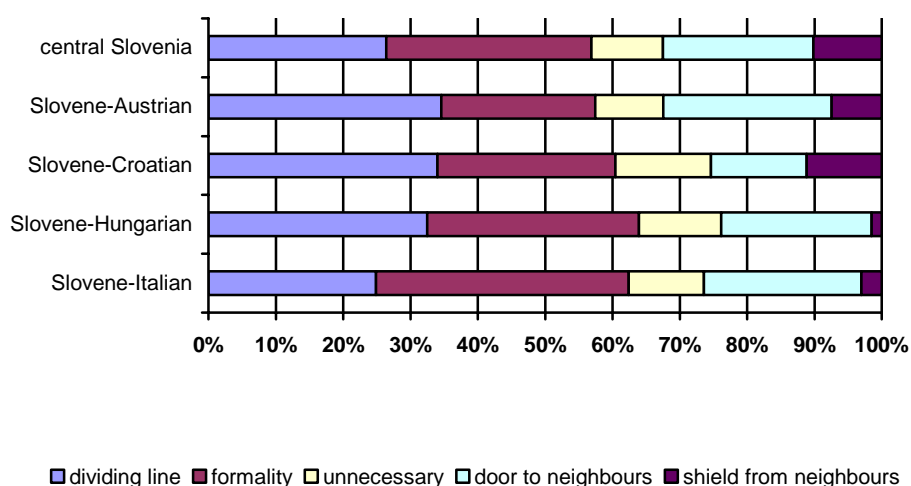


Figure 2b: Different views of the State border: views of pupils from different regions



The highest degree of openness towards the border, which was felt by most to be a formality, was shown among the young people living at borders with national minorities on both sides. Their experience of the border was as a dividing-line, but they saw it in a more positive way, as a door to the neighbour rather than as a shield from foreigners. The most mixed responses and areas of obvious uncertainty among the groups surveyed were shown by young people near the Slovenian-Croatian border. Secondary school pupils from this border region experienced the border more as a dividing-line, and saw it as a security against foreigners. Only 14.3% saw the state border as unnecessary and as a door to neighbouring countries. Pupils from central Slovenia show middle-range opinions on all the answers: the border was accepted in a more positive way by them.

We tried to find out how positive the young people were towards the multicultural diversity which is characteristic of most border regions, by asking how much they agreed with the statement that life is more interesting where the cultures, nations and races mix. 519 pupils answered this question.

Figure 3a: How school pupils in different regions of Croatia view cultural diversity

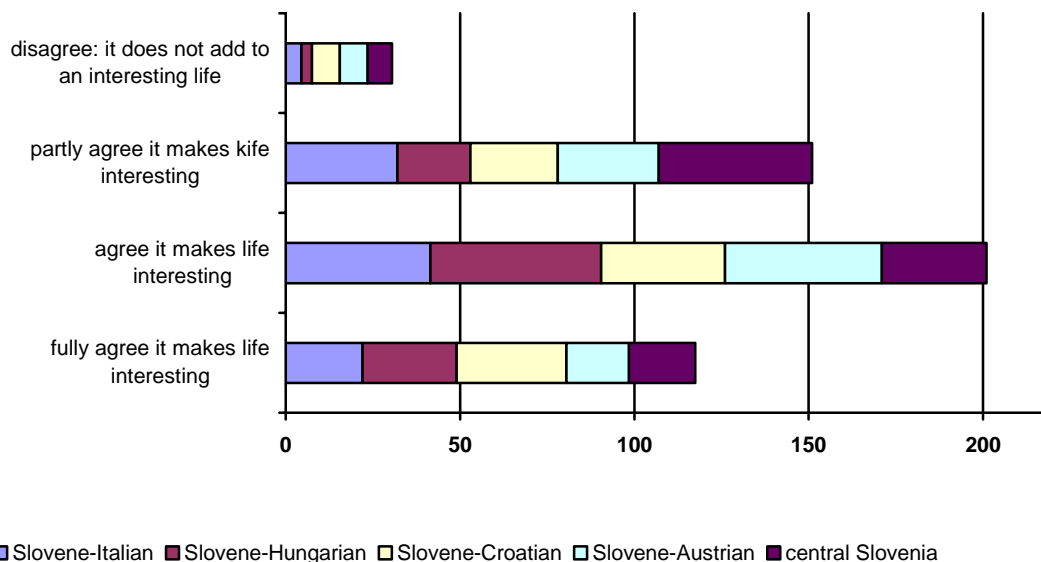
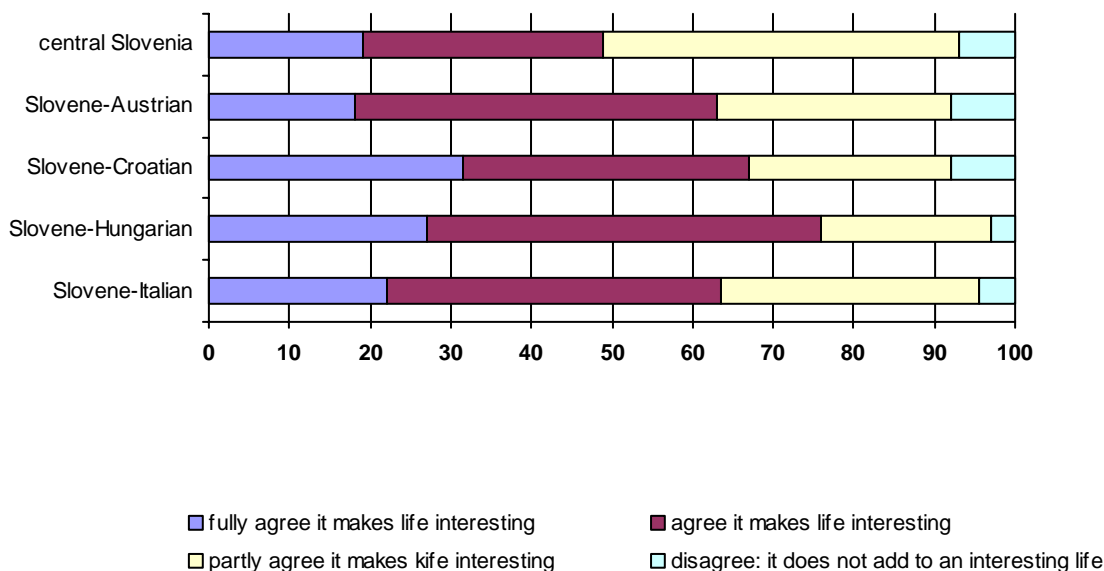


Figure 3b: Different views of cultural diversity: school pupils from different regions



The calculated value of $\chi^2 = 19.4$, exceeding the critical value $\chi^2 = 16.81$ ($P = 0.01$; $g = 6$). Differences in the level of significance between the groups are statistically confirmed. The 1st and 2nd empirical groups, who both live in nationally mixed areas, show the highest level of agreement with the statement, and are more inclined to ethnic pluralism. Pupils from central Slovenia (5th group) were much more reserved towards other cultures, nations and races. This group came closest to SPO (Klinar, 1994,424) where: ‘...almost half of those surveyed supposed that mixing of different ethnic groups brings trouble’ rather than advantages.

Part of our working hypothesis is thus confirmed where the attitude towards the state border was that it was a necessary administrative formality. But the other part of the hypothesis - that there would be greater agreement by young people about the meaning of multicultural harmony - is not proven.

The second set of questions concerned the feeling of belonging to a particular area, linked to a level of readiness for migration. 525 pupils answered the question ‘which of the following areas do you feel you belong to: your domestic town, your domestic region, Slovenia, the Alpine-Adriatic area or to Europe. The value $\chi^2 = 59.76$ exceeds the critical value $\chi^2 = 39.25$ ($P = 0.001$; $g = 8$). The differences between the answers of different groups are statistically significant, and show in all five categories of spatial belonging.

Figure 4a: How school pupils in different regions of Slovenia identify with different areas

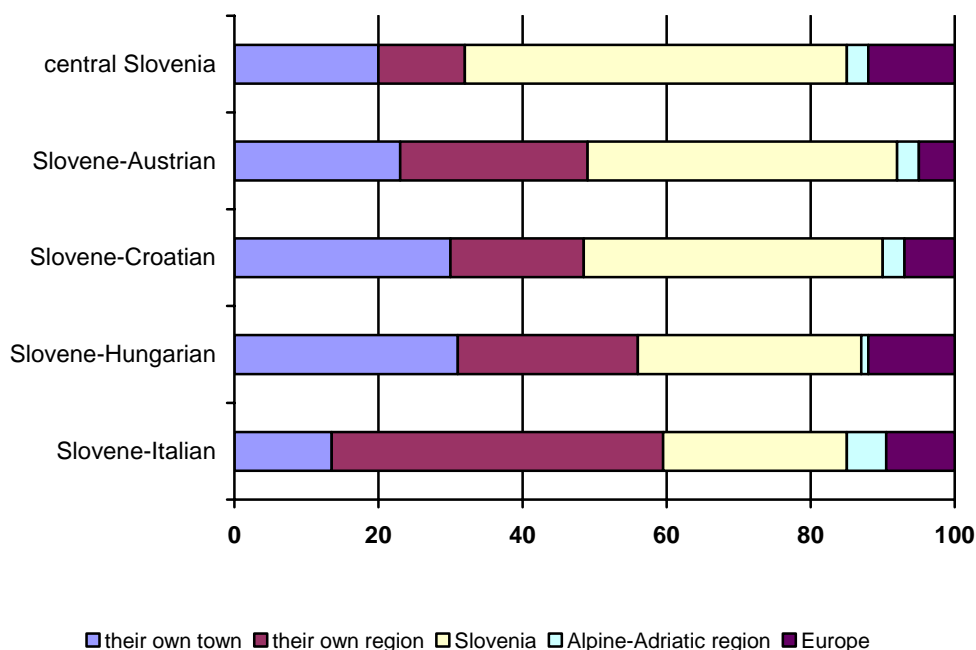
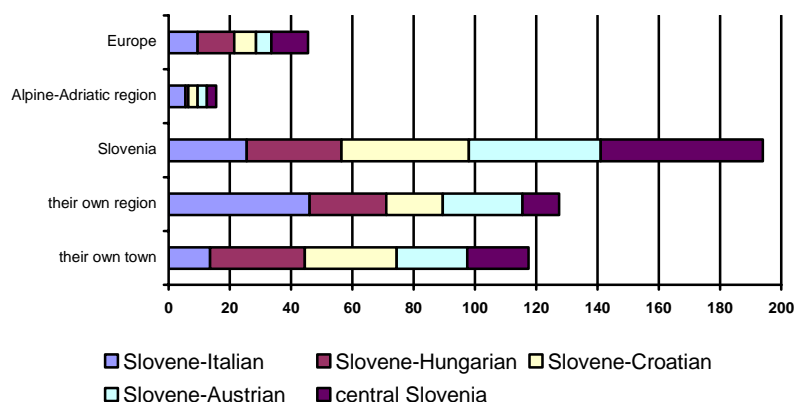


Figure 4b: Identification with different regions: school pupils from different regions



The majority of the sum of all groups declared for Slovenia (195 or 37.1%). Declaring for this state identity was more pronounced than the average by the 3rd (41.7%), 4th (42.7%) and 5th. It is somewhat lower, but still in first place in the 2nd group (31.4%). This group gave almost the same number as belonging to the domestic town or village (30.4%). Pupils from Slovenian-Italian border (1st group) show a much more pronounced attachment to their domestic region than to Slovenia (46.6%).

All groups showed the lowest percentage felt that they belonged to the Alpine-Adriatic area. Overall, 6.4% of pupils felt more ‘European’ compared to those surveyed in the 1994 SPO survey (3.7%). The group of pupils from central Slovenia (5th group) showed the patterns most consistent with the opinions given in the SPO survey, where 59.0% decided for Slovenia, 23.1% for home town and 13.5% for the region.

We also wanted to examine the level of pupils’ readiness to move locally in the region, in the country or away from their country. The answers were categorised on a scale of 5 grades, from very high readiness to migrate to being absolutely unprepared to do this. 433 pupils answered the first question and 467 the second ($\chi^2 = 51.67 > \chi^2 = 45,32$ ($P = 0.001$; $g = 20$)).

Figure 5a: How prepared school pupils from different regions of Slovenia are to migrate to different areas in Slovenia / parts of the world

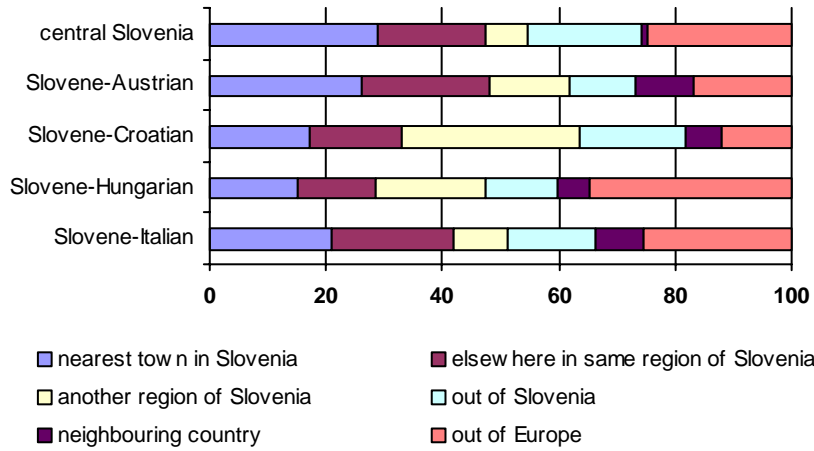
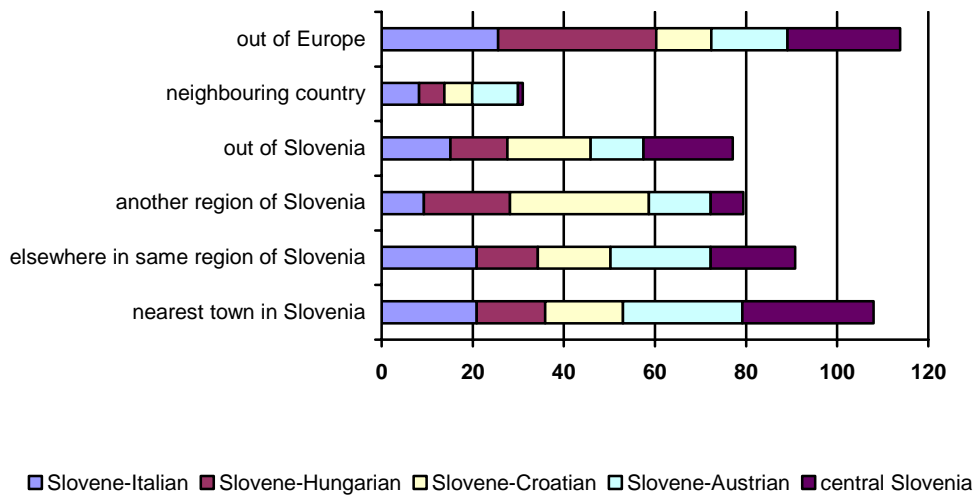


Figure 5b: Readiness to migrate to different areas: school pupils from different regions



The pupils showed different readiness to migrate ($\chi^2 = 53.66 > \chi^2 = 45.32$, $P = 0.001$; $g = 20$).

The majority of those surveyed were attached to Slovenia, and selected it as their desired country. The majority are also attached to their domestic region. They are more ready to move out of Europe (22.9%) than to move to the closest neighbouring country (6.2%).

The large differences between each group are very interesting. Most similarities were found between pupils from the 1st and the 5th groups, especially in their readiness to move out of Slovenia and their unwillingness to move to another Slovenian region. The answers given by the 2nd group show the lowest percentage of pupils who are not prepared to migrate (29.1%) and the highest level of those who are prepared to do so (42.7%). The highest level of refusal to migrate was shown by the pupils from Brežice, Kočevje and Ptuj (3rd group). The pupils living at the Slovenian-Austrian border showed the most willingness to migration in the narrowest, local area. They are the only group which showed that the element of distance was important in their decision.

The working hypothesis established earlier can only partially be confirmed. There are different opinions towards spatial belonging and the wish to live elsewhere shown by different groups. We cannot confirm that the larger the given distance, the smaller the readiness to migrate. The element of distance did not prevail: it was more important which region the pupils came from.

Conclusion

The survey is of a small selected population of secondary school pupils. However it is important because it shows the attitudes of future intellectuals and those who will be responsible for social development in their domestic regions. We have known that the level of economic development and the international connections of border regions are important for the quality of life. This is confirmed by the responses of the pupils who live in the Slovenian-Italian border area, and is largely confirmed by the pupils from the Slovenian-Austrian border regions. A relatively low level of attachment to the domestic border region has been demonstrated (for example by the youth from Slovenian-Hungarian and Slovenian-Croatian border regions) which raises questions about who will inhabit and develop such border regions in the future, if the local people are not going to do so.

Secondary school pupils from the selected frontier regions show the greatest attachment to their domestic town and region, and less to Slovenia, but they define Slovenia as the country where they want to live. There is not much European spirit. Secondary school pupils tend to define the border as an unnecessary administrative formality. They are very similar in defining the advantages of life at the border, but differ in enumerating and defining the disadvantages. Teenagers living in the frontier regions are more sympathetic to the ideas of multiculturalism than their peers from central Slovenia.

The social structure and the level of openness and connections with neighbouring states influences teenagers' ideas in terms of their personal identification and perspective towards their domestic region. Statistically important differences exist between the evaluations of students living in the domestic regions of the Slovenian-Italian and the Slovenian-Hungarian border. Geographical education does not influence the knowledge about the neighbouring countries very much. School knowledge about these countries does not bring about a better understanding. To live at the border does not directly mean one has a better geographical knowledge about the neighbouring country, but it does influence the larger multicultural attitudes of young people.

We also tried to find out how much importance the curriculum and particularly the aims of geographical education gave to the neighbours of Slovenia - Italy and Hungary - and also to the national minorities living within Slovenia. We found that the geographical gave

many opportunities for studying neighbouring countries and national minorities. A complex understanding of the border areas and of the evaluation of national identity and international co-operation is a very important element in regional studies. If we wish to get a better estimation of the possibilities for development, we have to consider the opinions of the young people: their personal ideas about real space in our border regions are different to the opinions of older people (as shown in the SPO) and also to the social reality and geographical reality of these areas.

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