

”Interdisciplinarity and the Future of Multilingualism Research”

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**What does the case of Vojvodina tell us about multilingualism,
mobility, inclusion and power relations?**



Research: field, questions, methods

- WPI: language, law and politics – the case of Vojvodina (Serbia), a multilingual border region
- Legal framework (Q1): how does it work in practice? (*de iure* vs. *de facto* multilingualism)
- Kin-state policies (Q2): find ways in which multilingualism at the intersection of mobility and inclusion can be analysed in a meaningful way
 - National minorities or claimed co-ethnics in a liminal position, e.g. the case of Bunjevci
 - Extra-territorial citizenship policies, e.g. facilitated naturalisation by Hungary
- Theoretical contribution
 - Macro, mezo and micro level dynamics, opportunities and constraints (relationship between EU conditionality, language regime of the nationalizing state, autonomy of Vojvodina, everyday choices)
 - Refine Rogers Brubaker's „triadic nexus” model
 - Taxonomy on conflict-inducing processes along ethnic and linguistic „fault-lines in Europe
- Interviews (with Gy. Horváth): reflect the variety and heterogeneity of positions in terms of
 - ethnicity (e.g. Bosniak, Bulgarian, Bunjevac, Croat, Hungarian, Serb, Slovak positions);
 - locality (*Belo Blato, Dobričevo, Gudurica, Kanjiža, Mužlja, Novi Pazar, Novi Sad, Palić, Senta, Skorenovac, Subotica, Tavankut, Vršac, Zrenjanin*);
 - level of agency (local, provincial, state and international level actors, kin-state representatives);
 - professional background (legal experts, officials, politicians, teachers, priests, members or activists of cultural organisations, ordinary people, diplomats, ombudsperson)
- Legal documents and fact-finding reports
 - published by provincial ombudsperson, language right monitoring team, Hungarian Language Office, European Commission, Committee of Experts on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Serbia's government (Action Plan for the Realization of the Rights of National Minorities)

Ethnic composition of Serbia and Vojvodina (2011)^a

^a Table 3 contains also data on the southern parts of Serbia for comparison but excludes the Belgrade region

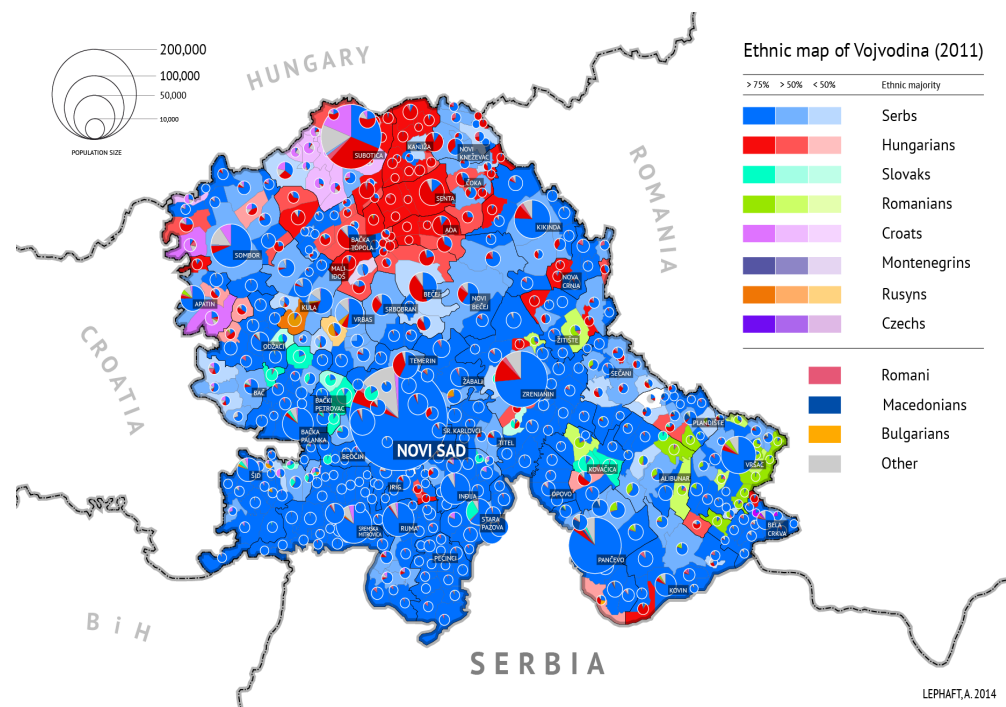
^b including Šumadija and West Serbia as well as South and East Serbia regions

^c incomplete coverage because the Albanians of the Preševo Valley boycotted the 2011 census (in 2002 the census recorded 61,647 Albanians in Serbia without Kosovo)

^d Rusyns with another ethnonym

Source: *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 2011. u Republici Srbiji (2012)*

Ethnicity	Serbia		Vojvodina region		Southern parts of Serbia ^b	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Serbs	5,988,150	83.32	1,289,635	66.76	3,193,067	88.80
Albanians ^c	5,809	0.08	2,251	0.12	2,306	0.06
Bosniaks	145,278	2.02	780	0.04	142,902	3.97
Bulgarians	18,543	0.26	1,489	0.08	15,866	0.44
Bunjevci	16,706	0.23	16,469	0.85	65	0.00
Croats	57,900	0.81	47,033	2.43	3,115	0.09
Germans	4,064	0.06	3,272	0.17	294	0.01
Goranci	7,767	0.11	1,179	0.06	1,260	0.04
Hungarians	253,899	3.53	251,136	13.00	953	0.03
Macedonian s	22,755	0.32	10,392	0.54	5,393	0.15
Montenegrin s	38,527	0.54	22,141	1.15	6,484	0.18
Muslims	22,301	0.31	3,360	0.17	14,945	0.42
Roma people	147,604	2.05	42,391	2.19	77,888	2.17
Romanians	29,332	0.41	25,410	1.32	2,640	0.07
Russians	3,247	0.05	1,173	0.06	773	0.02
Ruthenians ^d	14,246	0.20	13,928	0.72	73	0.00
Slovaks	52,750	0.73	50,321	2.60	325	0.01
Slovenians	4,033	0.06	1,815	0.09	679	0.02
Ukrainians	4,903	0.07	4,202	0.22	283	0.01
Vlachs	35,330	0.49	170	0.01	34,978	0.97
Yugoslavs	23,303	0.32	12,176	0.63	3,066	0.09
Other	17,558	0.24	6,710	0.35	3,765	0.10
Regional affiliation	30,771	0.43	28,567	1.48	915	0.03
Did not declare	160,346	2.23	81,018	4.19	40,357	1.12
Unknown	81,740	1.14	14,791	0.77	43,221	1.20
Together	7,186,862	100.00	1,931,809	100.00	3,595,613	100.00



Language regime of Serbia



- Serbia is an asymmetrically decentralized unitary state with one autonomous province: Vojvodina
- The multiethnic and multilingual make-up of Vojvodina as a border region is not reflected adequately in legislation nor in practice
- Limits territories where minority language rights can be claimed
 - 15% threshold at state-level, local self-government units (LSGUs)
 - 25% threshold at provincial level, villages and settlements
- Restrictive approach: limits Vojvodina's capacity to improve conditions of multilingualism to the repetition of state laws



Multilingualism in Vojvodina

- 2011 census: more than 33% non-Serbs (cf. less than 17% non-Serbs within Serbia)
 - Hungarians 13, Slovaks 2.6, Croats 2.43, Roma 2.19, Romanians 1.32, Montenegrins 1.15, Bunjevci 0.85, Ruthenians 0.72 per cent etc.
- In official use 9 national minority languages
 - Hungarian in the entire or partial territory of 31 LSGUs, Slovakian in 13, Romanian in 10, Ruthenian in 6, Croatian in 4, Macedonian in 2, Czech, Montenegrin and Bulgarian in 1 each
- Mapping various terrains of language rights enforcement
 - Linguistic landscape (public signs and street names); communication with public authorities and officials (hospital, post office, judicial proceedings); proportional representation of national minorities among the employees; textbooks and language of instruction in schools and translation of personal documents and transcription of names
- Variation in cases: from lived multilingualism (e.g. *Belo Blato*, Hun. *Nagyzerzsébetlak*, Slov. *Biele Blato*) to conflict (e.g. *Temerin*)



Implementation gap

- Pseudo multilingual practice: national legal framework is good, the application of laws is inconsistent and faces many obstacles:
 - lack of will and/or resource;
 - nationalizing state's logic;
 - lack of legal consciousness;
 - local and regional branches of state-level institutions are not sensitive to local context
- Incoherence in language rights enforcement (non-application or circumvention of the laws) helps undermine social inclusion
- Proportional representation of national minorities in labour market – barriers:
 - belonging to and speaking the language of a national minority do not overlap;
 - no obligation to declare national affiliation;
 - no proof of command of a national minority language is required



Kin-state policies I.



- Claimed co-ethnics and loyalty competition
 - Br/othering or dual othering, stigmatization by both home and kin-state majorities (also Serbs from Croatia and BiH *dođosi*)
 - Influence on also language use, e.g. in Bunjevci - Croat, Muslim - Bosniak, Vlach - Romanian relation
- Bunjevci textbook affair (2014)
 - Content and script of textbook: highly contested issue in a border region where ambivalent identities and loyalties („national indifference”) are endangered by competing nation-building projects
 - Serbia: donation of textbooks in Cyrillic letters to Bunjevci children; contribution to the standardisation of the Bunjevac language – „promote the situation of national minorities”; Bunjevci are „neither Serbs (i.e. „Catholic Serbs”) nor Croats”
 - Reactions from Croatia: an „insult”, the latest manifestation of the politics of annihilation of Croat language and culture in the territory of Vojvodina” – Bunjevci are „part of the Croat nation”
 - Also the Croat community in Serbia raised the issue of textbooks with Latin letters during the drafting process of the Action Plan for the Realization of the Rights of National Minorities
- Identity play: the case of *Tavankut*
 - Special classes for Bunjevci pupils in primary school
 - Serb parents enrolling children in the Bunjevac class: response to material incentives (textbook package, free visit to Croatia provided by the „kin-state”)
 - No linguistic barriers: speaking „Bunjevac” does not require extra efforts from local Serbs

Kin-state policies 2.



- Extra-territorial citizenship policies: Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary
- Mobilise language skills, family histories and personal connections in order to acquire EU citizenship via Bulgarian, Croat or Hungarian citizenship
 - Acquisition of Hungarian citizenship by facilitated naturalisation: conditioned by citizenship of the Hungarian Kingdom before 1920 instead of ethnicity
 - Language test: identity play, strategic use of identity repertoire
- Citizenship as a tool for labour migration within the EU (access to diverse resources) and identity security (prevent linguistic assimilation)
 - Indirect tool for language revival and dissimilation?
- (Unintended) consequences: growing prestige of national minority languages; emigration potential („emptification” of settlements with national minority communities)
 - Non-Hungarians attending Hungarian classes in language schools
 - Transit migration: Germany and Austria mentioned as the main destination countries



Macro environment

- International minority rights norms are often contested and subordinated to geopolitical interests
- Without a robust and common European minority rights regime, EU member states remain unaccountable for the non-implementation of minority protection commitments
- The primacy of domestic party politics often overpowers the influence of EU conditionality
- Case: UNCHR and Serbia's state gov. cooperation, Kosovar Roma from Western Europe into settlements with national minority communities in Vojvodina
 - Local protests: use humanitarian assistance as an opportunity to reshape ethnic and linguistic structure?



Conflict-inducing processes along ethnic and linguistic „fault lines” in Europe

- Unwarranted securitization of ethnic and language issues
 - Majority perspective: interpretation of culturally framed minority claims as threats to state integrity, mistrust of separate minority institutions as sites of counter-state nationalism
 - Minority perspective: the notion of a shared identity designed by the nationalizing state and the imposition of ethno-cultural neutrality and group-neutral regulation become suspect as codes for assimilation
- Violation of, restriction of the use of, or reduction of the scope of vested minority (language) rights, undisguised downgrading of the status of the language of the minority in administration, education etc.
- Ethnic gerrymandering
 - Redrawing of administrative or electoral district borders in ways that divide territorially concentrated minority populations, reverse minority-majority status, and/or minimize minority communities' voting power and /or chances to enjoy minority rights
- Contested markers of identity between majority and minority peoples coexisting on shared territory, possibly with an overemphasis on language as a marker of national identity over language as a means of communication
- Unilateral kin-state activism and extra-territorial (transborder) nation-building practices, efforts to reinforce the links with the kin-state in a way that downplays minorities' sense of belonging to their country of residence
- Competing nation-building efforts exposing claimed co-ethnics (co-nationals) or „in-between” minorities to irreconcilable loyalty pressures

Thank you for your attention!

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