Trans-border nation-building or trans-border nation-deconstruction?

The experience of Slovak youth from Hungary studying in Slovakia

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Abstract

This thesis is devoted to the study of ethnic minority – kin-nation relations, through the subjective lens of the Slovak minority youth studying in the kin-state. Slovakia offers a government-funded scholarship programme for trans-border Slovaks, as part of the Slovak state policies towards the Slovaks living abroad. This study abroad programme provides a framework in which ethnic minority – kin-nation relations are analysed in this thesis on an inter-personal and inter-group level, through in-depth personal interviews with the scholarship recipients. Although the length of the study abroad programme would provide space for the incorporation of various nation-building and community-building practices, these aspects of the programme until now are largely underdeveloped.

Slovak minority students from Hungary upon their arrival to the kin-state realize that Slovaks in Slovakia have very little knowledge about the existence of Slovak external minorities, which are generally not seen as integral parts of the Slovak nation. The perception of the Slovak students from Hungary becomes even more complex, as they are often mistaken to be ethnic Hungarians from Slovakia. This lack of acceptance from the kin-nation however, did not result in the devaluating of the students' minority identity, but conversely, it led to the strengthened appreciation of the distinctiveness of the minority culture's features.

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I. Introduction

The Slovak minority in Hungary, with its 35 208[1] members is a highly acculturated and assimilated, aging community, and is more so with every subsequent generation. [2] The Slovaks in Hungary can be characterized by having dual, or hybrid national identity: besides expressing certain elements of their Slovak ethnicity and culture, they also engage in Hungarian cultural traditions, have strong emotional connection to their homeland (Hungary) and its national symbols and high culture. Simultaneously with the feeling of Slovak ethnic belonging, Slovaks in Hungary express a strong sense of Hungarian national identity. The younger generations however, express rapidly decreasing connection to Slovak traditional culture, speak almost exclusively Hungarian among each other, and - as the transmission of the Slovak identity is no longer ensured in their family environment – the Slovak community in Hungary is facing the challenge of complete assimilation within in the circle of youth, at least according to the latest census data.

The gradual weakening of Slovak identity among Slovak minority youth is not only a concern of the Slovak community in Hungary, but also of the kin-sate, Slovakia. In the official Slovak rhetoric, external Slovak minorities are seen as an integral part of the nation: Slovakia offers professional, material and financial support for its trans-border co-ethnics, especially in the fields of education and culture, for helping them to preserve and develop their ethnic identity, culture and language. One of the main methods, that is perceived by the Slovak community in Hungary to be effective for strengthening the Slovak identity of minority youth is to encourage them to study in Slovakia, within the framework of a scholarship programme

[1] Official Census 2011, Central Statistical Office.

[2] I use the term 'assimilated' for Slovaks who are *claiming* Hungarian ethnicity instead of Slovak ethnicity, despite of their knowledge about their Slovak ancestors. 'Assimilation' in my understanding means the abandonment or the rejection of one's Slovak identity and culture, in order to fully integrate to the majority nation.

founded by the Slovak government. Slovakia's study abroad programme is considered to be efficient for improving the Slovak language competence of minority youth, bringing them closer to Slovak people and culture, and raise confidence in their Slovak national belonging. Although studying in Slovakia is widely encouraged for minority youth within the community of Slovaks in Hungary (as well as within other external Slovak minorities), there has not yet been an evaluation of the student's actual experience in the kin-state, and the study abroad programme's effectiveness in increasing the feeling of national belonging, between the members of the kin-nation and the Slovak minority youth.

In this thesis, I aim to address this question through a subjective lens: through the eyes of the Slovak minority youth, who participates in the study abroad programme. My first objective in this thesis is to briefly present Slovakia's perception of Slovaks abroad, in order to understand better the place external minorities hold within the Slovak nation-concept. Here, I study the aims and expected outcomes of the study abroad programme as described by the Slovak Government and related offices, with a special focus on the aspect of 'nation-building' and kin-state engagement. Chapter IV. will present the institutional frame of Slovakia's trans-border nation-building aspirations, which then will be contrasted to the actual experience of Slovak minority youth in Chapter V.

My second objective, addressed by the empirical research is to study the motivation behind the minority youth's decision to study in the kin-state. Here, I examine whether students applying for Slovakia's scholarship programme made 'national' or 'nationalized' choices, meaning, I aim to uncover in what extent 'national identity' was the drive behind their seemingly 'nationally motivated' behaviour.

My third and main objective in this thesis is to explore and analyse the experience of Slovak minority youth when encountering members of the kin-nation, with a special regard to

national belonging and national identification. I study this issue from the perspective of the minority students, focusing on the inter-personal and inter-group level.

The case of Slovak minority members from Hungary studying in Slovakia provides an especially interesting context for such research because of the following reasons:

1) Members of the Slovak minority find themselves in an environment where the majority nation shares their ethnicity and language, however not their context: their social-historical background is different, and they developed Slovak language and cultural traditions in a specific way, distinct from the conditions in the ethnic kin-state.
2) Slovak-Hungarian relations are historically overshadowed by ethno-political conflicts, which are reflected in certain public narratives until today, and provide ground for prejudice and stereotypes even nowadays.
3) A significant Hungarian minority lives in Slovakia[3], who in varying settings have direct or indirect contact with the Slovaks from Hungary living in Slovakia, and may become their point of reference in social positioning.
4) Furthermore, unlike the conventional knowledge about the trans-border Hungarian minorities in Hungary, external Slovak minorities abroad are largely unknown for the Slovak general public (except of the Slovak minority in the Czech Republic). Therefore, the presence of trans-border Slovaks in Slovakia is not perceived as common.

In this particular environment, I study how Slovak minority members integrate, by addressing the feelings of groups belonging and dynamics of group-formation: I study whether ethnic principles in social categorization play a role when it comes to the inter-personal and inter-group behaviour of Slovak students from Hungary. Furthermore, I study how different 'components' of nationhood emphasized by scholars of Nationalism Studies play or do not play a role in creating the feeling of shared belonging, or conversely, distinctness among the members of the Slovak minority and the kin-nation.

[3] According to the 2011 census, Hungarians (8,5%) represent the second largest ethnic group in Slovakia, after the Slovaks (80.7%). According to estimations based on language usage, Hungarians reach nearly 10% of Slovakia's total population (5 397 036 in 2011).

For conducting this analysis, I treat the study-abroad programme as a framework, in which national identification and encounters with members of the kin-nation can be analyzed, along the reference points above. I consider this framework important to study because of two reasons: 1) the field of education is considered by Slovakia as one of the most prominent areas of kin-state engagement, and 2) the Slovak community in Hungary relies heavily on the success of the Slovak study abroad programme in developing not only the students' linguistic and professional skills, but also facilitating a stronger connection and commitment towards their Slovak identity, as a result of which they would consequently display a greater interest and engagement in the life of Slovaks in Hungary.

II. Theoretical Background and State of the Art

2.1. Clarification of Concepts

Academic writing on *national identity* is often trapped by contested terms and the lack of clear definitions, as well as the lack of agreement among scholars on their precise meaning. Brubaker and Cooper warn against the use of these contested terms without the re-examination of their meaning, and urge scholars to move *beyond identity.*[4] Since my research concentrates on *minority identity*, let us first clarify the definition of these charged terms as used in this thesis, before moving to the discussion of related theories.

A national minority is an ethno-cultural unit, that is ethnically, culturally, linguistically or religiously distinct from the majority nation, and it presents itself or is presented as such. Gyivicsán distinguishes between ethnic minorities with dual or trial binding: minorities of trial binding adjust themselves to the cultural systems of their kin-nation and their majority nation, while also cultivating their minority specific culture. Ethnic minorities of dual binding

[4] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond Identity" in *Ethnicity Without Groups*, by Rogers Brubaker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 28-63.

have no kin-nation and kin-state; apart from their own culture they are closely tied to the cultural system built up by the majority nation of the state they reside in.[5] In relation to the state-building nation (or nations) other ethnic groups in most cases are in minority position, therefore these concepts are often used as synonyms especially in context of the 20th century and onwards.[6] Minorities are furthermore defined along power-relations: a minority is a non-dominant actor in the nation-building process and in terms of the culture of the state, thus minority status is frequently associated with varying levels oppression. Ethnic minorities might or might not have separate political agenda based on national claim-making, and might or might not be subject of special policies within the state.

A definition of *identity* is much harder to grasp. In this thesis I use the term *identity* as meaning the individual's *self-understanding* – bearing in mind its multidimensionality, fluidity and processuality -concerning their [here: ethnic or national] *group membership.* Brubaker rightly warns against equating *groups* [as membership] with *categories* [as characteristics] and treating nations and ethnic communities as homogenous groups, without devoting attention to their members' specific features, internal division, and individual agenda,[7] therefore falling into the trap of methodological nationalism. The theoretical framework of this thesis re-examines the scholarly debate over the meaning behind the terms *national identity*. I will furthermore use the term *belonging,* meaning emotional attachment to a group, regardless of real or perceived membership. The term *perception* will be used to describe how 'others' see an individual's or group's identity and belonging.

[5] Anna Gyivicsán, "Cultural autonomy of nationalities and the common Europe" in *The minorities at the turn of the millennium (Chances, possibilities, challenges)* ed. István Gráfik (Budapest: Hungarian Ethnographic Society, 2001), 47-53.
[6] Ignác Romsics, *Nemzet, nemzetiség és állam Kelet-Közép- és Délkelet Európában a 19. és a 20. században [Nation, nationality and state in Central Eastern and Southern Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th century]* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1998).
[7] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4-27.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

From the 19th century onwards, nation-states gradually emerged to be the main political organising units of society, and are often taken for granted as containers of otherwise very diverse populations. In political discourse, we often hear actors justifying their decisions by making claims *for the nation*, or *in name of the nation*, accusing opponents of *betraying the nation*. To be able understand and study the feeling of national belonging, or the logic behind trans-border nation-building policies, we first should ask the question "*What makes a nation*?"

The question above has long been of interest of scholars, from Anderson's *'imagined communities'* [8] through Smith's '*chosen peoples'* [9] to Gans' '*symbolic ethnicity.'* [10] These academic endeavours, although successfully capturing crucial aspects of national belonging, including the role of ancestry, homeland, traditions, language, shared myths and symbols, heroes and traumas, sense of community, solidarity among members, etc. still fail to pinpoint the exact composition of ingredients for nationhood.

According to the typography used among others by Romsics *Territory*, *Origin*, *Religion* and *Language* can be historically considered as the main building blocks of national consciousness. [11] Yet, there are nations without states, as there are nations with diverse ethnic origins, multiple religions and languages. This complexity of the aspects of national belonging makes it hard to come up with a precise definition of the nation. Most scholars of Nationalism Studies agree that perceived common descent, shared history and myths, language, culture, symbols, ancestral homeland, shared economy, solidarity among members, and the will to constitute a separate group all play a role on varying levels in the construction

[8] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
[9] Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[10] Herbert J. Gans, „Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no 1. (January 1979): 1-20; DOI:10.1080/01419870.1979.9993248.
[11] Romsics, *Nemzet, nemzetiség és állam*.9-20.

of national identity. Hobsbawm and Ranger highlight a crucial aspect in the construction of national identity and culture: what elements are chosen to become part of the given nation's identity is a result of social and political *power relations* and negotiation between actors, that guide the selective remembering and forgetting, channelled among others through education and media, as well as maintained or emphasized through national rituals and symbols.[12]

Calhoun points out that nationhood is also a "commonality of understanding, access to the world, and mode of action that facilitates the construction of social relationships and provides a common rhetoric. […] it is helpful to say something like people *participate* to varying degrees in ethnicity, rather than that they simply are or are not members of ethnic groups."[13] Nationhood is certainly more than a sum of relatively objective factors such as ancestral territory or a certain linguistic toolkit – its essence is found in various forms of emotional attachment: sense of belonging, solidarity, pride, nostalgia, etc. Phinney defines ethnic identity as a psychological attachment toward (an) ethnic group(s) that is one of the pillars of one's overarching self-concept.[14] He describes the development of ethnic identity as a process of the construction of identity (as self-understanding or self-image) over time due to a combination of experience and actions of the individual, and to the knowledge and understanding of in-group(s). Szarka emphasizes that national identity is not simply a sum of individual and collective ethnic characteristics, and that when studying national identity we must take into consideration the *relations* between the individual and the collective, and its determining ethnic and non-ethnic factors, such as social, economic, ideological, relational and habitual relations, as well as the socialization of the individual. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the *common experience* of the individual and the collective, the relations with other

[12] Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[13] Craig Calhoun, "The Variability of Belonging: A Reply to Rogers Brubaker" *Ethnicities* 3, no. 4. (2003): 560. DOI: 10.1177/1468796803003004007.
[14] Jean Phinney, „A three stage model of ethnic identity development" in *Ethnic identity formation and transmission among Hispanics and other minorities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 61-79.

(ethnic) groups and the *perception* of the collective and individual by others. [15] This thesis addresses the question *"What makes the nation?"* exactly on these grounds: instead of seeking to identify 'objective' criteria for nationhood, it aims to study how national identity is shaped by the relations and the common experience of the individual and the (national) collective, and by the perception of the individual's or the group's national identity by others.

Nationality, as membership in a nation or ethnic community, is connected to the notions of solidarity, loyalty and deservingness, that is nowadays one of the focal points of the discourses on immigrants and ethnic minorities. However, it is important to note, that even strong national identification, emotional attachment or solidarity are not necessary paired with claim-making on national grounds or active social or political engagement. Brubaker representing an individualistic approach, emphasizes that nations are not internally homogenous, externally bounded entities in terms of their characteristics, motivations and interests[16]. Moreover, different elements of national identity have different meaning for members and have subjective interpretations. Calhoun argues that *culture* and *solidarity* within group members constitute the one of the main basis of national identity. He defends the importance of culture against Brubaker, by saying that „Brubaker underestimates the constitutive role of culture and the ways in which the general phenomenon of human embeddedness in social relations also necessarily, but unequally, takes the specific form of embeddedness in particular collectivities."[17]

While many scholars claim that national identity is one of the basic dimensions of individual self-identification and belong to the most prominent 'big collective identities',

[15] László Szarka, *Kisebbségi léthelyzetek – Közösségi alternatívák.* [*Minority situations – Community alternatives*] (Budapest: Lucius Kiadó, 2004), 193.
[16] Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 4-27.
[17] Calhoun, *The Variability of Belonging*, 558.

others including Kiliánová, in contrast argue that it gains special significance only when projected against other (national) identities. They highlight the fluid nature of identity with its potential to change significantly depending on the *Significant Other* it is projected against.[18] Billig[19] and Fox & Miller-Idriss[20] argue, that besides studying the classical foundations of national identity, researchers should also devote attention to *when* and *how* nationhood is produced and reproduced in everyday life by ways of talking, doing and consuming, through which a view of the 'world of nations' becomes the norm, and nations are seen as natural organising units of the society. Brubaker et al. claim that nationhood (consciously or subconsciously) frames the choices ordinary people make every day, from choices of education and career, through relationships and socializing, consumed material and intellectual products, place of residence, and so on.[21] Fox & Miller-Idriss note, that "while these choices are not necessarily explicitly national, they can structure the trajectories of future choices in ways that reinforce nationhood as a salient idiom of belonging".[22] Brubaker et al. highlight the importance of educational, media, governmental, cultural, religious and other institutions, which often propagate a national logic. Furthermore, they emphasize that institutions often create social environments (peer groups) that is formed along ethnic lines.[23] Šrajerová on the other hand, by examining national feeling among ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic, constitutes that national consciousness, national identification and inter-ethnic relations today do not play as significant role in people's lives than during the previous decades. More pressing questions are that of socio-economic

[18] Gabriela Kiliánová „Bádanie o identite" [The research of identity] in *My a Tí druhí v modernej spoločnosti [Us and Them in the modern society],* (Bratislava: Veda, 2009.) 13-17.
et al., *My a Tí druhí v modernej spoločnosti [Us and Them in the modern society]* (Bratislava: Veda, 2009).
[19] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).
[20] Jon Fox & Cynthia Miller-Idriss „Everyday Nationhood" *Ethnicities* 8, no 4. (2008): 536 – 563.
[21] Rogers Brubaker et al., Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Hungarian Town (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[22] Fox & Miller-Idriss, *Everyday Nationhood*, 542.
[23] Brubaker et al., *National Politics.*

character.[24] Considering these arguments, we have to look at when and how is nationhood operationalized.

The Role of Boundaries

Scholars of nationalism studies traditionally distinguished between two main types of nations and ways of national becoming in modern European history: the *civic* and *ethnic* concepts of nation. The former is based on common territory and common legal, political and economic framework: the *state*, while the latter is determined by the shared culture, language, and the reality or myth of common origin. In the civic understanding,[25] *state* and *nation* are overlapping concepts: the nation is embraced by the state and what is embraced by the state is the nation.[26] While the civic nation concept is inclusive (different ethnic groups form one political nation within the state), the ethnic nation concept is exclusive towards national minorities. This civic/ethnic dichotomy today is considered outdated, and was challenged among others by Brubaker[27] and Schulman[28] who were especially critical about its projection to the 'West' and the 'East', finding in their empirical research that national elements traditionally categorized as characteristics for civic or ethnic nationalism are usually also found in the opposite category. Yet the civic versus ethnic model is highly interesting from the perspective of the notions of *inclusion* and *exclusion.*

According to social categorization and social identity theories,[29] humans see the world in categories for cognitive simplification. The formation of categories is a natural and inevitable process of human behaviour, but later these categories are filled with certain meanings and

[24] Olga Šrajerová "Slováci v českých krajinách v minulosti a v súšatnosti" [Slovaks in Czech lands in the past and the present] in *Slováci v Českej Republike [Slovaks in the Czech Republic (Bratislava: Dom zahraničných Slovákov),* 25-31.
[25] For further dissertations on the relation between nationality and citizenship see for example the works of Soysal (1995) and Joppke (2010).
[26] János Galántai, *A Habsburg Monarchia Alkonya* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1985), 175.
[27] Rogers Brubaker, "Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism" (Manuscript, 1998).
[28] Stephen Shulman, „Challenging the civic/ethnic and West/East dichotomies in the study of nationalism" *Comparative Political Studies* 35 No. 5, (2002): 554-585.
[29] Henri Tajfel, *Human groups and social categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 254-267.

values that can become a basis for formation of in-groups and out-groups. Selected attributes then become the justification of constructing boundaries between groups, and may become the roots of prejudice and stereotypes.

Yet the establishment of ethnic boundaries is a crucial element of national identity construction. To benefit from mutual solidarity and shared feelings of belonging, - on which then economic distribution, social welfare and democracy builds on - nations need boundaries, and not only in the sense of borders of a geographically defined homeland. Ethnic boundaries, as defined by Fredrick Barth, are best understood as cognitive boundaries that are a result of collective efforts of construction and maintance, and which dichotomize insiders from outsiders – *Us vs Them* – and guide social interactions accordingly - also noting that boundaries serve for creating an (at least superficial) homogeneity projected to the in-group and out-group(s).[30] In Barth's understanding, ethnic boundaries are *situational;* "invoked for certain purposes against certain groups, but not in others".[31] In opposition to Barth, Cohen however argues, that this approach overlooks the importance of self-consciousness and the symbolic expression of ethnicity.[32] In Cohen's critique, social scientists "have been largely content to assume the existence and integrity of *collective* boundaries. […] Instead of dealing with the individual, we [social scientists] have restrained our ambition, and addressed ourselves instead to whole societies or to substantial parts of them. Yet, looking at individual's boundary transformations should alert us to the *qualitative* nature of collective boundaries."[33]

[30] Frederick Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference* (Oslo: Universitets Forlaget, 1969).
[31] Anthony P. Cohen „Culture, identity and the concept of boundary" *Revista de antropologia social* no. 3. (1994): 52.
[32] Ibid, 52.
[33] Ibid, 54-55.

Jørgenson (1997) revisits Barth's concepts and applies them to his study of the relations between ethnic boundaries and marginalization in a post-colonial context.[34] He sees the role of ethnic boundaries as instruments in social navigation and in creating order: the concept of [ethnic] boundaries get charged with attached meanings and values simultaneously defining the in-group and the out-group(s), that are passed from generation to generation through social learning, education, media and other channels of communication. Yet Jørgenson (in line with Barth and Eriksen) argues that in the study of ethnic and national affairs the actual *cultural content* associated with national identity is often overestimated, while the significance of the process of boundary construction and maintance is sometimes overlooked.

Jørgenson quotes Verdery:

"The roots of ethnicity as an organisational form are not in the *cultural content* associated with ethnic identities, but rather in the fact of their *dichotomization* – the presence of boundaries separating groups. This shift of the emphasis from seemingly 'objective' cultural traits to *behaviour* that is socially effective in maintaining group boundaries."[35]

National boundaries are created and maintained through ethnic signalling, among others language usage, cultural practices, social behaviour and political actions of group members. The means of group-specific ethnic signalling and the boundaries constructed through them therefore, cannot be objective; they have to be selected as a result of consensus around the question what is *ours* and what is *foreign* to distinguish between *Us vs Them*.

Such distinctions are often studied when nations (whether as equals or in majority/minority relation) come in contact with each other - although boundary-construction is not exclusive to

[34] Bent D. Jørgenson, „Ethnic Boundaries and the Margings of the Margin: in a Postcolonial and Conflict Resolution Perspective*" Peace and Conflict Studies* 4, no. 2 (1997): 1-17.
[35] Verdery cited in Jørgenson, *Ethnic Boundaries,* 3.

ethnic/national groups. In certain cases, ethnic boundaries become highly politicized and can lead to ethnic conflict and violence. Burton, scholar in the field of Conflict Resolution, who argues that conflict often derives from a struggle for identity as a source of empowerment and higher status compared to other groups[36], which is in line with Tajfel's social identity theory. The field of Social Psychology provides a rich source of theories regarding the construction and explanation of inter-group relations and group boundaries (such as for example Allport's contact hypothesis[37]) but the limits of the scope of this thesis unfortunately do not allow us to discuss them here in detail.

Burton claims that the need for boundaries is essential for identity construction and that [ethnic] boundaries are integral part of competitive societies, however these boundaries should be inclusionary and penetrable, not discriminatory.[38] Wimmer emphasizes, that society is not a sum of sharply bounded groups, as "the concept of a boundary does not imply closure or clarity", and distinguishes between hard and soft boundaries - based on how easy/difficult it is for the individual to switch groups or maintain simultaneous membership in more communities - as well as stable and unstable boundaries – based on whether changes in boundary-construction occur over more generations or even during one individual's lifespan.[39] Individuals however are not only receivers, but *agents* in the process of boundary construction. Wimmer draws a typology that distinguishes between five modes of ethnic boundary construction: creating new groups by 1) expanding existing boundaries, 2) contracting existing boundaries, 3) changing the meaning of existing boundaries (e.g. challenging the hierarchy among ethnic groups), 4) crossing ethnic boundaries (changing one's individual position or group-membership, such as 'assimilation' or 'passing') and

[36] Burton (1990) referenced by Jørgenson, *Ethnic Boundaries,* 7-8.
[37] See Pettigrew & Tropp „Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis: Its History and Influence" in *On the Nature of Prejudice. Fifty Years after Allport.* eds. S. Glick, & L. Rudman (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2005.), 272–277.
[38] Burton (1990) referenced by Jørgenson, *Ethnic Boundaries,* 7-8.
[39] Andreas Wimmer „The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory" American Journal of Sociology (2008): 976; 984.

5) overcoming ethnic boundaries (rejecting ethnicity as a principle of categorization and social organisation altogether).[40] However, the actual implementation of these strategies Wimmer sees dependent on the institutions, power-relations and networks present in the actor's social field.

Considering these theoretical discussions, it is interesting to look at the following questions: How members of trans-border ethnic minorities and members of their kin-nation see each other? More particularly, are ethnic minorities outside the kin-state's physical boundaries considered being outside or within its social boundaries? What is actually, considered as a boundary between these groups?

Boundaries through Interactions – The Role of Language

The nation lives in its language – a saying attributed to count Széchényi that has become a base of the 19th magyarization politics, and has its equivalent in many of the era's nationalising movements. Language usage is an important indicator for expression of national origin. Sloboda notes, that language usage is often directly associated with nationality.[41] In the case of bilingual (or multilingual) speakers, and members of ethnic minorities[42] however, the situation is more complex, regarding the 'native tongue equals nationality' assumption. On the other hand, Bartha emphasizes, that the notion according to which *the state, the language* and *the nation* are inseparable, is until today prevalent in many European countries, rooting in the misconception that the linguistic unit overlaps with the

[40] Ibid. 986.

[41] Martin Sloboda, „Menej používané jazyky v Česku" [Lesser used languages in the CzechRepublic] in *The situation of lesser used languages in the Visegrad Four countries*, ed A. M. Papp (Budapest: Országos idegennyelvű Könyvtár, 2010.) 38-55.

[42] In the 20th century, bilingualism was defined as speaking two languages at native competency and fluency, essentially as 'two native speakers in one person'. In modern sociolinguistics however, bilingualism/ multilingualism is defined from a functionalist approach: a person, who can use two or more languages effectively in everyday communication according to one's social needs (in oral and/or written form, or as a sign language), can be considered bi- or multilingual (Bartha, 1999).

national unit.[43] This conception is challenged by bilingual/multilingual speakers, who do not fall linearly to ethnic categories respective of their native language(s). Furthermore, many scholars in the field of sociolinguistics, among others Skutnaab-Kangas consider language as one of the most crucial tools for preserving national consciousness in the case of ethnic minorities.[44] Language usage of minorities may also be viewed as one of the indicators of their acculturation and assimilation[45]. Bindorffer however, stresses that in the case of ethnic minorities, language loss cannot be equalled with the loss of ethnic identity.[46]

Unlike other components of national identity, such as 'pride' or 'culture', language usage[47] can be measured relatively accurately. Most importantly from the perspective of our research, language is also a tool of boundary construction and deconstruction. Collins & Clément find that language and prejudice are inextricably linked: language signals group membership though accent, vocabulary or group-specific phrasing. Based on research findings on non-native English speakers they conclude that "native speakers (or speakers who have the same accent as the recipients) are perceived as more potent, intelligent, perceptive, knowledgeable, capable, educated, successful, as more representative of the in-group, […] than non-native speakers."[48]

[43] Csilla Bartha, A kétnyelvűség alapkérdései [The basic questions of bilingualism] (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1999).
[44] Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, „Linguistic Human Rights" in *Sociolinguistics/Szociolinguistik: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*, Volume 3: 2575-2584.
[45] See for example Marin's (1992) model on the three stages of acculturation.
[46] Györgyi Bindorffer, „No language, no ethnicity? Ethnic Identity, Language and Cultural Representation among Hungarian Germans" *Review of Sociology (1998): 143-158.*

[47] Borbély defines the factors influencing the language usage of ethnic minorities as *general* – applied for the majority of the group and *specific*- applied for a certain community or individual. Among these factors she enlists: *participants of the conversation* (ethnic background, their language competence and preference, character of the relation between the participants, external influences, etc), *situation* in which communication takes place, *content* of the interaction, *social function* of the interaction such as request or order. (2014: 61).

[48] Katherine Collins & Richard Clément, "Language and Prejudice Direct and Moderated Effects" *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 31 no. 4. DOI: 10.1177/0261927X12446611. (2012) 376–396, 384.

Slovaks in Slovakia and the members of the Slovak minority in Hungary share ethnicity, ancestral homeland, certain myths and heroes, cultural traditions, and language. However, the Slovak language used by the minority in Hungary naturally differs from the language used in Slovakia. Furthermore, language competence widely varies within the minority community, from non-existent to native level, including a broad spectrum of bilingual speakers. I argue, that language usage therefore serves an ambivalent role: it is both an instrument of creating distance between the minority and the kin-nation through the experience of ethnic prejudice, but on the other hand, it is a tool for communication and sharing narratives, that can bring the groups closer to each other. Therefore, I devote specific attention to the study of language usage *as a boundary* among minority members and their kin-nation.

Previous research on ethnic minority – kin-nation relations (among others Csepeli, Örkény & Székelyi) [49] shows that trans-border minorities are most often seen as *the Other, an outsider* by the representatives of the kin-nation due to their distinct cultural, linguistic and social attributes, even if the minority members themselves would claim different levels of belonging to or identification with the kin-nation. This perception is reflected in everyday encounters with members of the kin-nation, and often persists despite of the kin-state's inclusive nation-concept. The modes of ethnic identification have been studied among the members of the Slovak minorities abroad. Bošelová studies the ethnic identification of Slovak minority members from Romania, who relocated to the kin-state, and observes dual-attachment towards both Slovak and Romanian cultures.[50] Surova studies the ethnic and civic aspect of national attachment of Slovaks from Serbia. Her main findings reveal a discrepancy between

[49] György Csepeli, Antal Örkény and Mária Székelyi, *Grappling with National Identity: How Nations See Each Other in Central Europe.* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2000).
[50] Miriama Bošelová, „K etnickej identifikácii Slovákov z Rumunska žijúcich na Slovensku" [Ethnic identification of Slovaks from Romania living in Slovakia] (Nadlac: Vydavatel'stvo Ivan Krasko, 2017), 303-312.

the ethnic/national identification and attachment to the state; strong ethnic Slovak identification among minority members does not mean weaker identification with Serbia, nor does it necessarily mean stronger identification with the kin-state, Slovakia, even after extended period of residence.[51]

In case of the Slovak minority in Hungary, scholars have not yet studied their attitudes towards the kin-nation and kin-state or vice versa. With my research, I would like to contribute to the filling of this gap, as I believe this area of research is worth examining in order to understand better the aspects of national identification of Slovak minorities, and in a broader context, the effects of Slovakia's external minority politics.

2.3. Research Questions

In the light of these theoretical discussions, and considering the gap in the empirical research in the context of the Slovaks in Hungary, this thesis aims to address the following research question: Is there a shared feeling of national belonging between the members of the Slovak minority in Hungary and the kin-nation? I aim to study this issue in the framework of Slovakia's scholarship programme for Slovaks abroad, on three levels: 1) Does Slovakia's official rhetoric, particularly the aims and the structure of the scholarship programme reflect the aspiration of nation-building between Slovakia and the external Slovak communities?

2) Do Slovak minority organisations in Hungary, namely Slovak schools and the National Slovak Self-Government see the study abroad programme as an instrument of nation-building? What are their expectations from this cooperation?

3) Does Slovak minority youth from Hungary experience shared feelings of national belonging when encountering the members of the kin-nation in Slovakia? What are the

[51] Svetluša Surova. „National and ethnic identifications among the Slovak diaspora in Serbia: stranded between state(s) and ethnicity?" *Nationalities Papers.* DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2018.1488825. (2016): 16.

dimensions of connectedness or distinctness between the Slovak minority in Hungary and its kin-nation? Where are the boundaries and how are they maintained? Does the study abroad programme strengthen connection between the groups and reduce potential boundaries? Actually, why this differentiation occurs at the first place? Is national identity still *that important* today?

III. The Slovak Minority Youth in Hungary in Context

3.1. The Slovak Minority in Hungary

In order to contextualise the relations between the Slovak minority youth from Hungary and their kin-nation, we should first study the characteristics and identification patterns of the Slovak minority in Hungary, briefly presented in this chapter.

Preservation and developing of the ethnic minorities' cultural identity and the transmission of its specific elements (such as language, traditions, shared emotions and group-specific knowledge) to subsequent generations in a majority environment depend on several external and internal factors. The most determining aspects are economic, political and social-historical, however, the preservation of minority identity is also significantly affected by so called group-level factors: such as demographic features of the minority, territorial distribution (living in a bloc or scattered), or the homogeneity/heterogeneity and level of organisation of the minority group itself.[52] Furthermore, this process is highly influenced on the individual level: family, education and place of birth and residence belong to the most prominent aspects. Besides external factors, we also need to examine the role of the minority itself in preserving and developing its national identity, culture and language. Henri Lefebre argues that above all social factors "only the activity, initiative and emotional motivation of

[52] Anna Gyivicsán and András Krupa, *The Slovaks of Hungary* (Budapest: Útmutató Publishing House, 1998).

minorities could rescue the culture of a given minority in modern society."[53] However, Gyivicsán criticizes Lefebre for taking the freedom of such actions for granted, which freedom had not always been provided throughout history due to political factors or lack of resources.

The national feeling and identity-construction of ethnic minorities in Hungary has been extensively studied by several scholars, who conclude that dual identity (as attachment to both the Hungarian and the minority nation and culture) is present at all minorities in Hungary. Szabó defines dual identity as an identity-construction in which members of an ethnic group (minority) besides the preservation and representation of their own identity, adopt elements of the majority culture which are missing, or are only partially present in their own ethnic identity. In case of dual belonging "since the modes and expressions of national and ethnic identity change depending on the situation, therefore, the identity which becomes conspicuous also changes."[54] Szarka finds that in case of all ethnic minorities in Hungary Hungarian has become the dominant language in everyday communication, even among in-group members, and for the majority of these minority members Hungarian national identity became dominant against other ethnic identities.[55]

Members of the Slovak minority in Hungary today are descendents of the Slovak migrants who came to the territory of present-day Hungary during three major migration waves through the 17th-20th centuries, motivated by the pursuit of religious freedom and economic prosperity.[56] Although the Office of Slovaks Living Abroad estimates that today around

[53] Leberfe cited in Gyivicsán, *Cultural autonomy*, 49.
[54] Orsolya Szabó, „Kettős identitás? Budapest és Piliscsév szlovák közösségei" [Dual identity? Slovak communities in Budapest and Piliscsév] in *Változatok kettős identitásra* [Varieties of Dual-Belonging] ed. Györgyi Bindorffer (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2007), 63.
[55] Szarka, *Kisebbségi léthelyzetek*.
[56] For an overview in English language, see Anna Gyivicsán and András Krupa, *The Slovaks of Hungary* (Budapest: Útmutató Publishing House, 1998).

100 000 inhabitants of Hungary have Slovak origin[57], according to the latest census in Hungary from 2011 the number of Slovaks in Hungary is 35 208, which is 89,7% of the 2001 census (39 266).[58] This brings the Slovaks to the place of the 4th biggest ethnic minority in Hungary. Scholars generally distinguish between the Northern Slovaks (residing in Pest, Komárom-Esztergom and Nógrád counties) and the Southern Slovaks (residing in Békés country) based on their region of origin, dialect and cultural traditions. In case of the Southern Slovaks, it is important to mention the concept of *Lowland Slovak identity*: the term Lowland Slovaks [*Dolnozemskí Slováci*] covers the Slovak ethnic enclaves south of Budapest until the Sava river in Serbia, including settlements established or re-established by Slovak settlers in today's south east Hungary, western Romania, the Vojvodina region in Serbia and a few settlements in the northern part of Croatia. Slovaks of these regions are tied together by particular cultural traditions deriving from the agricultural lifestyle.

Furthermore, we can also distinguish between Slovaks who live in heterogenic urban environment with a high percentage of Hungarian population (such as Budapest and Békéscsaba) and Slovaks who live in or come from small villages, where historically the Slovak population was in majority (Pilisszentkereszt, Tótkomlós).[59]

The position of the Slovak language in Hungary can be characterized as ambivalent; researchers observed simultaneous development and backsliding: its usage in the private

[57] Úrad pre Slovákov žijúcich v zahraničí. *Počty a odhady* [Data set]. Retrieved from http://www.uszz.sk/sk/pocty-a-odhady

[58] Official Census 2011, Central Statistical Office.

[59] Gyivicsán also distinguishes between two groups of Slovaks in Hungary based on *cultural value orientation*: "Group A" consists of Slovaks living in or coming from Hungarian villages, attaching their ethnic cultural values to traditional style of living, and are less connected to modern Slovak culture. "Group C" consist of Hungary's Slovak elite; academics and artists. The group is much smaller than the former and "is not only a receiver but a creator of Slovak high culture". The absence of "Group B" is intentional; it is a group of the middle layers: the civic sphere, entrepreneurs, who could sponsor the development and spreading of the Slovak culture and which is currently almost absent from the Slovaks of Hungary. Gyivicsán argues that this division can be diminished only by protection and development of all layers of ethnic culture: traditional, popular, cleric and elite (Gyivicsán, *Cultural autonomy*, 2001, 51-52).

sphere (such as family, friends and the religious sphere) is on a constant decrease, while its usage in the public sphere and in high culture (media, politics, science, business, higher education,) has been increasing in the recent years.[60]

The study of the Slovak minorities abroad is valuable not only for the countries they reside in, but also from the perspective of the Slovak nation. The reasons for this were worded by ethnographer Ján Botík as the following:

"Until our Slovaks abroad are conscious about their national or ethnic belonging, or at least their Slovak origin, we consider them as an organic part of our national community. Their fate is the natural continuation of our national history and the cultural traditions of their material, social and intellectual life are inseparable part of the national-cultural development of Slovaks. […] They are especially interesting, because they do not only transmit Slovak identity and culture, but they have kept, developed and spread Slovak cultural traditions in a special way, different from the conditions in the ethnic kin-state."[61]

However, until now the interest of Slovak scholars in external Slovak minorities is mostly limited to the field of ethnographic and cultural research, with a few examples in the field of linguistics and history.

The study of the Slovak youth in Hungary so far received only modest attention among researchers. Tuska studied the language usage of Slovak minority students studying Slovak majors at universities in Hungary, focusing on the students' attitudes towards the minority language and the spheres of its usage.[62] According to her findings, students use almost exclusively Hungarian language outside the classroom, and prefer its usage in all studied communication situations. The usage of Slovak language is limited mainly to the university environment, Slovak events and to a lesser extent, for interactions with family members (grandparents). Tuska's findings furthermore provide an insight to the self-identification process of the younger generation of Slovaks in Hungary. They show that

[60] Erzsébet Uhrin, „Szlovák nyelv Magyarországon a nyelvhasználók szemszögéből" [Slovak language in Hungary from the perspective of its users] in *Slovenský jazyk v Maďarsku. Bibliografia a štúdie I.* (Békešská Čaba: Výskumý ústav Slovákov v Maďarsku, 2008.), 145-223.
[61] Ján Botík , *Dolnozemskí Slováci [Lowland Slovaks]*, (Nadlak: Vydavatel'stvo Ivan Krasko, 2011.),13.
[62] Tünde Tuska, Slovenský jazyk v univerzitnom bilingválnom prostredí *[Slovak language in a bilingual university environment]* (Békešská Čaba: Výskumý ústav Slovákov v Maďarsku, 2016).

ethnic origin, family impact or language competencies do not play the most prominent role in the minority youth's identification, but more significant is the perception by their peers, and the feeling of belonging to a community through shared Slovak identity.

Uhrinová also studied the language usage and language attitudes of the younger generations. She comes to the conclusion that there is a group of young Slovaks (although small in number, but significant in proportion), who are proud of their minority origin and use Slovak language as an expression of their national identity. Moreover, they also consider important the transmission of the Slovak language and culture to subsequent generations. However, the main motivation of the minority youth for learning Slovak language is not primarily their ethnic belonging, but the benefits it may mean on the labour market. Despite of this, Uhrinová observes dual-binding towards both Slovak and Hungarian national identities, where the Slovak identity has a secondary, yet stable status.[63]

3.2. Slovak Education in Hungary

As widely acknowledged by social scientists, education plays one of the most important role in developing and preserving national identity. Choosing a minority school for education is often viewed as a form of insurance against assimilation.[64] On the other hand, as Kolláth stresses, minority education should provide sufficient general and [minority] specific knowledge for students to be successful in all areas of life, provide opportunity to preserve and develop minority language and culture, and promote the values of tolerance and diversity – based on which the individuals can decide for themselves whether or not they wish to belong to the minority community or other group(s)[65].

[63] Alžbeta Uhrinová, *Z jazykových autobiográfií Slovákov v Maďarsku [Linguistic Autobiographies of Slovaks in Hungary],* (Bratislava: SAV, 2017).
[64] Brubaker et al. , *Nationalist Politics.*
[65] Anna Kolláth, *„A szlovéniai kisebbségek nyelvi jogai a törvények és a rendeletek tükrében" [Linguistic Rights of the Slovene Minority in the framework of the legislation]* (MTA online library, 2003).

The Slovak education in Hungary is considered well developed, especially when compared to other Slovak minorities in Central Eastern Europe. Legislation in Hungary differentiates among 3 types of minority education: A) schools where the education is exclusively in the minority language B) schools with bilingual education (Hungarian and the minority language) and C) schools where the language of education is Hungarian and the minority language is thought as a subject. Today there are 5 bilingual elementary schools and 2 high schools in Hungary where part of the education runs in Slovak language (in practice this generally means that Humanities are taught in Slovak, while Natural Sciences in Hungarian, due to the lack of native language teachers of these subjects).[66] There is also a number of schools and kindergartens where Slovak language can be chosen as an optional subject, generally in 4 hours per week. However, many members of the Slovak minority, especially teachers, argue that the limited resources and opportunities for language learning result in insufficient language knowledge among youth, that causes anxiety among pupils to use the Slovak language. Edit Pecsenya, Headmaster of the Slovak High School in Békéscsaba however points out that schools alone cannot replace the role of the family in transmitting the Slovak language. To improve their language competence, students from Slovak minority schools are encouraged to complete intensive language courses, or even their whole higher education in Slovakia.[67] On the university level, Slovak Language and Literature is thought at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest and at the University of Szeged. The major 'Elementary school pedagogy with Slovak specialization' is taught at the Ferenc Gál Catholic University in Szarvas and the Peter Pázmány Catholic University in Esztergom. However,

[66] The two biggest Slovak schools are found in Békéscsaba and Budapest, as integrated institutions of a kindergarten, elementary school, academic grammar school and student dormitory. Further bilingual elementary schools are located in Szarvas, Sátoraljaújhely, Tótkomlós. The operating of these institutes falls under the National Slovak Self-Government and it is also supported financially by the Slovak Republic. Slovak schools in Hungary work independently from the state, under the Slovak Self Government, which has also the right to monitor minority education, as well as to form the curriculum used in minority schools.

[67] Own research: *Components of Modern Minority Identity among Slovak Youth in the Czech Republic and Hungary* [Master Thesis] Jagiellonian University in Krakow, 2017.

these majors for years now struggle with a very low number of students, often only 1-4 persons/ academic year (including ethnic Hungarian students from Slovakia, and students who only begin Slovak as a foreign language, without previous minority school education).

The Slovak education system in Hungary, simultaneously faces the challenge of the lack of students and the lack of teachers. The lack of students is mainly attributed to the very high degree of assimilation within the Slovak community in Hungary, while the lack of teachers is also affected by limited sources for training.[68] Yet the Slovak community in Hungary is in an increasing need of young professionals with strong Slovak language skills, as current employees in the minority education sector reach the age of retirement. Reflecting on these challenges, the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary developed the *Concept of the Development of the Slovak Educational System in Hungary*,[69] in which they express that the Slovak Self-Government's aims are 1) to create conditions under which more students from Slovak high schools would choose to study vocations in the field of Slovak education, and 2) to create effective forms of the propagation of university level studies in Slovakia. While the first aim mainly concerns the developing of the internal resources of the Slovak minority in Hungary, to reach the second aim, Slovaks in Hungary also rely on the support and engagement of the kin-state, Slovakia.

[68] To combat this problem, the Slovak Educational Methodological Centre [*Slovenské Pedagogické Metodické Centrum*] has been established which role is to provide trainings for teachers and prepare educational materials for Slovak schools.

[69] *Concept of the Development of the Slovak Educational System in Hungary, 2017* [Retrieved from]: http://www.slovaci.hu/index.php/sk/kolstvo/534-koncepcia-na-kompas

IV. Slovakia's Position towards External Slovak Minorities

4.1. Slovaks Abroad and Slovakia's Position towards the External Slovak Minorities

Although the detailed study of Slovakia's trans-border nation-building policies is not in the research focus of this thesis, I believe it is important to briefly present here the general framework of Slovakia's kin-state engagement in order to understand better the position external ethnic minorities hold in the Slovak 'official' nation-concept. This chapter contrasts the official Slovak rethoric on trans-border Slovaks (as being integral parts of the nation), with the perception of Slovakia's kin-state engagement by the representatives of the Slovak minority in Hungary. An overview of Slovakia's official position towards Slovaks abroad is furthermore useful in this thesis, as it is a broader context that might influence how Slovaks perceive the external Slovak minorities, depending on whether this issue becomes politicized.

Slovakia as a state engages with the Slovak communities outside its borders, coordinated through the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad [*Úrad pre Slovákov Žijúcich v Zahraničí*]. We can distinguish between two categories of Slovaks living abroad:

a) **Autochthonous Slovak minorities**: Slovaks who became citizens of other states due to geopolitical reasons, such as changes of borders or exchanges of population. The largest group in this category are the Slovaks living on the territory of present-day Hungary, who became Hungarian citizens after the dissolution of the Hungarian Kingdom in 1918, and the Slovak inhabitants of Sub-Carpathian Ukraine, previously belonging to Czechoslovakia. In this category belong also the autochthonous Slovak minorities of today's Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, Poland and Czech Republic.

b) **Slovak diasporas:** Slovaks who migrated abroad particularly during the second half of the 19th century and after the World War I. and World War II. This category includes the Slovaks from Hungary, Czechoslovakia and present-day Slovakia who migrated mostly to Western Europe and overseas for mainly economic reasons. This category also includes the current migration of Slovaks.

Although these categories are rhetorically distinguished by the Office of Slovaks Living Abroad, this distinction very rarely translates to the level of actual policy making, where Slovak autochthonous minorities and Slovak diasporas are addressed together,

under the umbrella term Slovaks Living Abroad. For these communities, Slovaks also use the collective term *krajania* [compatriots].

According to the estimates and statistical data of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, there are currently nearly 2.8 million Slovaks living outside the borders of Slovakia [70] however, their numbers can only be estimated due to the different methodologies in conducting censuses. The following graph illustrates the numbers of Slovak autochthonous minorities[71] in Central Europe:

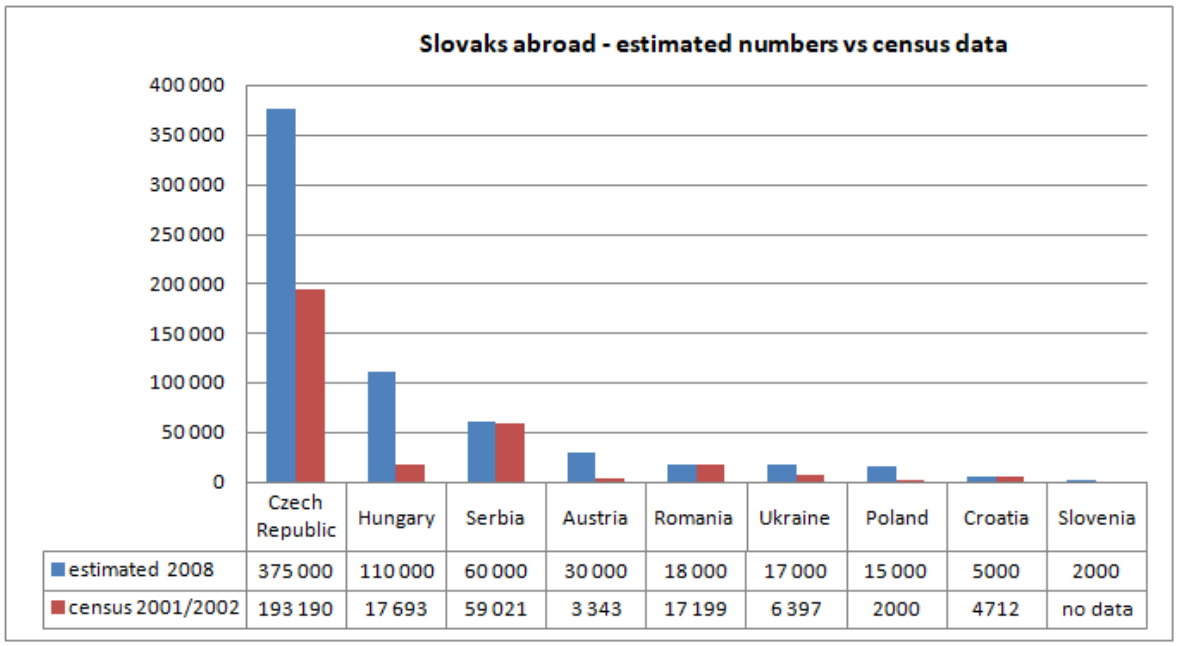

Figure 1: Census data 2001/2002 and estimations of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, 2008

The high level of discrepancy between estimated data and actual census results in the Czech Republic and Hungary, can explained - among other socio-political factors - by the high degree of acculturation and assimilation, and the perceived fewer benefits and lesser prestige of Slovak minority belonging in contrast to claiming belonging to the majority.

[70] for the exact statistics see: Úrad pre Slovákov žijúcich v zahraničí. *Počty a odhady* [Data set]. http://www.uszz.sk/sk/pocty-a-odhady

[71] The position of Slovaks as an 'ethnic minority' is only recognized by law in Central and Southern-Eastern Europe, where Slovak communities are historically present. Slovaks living in other parts of the world, including Western Europe, and overseas did not obtain the legal status of an ethnic minority and the respective individual and collective rights.

Kin-state politics, including political, social and economic engagement between the kin-state and its external minorities, can only be legitimized if a common understanding of *belonging together, as a nation* exists. The kin-nation (along with the position of the majority nation in the host state, and the resources of the minority community itself) plays a peculiar role in the preservation and development of national identity in case of ethnic minorities. Öllös argues, that only from its own resources minorities are often not capable of ensuring the conditions for the continuation and modern developing of their communities. Here comes the responsibility of the kin-state, which should support its compatriots morally as well as financially. Especially important areas of support are education and science, as well as access to modern popular and elite culture and media. The kin-state's role is moreover to support the living contact between the minorities abroad and their kin-nation.[72]

The rights of Slovaks living abroad are protected by the Slovak Constitution: "The Slovak Republic supports the national consciousness and cultural identity of Slovaks living abroad, supports their institutions established to achieve this purpose, and their relation with the motherland."[73] In 2005 the *Law on Slovaks Living Abroad* has been passed, which specifies their position: "A Slovak living abroad is a person who is not a citizen of the Slovak Republic but has Slovak nationality or Slovak ethnic origin and Slovak cultural-linguistic consciousness."[74] The law states the rights and the obligation of Slovaks from abroad on the territory of Slovakia, among others, right to obtain an identity card proving Slovak ethnic origin. Slovakia furthermore offers professional, material and financial support for its external minorities, especially in the field of education, culture and media. This support focuses on activities which aim to strengthen Slovak identity or promote the usage of Slovak language.

[72] Lajos Öllös, „A kisebbségi jogok érdemi tételezése" [Minority Rights as legal proposition] in *Slováci v Maďarsku. Zborník z medzinárodnej konferencie [Slovaks in Hungary. International Conference Volume.]* (Šamorín: Fórum Inštitút, 2008.), 42-45.
[73] Constitution of the Slovak Republic. [Retrieved from]: https://www.prezident.sk/upload-files/46422.pdf
[74] Law 474/2005 *on Slovaks Living Abroad*: https://www.uszz.sk/data/2016/ZZ_2005_474_20160101.pdf

In the field of education this translates to exchange programmes for students and teachers, excursions to Slovakia, government founded language courses, publication of teaching materials and textbooks, trainings for teachers, and also financial support for Slovak publications in Hungary.[75]

Besides the role of the kin-state, the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad emphasizes the responsibilities of the host state for the preservation and development of Slovak minorities:

"It should be emphasized that the preservation and development of these national minorities is primarily the task of the countries in which the Slovaks live and are citizens. The Office of Slovaks Living Abroad will intensively monitor the policy of those states towards their national minorities, namely towards the Slovak national minority where Slovaks are living and working, as well as the fulfilment of the signed international and intergovernmental contracts in the area of securing the rights of national minorities."[76]

Slovakia's kin-state engagement and support towards its external minorities is perceived only partially satisfactory by the Slovak trans-border minorities. In the *Concept of the Development of the Slovak Educational System in Hungary*, developed by the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary, the Slovak minority articulates their expectations for stronger support by Slovakia in a number of areas: "As our nationality is part of the Slovak nation, for dealing with the problems in the area of Slovak minority education, we expect the effective and systemic support of the Slovak Republic" in the following areas:

1. It is necessary to advocate that Slovakia should lead a stronger external minority policy. Its creation and implementation should be in accordance with the requirements of the Slovak community in Hungary.

2. Under the current conditions of advanced-level language loss, we need help in creating Slovak language environment for children and teachers in the form of study programmes, residencies, camps and trainings in Slovakia, as well as the recruitment of guest-teachers [from Slovakia] to our schools.

3. We need help from the Slovak Republic for ensuring effective methodological resources and modern visual aids for our teachers.

[75] Slovaks abroad furthermore are supported by various Slovak and international organizations, besides the Office for Slovaks Living abroad, they can cooperate within the framework of the World Association of Slovaks Living Abroad and the World Congress of Slovaks, as well as attend the annual Conference for Slovaks Living Abroad, where they can express their evaluation about Slovakia's policies towards the minorities abroad.

[76] Law 474/2005 *on Slovaks Living Abroad*: https://www.uszz.sk/data/2016/ZZ_2005_474_20160101.pdf

4. The fulfilment of the commitments contained in the minutes of the Slovak-Hungarian Mixed Commission and other bilateral agreements should be systematically monitored and evaluated.

5. It is necessary to ensure that the media in Slovakia would regularly inform the citizens of Slovakia about the life of Slovaks abroad, and that information about Slovakia and Slovaks worldwide would reach the individual Slovak communities.

6. We need the help of the kin-state in building the economic potential of the Slovaks in Hungary, which can help realize their common goals. [77]

Conversations with leading representatives of the Slovak minority in Hungary[78] also reflect these claims: Edit Pecsenya, Headmaster of the Slovak High School in Békéscsaba expresses having a feeling of lack regarding Slovakia's kin-state engagement, especially in comparison to the external minority politics of Hungary, which she considers exemplary. Although she appreciates all support and the broadening of opportunities, such language courses and exchange programmes –for now she considers this support rather symbolic than substantial. President of the Slovak Self-Government in Hungary, Erzsébet Racskó notes that financial support of external minorities dropped in Slovakia, in contrast to Hungary. She sees the main areas of development in the work of the Slovak public cultural institutions, who should establish a systematic cooperation with Slovak minorities abroad and incorporate their works to their collections, thus contributing to raising awareness about them in Slovakia. As the chairman of the World Association of Slovaks Abroad, Vladimír Skalský observes, vast majority of the Slovaks in Slovakia is not quite aware of the existence of the Slovak minorities abroad until today. The World Association of Slovaks Abroad tries to raise this awareness, for example by their long-term plan to establish a House of Slovaks Abroad in Bratislava and to incorporate a subject about the Slovaks abroad to national school curricula.

[77] *Concept of the Development of the Slovak Educational System in Hungary, 2017 [Retrieved from]:* http://www.slovaci.hu/index.php/sk/kolstvo/534-koncepcia-na-kompas

[78] Own research: *Components of Modern Minority Identity among Slovak Youth in the Czech Republic and Hungary* [Master Thesis] Jagiellonian University in Krakow, 2017.

Although comparisons with Hungary came up as causal references, of course, one could not directly compare Slovakia's kin-state policies to those of Hungary. On one hand, the size of the Slovak populations outside of Slovakia is significantly smaller (around 300 000 in Central Eastern Europe, based on census data), and their distribution is more scattered than forming connected blocs. Moreover, and more importantly, as Slovakia did not lose significant amount of territories as a result of border changes, the history and *meaning* of having external minorities is extremely different, which greatly influences kin-state engagement politics.[79] What is clear however, is that in contrast to Hungary, the question of trans-border minorities is not present in the current Slovak political and public discourse.

4.2. Slovakia's Scholarship Programme for Slovaks Living Abroad

Slovakia's kin-state engagement towards its external minorities is most visible in the fields of education and culture. Active cooperation in these fields between Slovakia and the trans-border Slovak communities in the neighbouring countries, including Hungary, began in the 1970's. Through the 1970's and 1980's, significant part of today's Slovak intelligentsia in Hungary studied in Czechoslovakia, based on bilateral agreements between the two countries. During this period, scholarships were provided partly by the Hungarian government, partly by the cultural organisation Matica Slovenská (funded by the Slovak government). With the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the cooperation has been suspended for a few years, as Slovakia has been building its institutions for the independent statehood, and redrawing its foreign policy. The 1990's also marked a significant worsening of the Slovak-Hungarian relations, due to Slovakia's openly anti-Hungarian Mečiar government, and the restrictions of the rights of national minorities in Slovakia, particularly in the field of language usage, minority education and political participation.

[79] For a comprehensive analysis of the Hungarian kin-state nationalism and external minority politics see Waterbury (2010) and Pogonyi (2017).

These developments pictured Slovakia as a less attractive destination. After the European Union accession of Hungary and Slovakia in 2004 the scholarship program began to rise in popularity, as mobility between the two countries became significantly easier. The reformed version of the scholarship programme for Slovaks living abroad – now founded exclusively by the Slovak government - became a part of state policy supporting Slovaks Living Abroad, which was gradually developed over time with the establishment of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, and with the adoption of the *Act No. 474/2006 Coll. on Slovaks Living Abroad and on amendment of certain acts*.[80]

Today, Slovakia offers help in higher education for external Slovak minorities in the form of a reformed scholarship programme offered by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. The program is part of the framework of the *Concept of state politics of the Slovak Republic in relation to the Slovaks Living Abroad* developed by the Department of Cultural Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic for the period 2016-2020. The scholarship is offered on Bachelor, Master and Doctoral levels, for the full duration of the study programme, to students who are members of Slovak autochthonous minorities or diasporas abroad, and apply for majors taught in Slovak language at a public university (except for certain majors in Law and Medicine).

Nowadays (after 2010), on average 10-20% of the students from each graduating class[81] of the bilingual Slovak schools (from Budapest and Békéscsaba) opts to attend university in Slovakia, most of them choosing majors closely related to the Slovak minority (Slovak language and literature, History, International Relations, Journalism, Cultural Studies). They mainly study in the capital city Bratislava, Nitra and Košice. Slovaks from Hungary have 5 places/academic year for the scholarships on BA and MA level (280 eur/month),

[80] Governmental scholarships of the Slovak Rebuplic for foreign students [Website] https://www.vladnestipendia.sk/en/

[81] On average, overall 20-25 students graduate each year from the two Slovak high schools in Hungary

and 1 place on PhD level (330 eur/month). In the last 5 years however, there has not been sufficient interest from students to fill all offered places.[82] The nomination process is run by the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary, taking into consideration the students' ethnic origin (being a member of the Slovak minority in Hungary), academic achievements and extracurricular activities, Slovak language competence[83] and the relevance of the chosen major for the Slovak community in Hungary in terms of employment. The final selection is made by the Ministry based on 1) the nominations of the Slovak minority organisations, 2) academic records of students and 3) the chosen field of study.[84]

Based on the available documents and the scholarship's website, there is no clearly articulated aim or expectation about the outcomes of the scholarship programme, apart from the financial support: the documents do not mention the any 'nation-building' aspect, neither the aim of developing connections between Slovaks in Slovakia and members of the trans-border Slovak communities. The only reference to the nation-building aspect can be found on the website of the Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, as part of the legislation towards Slovaks abroad:

(2) The basic principles of state support are: […] the principle of a specific approach, meaning the consideration of the specific needs of Slovaks living abroad, in order to preserve and develop their Slovak identity, culture and language and cultural heritage in the states they reside in.[85]

[82] information provided by Erika Lázár, Coordinator for the Scholarship Programmes at the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary

[83] Scholarship recipients from Hungary, Romania and Serbia also have the possibility to complete an preparatory intensive course in academic Slovak language prior their university studies, organized by the Centrum of Further Education at the Comenius University in Bratislava, to strengthen their skills in communication necessary for completing their higher education. Furthermore, as part of support of Slovak education abroad, the Slovak Republic furthermore funds two short-term (3 week long) intensive language courses: one in Modra, for high school students of 11th and 12th grades for preparation for their final exams, and one in Bratislava, the Studia Academica Slovaca, for university students and professionals working for the Slovaks of Hungary. The courses also have a cultural component, and are combined with cultural activities and sightseeing trips (similarly to the Hungarian *ReConnect* programme).

[84] „*Requirements for the govermental scholarships for compatriots for the academic year 2019/2020" [Accessed from the Slovak National Self-Government in Hungary]*

[85] Law 474/2005 *on Slovaks Living Abroad*: https://www.uszz.sk/data/2016/ZZ_2005_474_20160101.pdf

The scholarship programme moreover, does not include any organised community-building or extracurricular activities, apart from one initial orientation session. Unlike the *Határtalanul* programme in Hungary, Slovakia until now does not offer exchange programs for Slovaks from Slovakia to visit Slovak minorities abroad.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the Slovak minority in Hungary the study-abroad practice is considered to be among the most efficient tools for improving the minority youth's language competencies, bringing them closer to Slovak people and culture, and raising confidence in their Slovak ethnicity, ultimately resulting in their engagement in Slovak minority life in Hungary after their return. However, experience shows that the reality is partly different: from students who studied in Slovakia, some remain permanently abroad, and only part of those who return chooses to work in the field – although besides national interest or commitment this is also due to the fact that financial remuneration in the field of minority education falls sharply behind the remuneration in the corporate sector.

This chapter illustrated that although the aim of trans-border nation-building is present in the official Slovak rhetoric, and is reflected in the present legislation and institutional framework, in the case of the government's scholarship programme for Slovaks abroad, the nation-building aspect is largely underdeveloped. This issue in general could be improved for example by incorporating the subject of Slovak external minorities more in the Slovak public and political discourse, national school curricula, as well as the Slovak cultural and media outlets. Particularly in the context of the scholarship programme, the nation-building aspect could be developed by organising community-building and educational events, where the members of the external Slovak minorities and the kin-nation could learn together about each other.

V. Empirical Research:
The Experience of Slovak Youth from Hungary Studying in Slovakia

5.1. Methodological Framework of the Empirical Research

This thesis aims to study the minority - kin-nation relations through a subjective lens: through the eyes of the minority students abroad, who interacted with the members of the kin-nation for a longer term, on an everyday basis. Based on academic literature, I considered that the best method to explore the attitudes, behavior and experience of the research subjects is by conducting in-depth personal interviews. Qualitative methods, such as personal interviews are used when the researcher's aim is to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the *meaning* of peoples' experience.[86]

According to their structure, we can distinguish among 3 types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews (guided conversation), which I found most suitable to represent the emic perspective: to make sure participants include the topics relevant to my research, but also provide them with space to talk freely about subjects *they* find important – as a result I could also observe and analyse which topics they chose to talk about most frequently and in most detail, and which issues they considered less relevant for sharing.

For my case study I preferred the use of in-depth personal interviews over focus groups based on three factors: 1) the low number of students participating in the study abroad program, 2) to discover the participants' personal attitudes and experiences, for which building trust between the researcher and research subject is inevitable, and it is easier achieved during one-on-one meetings, and 3) to avoid that the research participants would influence each other's answers and opinions during the interview – it was especially important for my

[86] Steinar Kvale, InterViews: *An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

research which topics the interviewees bring up and how they talk about them, that is better observed through in-depth personal interviews.

Data Collection: Research Sample and Sampling Techniques

The empirical research builds on 11 in-depth interviews with students who attended Slovak minority education in Hungary and continued their studies in Slovakia. For the overview of the research participants, see *Table 1*. in the Appendices. I decided to interview students who currently (in 2019) study in Slovakia, as they would remember most clearly and accurately their everyday experiences and interactions, and describe their encounters with Slovaks in most detail. I interviewed students who spent at least 6 months in Slovakia, in order to be able to analyse a more established position and well-rounded experience. According to the information obtained from Erika Lázár, the coordinator of the project at the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary, in the period of 2016-2019 overall 15 students are registered as studying in Slovakia through the scholarship programme at bachelor, master and doctoral levels. Students participating in the scholarship programme are graduates of one of the two Slovak high schools in Hungary (Budapest and Békéscsaba), and study at universities in Bratislava, Nitra and Košice. If we would like to study the experience of the minority students abroad as a community, instead of as individuals, it is important that our research sample would reflect the composition of the whole group. Therefore, my research sample includes students from both high schools and all three universities, reflecting the current composition of the scholarship programme (for the period 2016-2019). The sample includes 10 bachelor students and 1 doctoral student (currently there are no master students receiving the scholarship).

I reached the research subjects by using the following techniques:

1) Reaching respondents through Slovak organizations

During the empirical research, I looked out for respondents through Slovak organizations, namely the Organisation of Slovak Youth in Hungary (MASZFISZ-OSSM) and the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary (ÖSZO-CSSM), who provided me with a list of students known for currently studying abroad. I received only their names, without any personal data, and I contacted the students through social media. This way of sampling was used to reach around 40% of my research sample.

2) Network of acquaintances and snowball technique

After reaching out to the initial few participants, I asked them to connect me with other students studying in the scholarship programme. This technique seemed very effective in recruiting research participants, around 50% of the final sample.

3) Reaching respondents through the Internet

I tried to reach out to students through the internet, publishing a call for participation on social media in groups related to the Slovak high schools. This sampling technique proved to be the least efficient, only 1 person responded, that translates to 9% of my final sample size. I reached out personally to overall 14 participants: 11 fulfilled the selection criteria and were willing to participate in the interviews, 2 people were willing to participate, but did not fit the criteria (one was ethnic Hungarian studying in Slovakia, thus ineligible for the scholarship, one decided to cancel their studies before 6 months of studying abroad, and 2 people did not respond). Considering that currently 15 minority students study abroad within the framework of the governmental scholarship, the research sample (11) is nearly representative for the period of 2016-2019. I aimed for a gender balanced sample, however, this was largely dependent on the composition of the actual scholarship recipients: currently 6 male students and 9 female students. For my research, I interviewed 3 male and 8 female students.

Furthermore, as all interview respondents stressed that the encouragement/ push from the Slovak high schools played a role in their decision to study in Slovakia, I decided to interview the headmasters of the Slovak high schools in Budapest and Békéscsaba about why they consider studying in Slovakia important for the students and the for the Slovak minority. I was curious furthermore, that as a nominating organisation, what are the expectations from the study abroad programme of the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary.[87] I believe contrasting the expectations of students and minority representatives about the outcomes of the study abroad programme adds an interesting layer to the analysis, showing possible compliance or discrepancy between the agenda of the 'Slovak community' and the agenda of the individuals.

The interviewing period lasted April-May 2019. 10 personal interviews (7 students and the 3 minority representatives) were conducted in Budapest and Békéscsaba, while 4 of them via Skype for the convenience of the research subjects. Interviewees took their time to reflect on each question and talked very openly and in detail about their personal experiences. Each interview lasted around 1,5 hours and was conducted in Hungarian – however, all participants used a variety of Slovak phrases. All data was obtained and used after clear and informed consent from the research participants about the purpose of the study.

Possible Sample Bias

Based on the composition of the current study abroad cohort, there is an overrepresentation of students studying in Nitra, and an underrepresentation of students studying in Bratislava and Košice, which might influence the outcomes of the empirical research. To balance this bias, where it proves relevant, extracts used from the pilot study will be provided.[88] Furthermore, an issue of personal bias arises, because some of the participants attended the same Slovak

[87] This interview was also designed to obtain background information about Slovakia's kin-state engagement and the technical details of the study abroad programme.
[88] The pilot study included 2 students who studied in Bratislava during 2010-2015 and 2012-2016.

minority school as I, the researcher, and I also have experience of studying in Slovakia. In this case it was especially important to remain objective and not to influence the participants' answers. However, this distant acquaintance and certain knowledge of the environment abroad proved to be helpful to gain the interviewees' trust, and to encourage them to talk openly about their experience (both negative and positive) without the fear of judgment.[89]

Data Analysis

The data analysis is based on two methodological approaches: thematic content analysis and narrative analysis. As part of the preparation for the research, I conducted 3 exploratory interviews in December, 2018 in the framework of a pilot study, in order to understand better the studied subject and identify the emergent research categories. Because of the methodological issues of comparing the accounts of students who finished their studies years ago with the current students' experiences, I decided to exclude my exploratory interviews from the research sample and the following analysis.

During the pilot study, I identified the following topics the qualitative research is built on:

1) Motivation to study in Slovakia, 2) Expectations about the outcomes of the study abroad programme, 3) The experience of encountering the kin-nation and 4) Reflections on national identity and the effects studying in Slovakia might have had on it.

The following personal interviews were coded and organised into thematic categories according to these topics. The empirical chapter of this thesis was structured to reflect the flow themes as appeared in the interviews. Certain overlaps may occur, given the qualitative nature of the data.

[89] According to my personal observation, students studying abroad are often pressured by their teachers to talk about their experience only in a positive way (at least in the minority school environment), as to not influence further generations of students negatively.

The second dimension is the analysis of narratives. From the data obtained through the personal interviews, I conduct an inductive analysis: by exploring specific attitudes and experiences, I identify broader patterns of the experience of the Slovak minority youth from Hungary in contact with their kin-nation, and I analyse how they interpret and explain the experienced social phenomena, using the *emic* perspective. The analysis also assesses the applicability of the theories on national identification presented in the theoretical framework for the case of the Slovak minority youth from Hungary, studying in Slovakia.

Challenges Encountered in the Empirical Research

Given the complexity and depth of the studied topic, the main challenge was to organise and select, which materials to include in or exclude from this thesis, from the pool of a very rich and exciting collection of theoretical and empirical data – this proved to be especially hard while choosing the extracts from the in-depth personal interviews. I selected material that I found most relevant for answering my research questions, and quotes from the interviews that were most illustrative of the narrative of the research participants. The other main challenge of the empirical research derives from the sensibility of the subject: national identification is personal and subjective, therefore in order to obtain meaningful data gaining the trust of the research participants was crucial. The length of the interviews (1-1,5 hour on average) enabled me to build up this trust in the interviewees. A further challenge is that data anonymity is hard to ensure within small communities, therefore the detailed descriptions of the participants' background unfortunately had to be excluded, in order to respect confidentiality. To overcome this challenge, all potentially revealing or sensitive information has been excluded from the selected quotes.

Presentation and Analysis of the Empirical Data

5.2. The Motivation of Minority Students for Studying in the Kin-State

In the first section of the empirical research, I study the students' motivation behind choosing to study in Slovakia: a special focus is given to explore whether their decision to move to Slovakia was primarily influenced by national feelings, or other reasons, such as economic or social factors.

In case of the 'homeland tourism' of diaspora communities to their kin-states, the family factor is often prevalent as the main source of motivation, as participants would like to know where their families/ancestors grew up and are coming from.[90] In the case of Slovaks in Hungary, the motivation for deciding to study in Slovakia as a way to connect to family heritage is almost negligible. This however is primarily due to the 300 year history of Slovaks in Hungary – Slovaks migrated to the territory of today's Hungary before the establishment of the Slovak state, and they considered the Hungarian Kingdom as their homeland. Moreover, all apart from one interview respondents reported that their families have been living for at least 3 generations in present-day Hungary – thus present-day Slovakia is not seen by the students as their own ancestral homeland. All interviewees were familiar with the history of the Slovak migration, some even mentioning the regions their families are documented to be coming from, yet none of my respondents mentioned among the reasons for choosing to study in Slovakia the aim to discover, or reconnect with the homeland of their (distant) ancestors.

Students unanimously reported that the will to improve their Slovak language competencies was the main motivation behind their decision to study in Slovakia. Here we can trace the influence of national consciousness/ethnic origin: Slovak language was seen by minority

[90] Eszter Herner-Kovács, „Diaspora Engagement through the BirthRight Programme: Hungarian Americans Encountering the Homeland" (Central European University, Master Thesis, 2015).

youth as an instrument of connecting to their ethnic origin and culture, as well as a family heritage and values:

"My grandparents were really happy and proud that I studied the Slovak language." resp. 4

"*I wanted to learn the language of my ancestors*" resp. 10

One student shared a very emotional account, which showed her connection to the Slovakness through language knowledge:

"Speaking Slovak is the way I connect with my grandpa. He is 90 now. I am the only one who learned Slovak from the whole family, and I know it is important to him. He always tells me how proud and happy he is. Every time when the university was hard, I thought I have to keep on, and learn Slovak for him. And one day when he is gone, the Slovak language will always stay with me, as a part of him." resp. 3

Secondly, the economic and practical benefits of Slovak language knowledge were deemed important by the participants, such as its advantages on the job market and for travelling. Moreover, as Fox & Miller-Idriss describe, material rewards can be an important incentive to make 'national choices'.[91] As my research findings show, financial incentives played a significant role in the students' decision-making:

„My main reason for deciding to study in Slovakia was that it was for free. Moreover, I even received a scholarship, quite a high amount. I could manage very well with the money I received. I also heard others opened savings accounts. I went to Slovakia because it was very beneficial from a financial perspective." resp. 1

This reasoning was echoed on varying levels by the vast majority of the participants, many of whom furthermore expressed that by studying abroad with a scholarship they wanted to take burdens off their families. On the other hand, we can find examples where financial benefits did not play prominent role:

„Unlike for others, money did not play any role for me at all. I knew since I was a kid that I wanted to attend university in Slovakia. It was an inner commitment." resp. 2

"Of course, the money is nice, but I would have done it also without it. I think it is worth doing even without any financial support. You can study a language, get to know another country and culture. These factors were much more important to me." resp. 3

[91] Fox & Miller-Idriss „Everyday Nationhood", 536 – 563.

Although, an interest in connecting with the Slovak nation was reported by respondents participating in the pilot study, it did not appear in the current research sample among the students' motivation. The reason for this besides individual factors might be that students in the research sample already heard the experience of the previous generations about the difficulties of this connection (elaborated in the following sub-chapters).

Among the factors of the students' motivation to study in Slovakia, it is important to mention not only the role of pull factors, but also the push factors: nearly all participants stressed that they decided to study in Slovakia because of the financial burden pursuing education in Hungary would have placed upon them. Majority of the participants also highlighted that they choose to study abroad in order to feel more independent from their parents.

As the provided answers suggest, the motivation behind deciding to study in the kin-state may vary highly on the individual level. Besides the financial benefits, the aim to learn the Slovak language fluently reoccurs as the main common pattern for all research participants. Slovak language is primarily associated with connection to the family and the students' Slovak roots, however it is also seen as means for improving their chances of future employment. The section illustrates, that although Slovak national identity can be traced behind the choice made by minority youth to study in the kin-state, it is rather a frame around, than a driving force of this decision.

5.3. Expectations about the Outcomes of the Study Abroad Programme

This section contrasts the expectations of students and minority representatives about the outcomes of the study abroad programme, adding an interesting layer to the analysis by showing possible compliance or discrepancy between the agenda of the 'Slovak community' and the agenda of the individuals.

a) Internal Expectations

The greatest expectation from the study abroad programme, unanimously reported by all research subjects was to learn the Slovak language perfectly. Students from the Slovak high school in Budapest evaluated their language competencies stronger ("fluent/ upper intermediate") than students from the high school in Békéscsaba ("sufficient/ mediocre")[92] however, all participants expressed the wish to improve and reach near-native level.

Interestingly, the second most expressed expectation has been 'not being prejudiced against':

"When I got to Nitra, I did not have any initial expectations. I only wished for a comfortable bed… [laughs] and of course, that they would not treat me any differently, I mean, negatively." resp. 4

I am not sure how to say this, but… before I went there to study, I expected that the people will treat us different. I expected them to hate us, after all you hear… In school, they told us it is better to go to Nitra, because there are more Hungarians, so we can better blend in and feel less the… how to say… that negative wave. They told us that in Bratislava, there are much more Slovaks, and they won't like us. So, from our year no one went to study to Bratislava. resp. 6

Relations between the Slovak and Hungarian nations are historically conflict-burdened owing to political conflicts and the fight over territories. This phenomenon still echoes in segments of the current political and public discourse, influencing the view of the two nations about each other. The construction and change of ethnic stereotypes[93], and the study of the role of ethnic prejudice and stereotypes in national identity construction[94] would unquestionable deserve more attention, however, unfortunately the limits of the scope of this thesis had to be drawn here.

[92] The reasons behind the differences in real or perceived language competence between the two groups were not studied in this thesis, however, students from the Budapest high school often attributed their good language skills to the high number native Slovak speaker teachers (and even students) in their school.

[93] in more detail see for example: Bar-Tal, D. „Formation and change of ethnic and national stereotypes: An integrative model." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 21(4), (1997): 491–523.

[94] See for example the research conducted by Örkény, A., Csepeli, Gy. & Székelyi, M. (2000) who in their book titled *Nemzetek egymás tükrében* [Grappling with National Identity] studied the self-perceptions of members of the Hungarian minority abroad, their perception by their majority nations, and by Hungarians from Hungary. Their findings show that historical and political conflicts still play a very significant role in the perception of each other among Central European nations.

The possible explanations for prejudice referred to by the students, were historical conflicts and recent political tensions - according to their narrative - the Trianon Treaty, the political conflicts around the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, Slovakia's state language law [introduced in 2009, limiting the spheres of usage of the minority languages], and the recent rise of the Slovak far-right party *Slovenská Národná Strana* (SNS), led by Ján Slota, who have used openly anti-Hungarian rhetoric on multiple occasions.

Further expectations about the study abroad programme did not reflect ethnic/national references: they mainly concerned the quality of education and the student life.

b) External Expectations

I found it important to include the expectations about the study abroad programme from the perspective of the Slovak minority community, which I studied by interviewing the headmasters of the Slovak high schools in Budapest and Békéscsaba Edit Pecsenya and Júlia Marlok, and the coordinator of the study abroad programme at the National Slovak Self-Government, Erika Lázár.

Both headmasters emphasize, that the Slovak community in Hungary is an aging population, which is in need of young professionals with proficient language skills and commitment towards the Slovak minority in Hungary - they especially stress the lack of Slovak speaking teachers. Their main expectation from the study abroad programme (also expressed by Erika Lázár from the National Slovak Self-Government) is to supply high skilled young professionals, who can take over the leadership of the Slovak minority in Hungary. This expectation reflects in the narrative of the interviewed students:

"Originally, I wanted to study ethnography, but then one of my teachers told me I have much better chances for employment as a teacher, maybe even at this school." resp. 4

Edit Pecsenya is convinced that education has a very significant role in developing identity:

"There are many connection points between national identity and education. For developing identity, there are two pillars on which education can build: experience and knowledge. In many cases, we only emphasise knowledge, however experience is also very important."

She stresses the importance of excursions to Slovakia, through which students can gain first-hand connection to the country, the language, the modern culture and the Slovak society.

However, all interviewed respondents acknowledged, that education in Slovakia alone cannot build national identity: it has to build on traditions and values transmitted by the family, and the motivation of the students for claiming belonging to the Slovak minority in Hungary has to be internal. Furthermore, Edit Pecsenya argues that within an environment, where the majority nation constantly propagates [Hungarian] national identity though various channels, minority institutions do not have the tools to compete, and minority ethnicity is a less attractive alternative to youth.

Based on the interviews we can conclude, that while the minority representatives' main expectation from the study abroad programme is to strengthen the students' Slovak identity and thus increase their interest in and the commitment towards the Slovak minority in Hungary, this engagement towards the Slovak minority in Hungary is not reflected in the student's motivation nor in their expectations. Moreover, they expect being prejudiced against, which is more an indicator of distinctness from the Slovaks in Slovakia, than that of connection or shared national belonging.

5.4. The Experience of Encountering the Kin-Nation

Tajfel argues that social behaviour is affected by feelings of *belonging* or *not belonging* to groups that are defined by the individuals themselves[95]. Here, the *perception* of groups plays a crucial role, because as Wimmer writes, only those groups and boundaries are seen to be valid references of belonging, which the individuals consider relevant or salient for

[95] Tajfel, *Human groups and social categories*, 254-267.

themselves in the studied context.[96] To study the feelings of group-belonging and the means of group-formation, we have to first identify what groups are seen as present and relevant for the students from Hungary studying in Slovakia. Based on the in-depth interviews, students identify 6 categories they relate themselves to: 1) Slovaks from Slovakia, 2) Hungarians from Slovakia, 3) Slovaks from Hungary 4) Slovaks from other countries [mostly Romania, Serbia and Croatia] 5) Hungarians from Hungary and 6) Others/Foreigners. The first section of this sub-chapter studies the national self-perception Slovak minority students from Hungary, while the following sections examine how the interviewed students see themselves in relation to these national categories, what kind of attributes they attach to relevant groups, and how the process of connection/othering occurs according to their narrative.

5.4.1. National Self-Identification. Perception of the Self.

When asked to introduce themselves and talk about their background, only 2 out of 11 interviewees mentioned their ethnicity at all. Others defined themselves mostly in terms of which high school they attended, and what they are studying at university. Ethnic self-identification neither did explicitly come up when the students described their motivations for applying to the study abroad programme. The moment interviewees started to talk about their nationality was when they began to describe encountering *Others.* This is in line with the relational understanding of nationality, as being non-salient until it is "evoked." This aspect of *relationality* of ethnicity was observed by many social scientists among others by Kiliánová, and was an expected research outcome.[97] What was surprising however, is the discrepancy between the range of 'available' national categories to choose from when it comes to national identification, as seen by the students and their environment. All students reported a kind of hybrid or dual identity: "*I [pause] think I identify*

[96] Wimmer „The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries" 976-984.
[97] Kiliánová „Bádanie o identite"13-17.

as Hungarian, but I have Slovak ancestors." resp. 6 "*I am Slovak-Hungarian*" resp. 4 "*I am Hungarian of Slovak origin*" resp. 1 "*I am Slovak from Hungary*" resp. 2. Interestingly, students (consciously or subconsciously) often avoided direct national identification by positioning themselves to a local or global context:

"I consider myself a Lowland Slovak – more precisely Čabän [Slovak from Békéscsaba]." resp. 11

"I always say I am from Békéscsaba. For me that means an identity, which combines both Slovak and Hungarian elements." resp. 4

"I feel European [pause]. If I had to narrow it down, I would say Central European." resp. 8.

Strong local identification was present in most participants' accounts of their national belonging, while the feeling of *Europeanness* was reported by nearly half of the research subjects. One of the main observable divisions in my research sample was the strength of local identity: students from northern Slovak settlements in Hungary reported a notably weaker local identity than Slovaks from southern Slovak settlements [from the Lowland]. One of the probable reasons for this difference could be the salience of Lowland Slovak identity in the students' life: for Southern Slovaks, Lowland Slovak identity is expressed by various cultural and social events, such as the recent 300th anniversary of the re-establishment of Békéscsaba (in 2018), moreover Slovak students from Hungary often meet Lowland Slovak students from Romania and Serbia through various excursions and student competitions organised by the Slovak school in Békéscsaba.

Despite their multidimensional identity, minority students perceived that their environment often pressures them to choose between one of the two *mutually exclusive* national categories: Slovak *or* Hungarian. Interestingly, they reported this feeling in all social environments: in interactions with Slovaks from Slovakia, Hungarians from Slovakia and Slovaks from Hungary too:

"I remember in high school we had those questionnaires about your identity. You had to put an X whether you consider yourself Slovak or Hungarian. There was no middle ground. The following year, we got the same questionnaire, but there was already an X next to the Slovak nationality, we only needed to sign it." resp 1.

"The Hungarians [from Slovakia] never understand me, and say: you are from Hungary, therefore you are Hungarian. I say NO [accent]. I'm from Hungary, but I'm not Hungarian. But they don't listen […] They say: 'you're one of us!' But I don't feel that way." resp. 2.

"I sometimes get pressured to choose an identity in situations where I don't feel the need for it at all. People often ask me: which country's politics do you agree with? I don't even care about politics. The most absurd instance I had was when someone asked me, who would I choose between Kossuth and Štúr.[98] *I refuse to choose. They don't understand it. Not that I mind, no point in arguing with those kind of people*" respondent from the pilot study, f, 28.

Our research findings – according to which students reported hybrid [Slovak-Hungarian] national identity or at the least Hungarian national identity with the full awareness of their Slovak/mixed ethnic origin – show that respondents do not see *nationality* as a bounded, one dimensional category: their answers represented a wide variety of identification patterns, including the following combinations: ethnicSlovak+civicHungarian, hybridLocal+civicHungarian, civicHungarian+European, ethnicSlovak+European, hybridLocal+European. What did not occur however, is that a respondent would describe their national identification one-dimensionally: none of the students reported being only Slovak, or only Hungarian. These research results comply with the findings of Bošelová[99] on Slovaks from Romania and with those of Surová[100] on Slovaks from Serbia, who display simultaneously their ethnic Slovak identity, civic attachment to their homeland (Romania and Serbia), and local embeddedness in their settlements of origin [in the host states].

Vast majority of the research subjects defined national identity in civic terms: "*I define myself as Hungarian, because I was born and raised in Hungary, and I simply care more about what's going on in Hungary than in Slovakia."* resp. 8

[98] A Hungarian and a Slovak politician in the 1840's with strong national political agenda, having a dispute with each other about the position of Slovaks in the Hungarian Kingdom.
[99] Bošelová, „K etnickej identifikácii Slovákov" 303-312.
[100] Surova. „National and ethnic identifications" 2-20.

National identity is first associated by nearly all of the respondents with mother tongue:

"*I feel Slovak because I speak Slovak with my family. But I feel like a Hungarian citizen."* resp. 5

"*I actually consider myself Hungarian. [pause] My friend, also from the scholarship programme, told me after 1 month of being in Slovakia, that he could not decide whether he feels Slovak or Hungarian. He has Slovak ancestors, and so do I.*

- *What do you think makes someone a certain nationality?*

- *For me, it is that I think in Hungarian. Every word in my head formulates first in Hungarian."* resp. 1

"I would say I am Hungarian, because I was born in Hungary and Hungarian is my mother tongue. No one uses Slovak language in my family anymore." resp. 6.

On the other hand, research participants expressed a certain rejection of the principle of ethnic or national categorization:

"I simply decided to introduce myself by just saying my hometown, not the country or ethnicity. Some people think it is in Slovakia. Most never heard of it. Most never heard about the Slovak minority abroad itself. I don't explain. If they are truly interested, they will ask questions." resp. 2

"Oh just not this question! I feel like I had been forced to explain my nationality my whole life." resp. 1

"I think national identities are outdated" resp. 3.

Although many scholars found minority identity to be situational and context-dependent, these results were only partially reflected in this study: research subjects with stronger Hungarian belonging indeed expressed that whether they feel "Hungarian" or as a "Slovak from Hungary", depends on the situation. Such contexts include whether the students are in Slovakia or in Hungary, the ethnic composition of their social setting and the language they are using at the given situation.

Those students however, who claimed stronger Slovak identification described a much more stable national identity: regardless of their place of residence, social environment and language usage they reported to be claiming themselves being "Slovaks from Hungary". One of the possible reasons behind this pattern, as reflected in the interviews, might be that

as members of the Slovak minority youth experience their status to be questioned or simply ignored in both Slovakia and Hungary, they emphasize it intentionally and purposefully, not only to show emotional attachment towards the Slovaks minority in Hungary, but also to raise awareness of it in the majority environment.

5.4.2. Perception by Others.

Although the vast majority of respondents clearly stated that they do not want to be put in bounded national categories, the question arises, can they avoid it? To study this issue, I address how they have been perceived by others, and whether this is in line or in discrepancy with their national self-perception.

All research participants unanimously reported that the first reaction they experience from their environment is surprise:

"People I meet for the first time are very confused about where I am from, because I speak Slovak differently, and I speak Hungarian differently than them. Then the long explanation begins. They are mostly surprised and say they had no idea such thing exists." resp. 6

"Teachers would ask, with a sceptical tone: [Are you] from Hungary? Why did you come here? Why to the Slovak major? Are you those *Slovaks from abroad? And we say yes, we are. But to our classmates, we are still the Hungarians*." resp. 4

Nearly all interviewees reported that they are seen as Hungarians, in nearly all social encounters, both with Slovaks and with Hungarians.[101] All students explicitly expressed, that they are seen through the lens of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, both by Slovaks and Hungarians alike:

"Slovaks cannot imagine what it is being like [a member of the Slovak minority in Hungary]. They think about it like a Hungarian town in Slovakia, where everyone speaks the minority language, and is sceptical towards the state. They do not know and understand the history of our community [the Slovaks in Hungary]. The Hungarians [in Slovakia] even less so. The imagine they have about Hungary as a homeland is as it was composed only of ethnic Hungarians. I think that's the message they get through the media and politics." resp. 4

[101] Those students who did not experience being perceived as Hungarians, previously reported near-native or native level of Slovak language competency.

Nearly all interviewees expressed that they notice a significant difference in social interactions when they are perceived by Slovaks as Hungarians from Slovakia:

"They would see from our names that we are Hungarians. […] For example in the bank: initially, they are very distant and unfriendly. The first question was: do you actually understand Slovak? But the moment they realized we speak fluent Slovak there were no issues at all. Especially, when they find out that we are from Hungary, and not from Slovakia. When I told the lady that I am from the Slovak minority in Hungary, it felt like someone exchanged her. She warmly assured me that I could go to her anytime I need help." resp. 4

"Oh, I have a funny story! I held a presentation on a seminar about some teaching methods, that are mostly used in the 9th and 10th grade of high school. The class got totally confused, as they have grades from 1st to 4th not 9th to 12th. I said 'this is our way', and the teacher even got mad, and challenged me 'what do I mean this is our way', and that I must know how it is done in the Slovak schools. At that moment, my classmate, also from Hungary, interjected by saying: it is the school system in Hungary. Everyone was shocked, that we came from Hungary, and from that moment on, they started to treat us completely differently." resp. 1.

These stories also illustrate what most interviewees described: that their nationality is not directly discussed in most social encounters, and their origin from Hungary is uncovered so to speak accidentally. This section furthermore showed that the Slovaks minority students encountered in general do not know about the Slovak minority in Hungary, nor seem to accept them as part of the Slovak nation. The following section examines how this perception influences feelings of groups belonging and means of group formation.

5.4.3. The Process of Othering.
Feelings of Group-Belonging, Means of Group-Formation

This section aims to address *connectedness* and *commonality* as aspects of national identity,[102] which serve as the basis of the formation of social categories and groups. In this context, I use the term *connectedness* meaning having contact and interactions with other groups: I was mainly curious whom Slovak minority students from Hungary spend the most time with. By *commonality,* I understand the perception of shared attributes: here I studied whom Slovak minority students from Hungary feel being similar to and closest to.

[102] Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups.*

a) Connectedness with Ethnic Groups

As Slovaks from Hungary study in towns (Bratislava, Nitra, Košice), where a significant Hungarian minority community is present, they have the choice to socialize both with Slovaks and Hungarians. All interviewees reported that in the university environment they have on average 2-4 ethnic Hungarian classmates from Slovakia, out of 30-40 students (mostly ethnic Slovaks from Slovakia). When asked about their group of close friends, all but one student stated that they have the same amount of ethnic Slovak and ethnic Hungarian friends. All students reported having 1-2 Slovak classmates from Romania, Serbia, Croatia or Ukraine, with whom however the vast majority of the respondents does not spend time with, apart from the university setting.

Socializing preferences highly vary by the individual. Some research subjects stated that they hang out more frequently with Hungarians, mainly for pragmatically motivated reasons: it is easier for them to express themselves in Hungarian. Other participants (mainly those who attached higher importance to their Slovak ethnic origin) said they prefer to socialize with Slovaks, because they want to perfect their language skills. But overall, all students claim that they reject the organisation of their in-group on the principle of ethnicity: their friendships are primarily formed by personal sympathy, and secondarily by pragmatic factors such as physical proximity (e.g. classroom and dormitory environment).

"*I do not care about my friends' ethnicity: I have friends who are Slovaks, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Mexicans... no one should care about that*." resp. 2.

b) Commonality with Ethnic Groups

In the case of the Slovaks from Hungary, connection points with Slovaks from the kin-state are not found in the contemporary Slovak culture, but in attributes they experienced as part of the Slovak culture back in Hungary:

"I did not feel anything in common with the Slovaks. I could not get any of their references to music or movies. I felt like an outsider." resp. 1

"Sometimes I could not get involved in discussions about topics, which seemed very important to them, but were completely unfamiliar to me, for example, most recently the nostalgia surrounding the anniversary of Czechoslovakia." resp. 4

"During one class, we learnt about cultural traditions for religious holidays, and it was a good feeling to see that they [Slovaks in Slovakia] actually have them the same way as we learnt about it at home." resp. 6

"I remember one specific moment of connection: I was walking home through the subway and I suddenly heard a folk song, played by a street musician. It was a song I used to do folk dance to in my town back in Hungary. It was a very particular feeling of connection." resp. 8

Few minority students also experienced very personal notions of national connectedness:

"I had an internship in a school in a small town, and while I was there, I got to know that many people have the same surname as I do. I never met anyone in Hungary with the same surname. That was a moment I realized my family actually belonged here." resp. 6.

More interviewees reported feeling most disconnected from the kin-nation during national holidays: they did not perceived Slovak holidays meaningful, but celebrated - even from distance - the Hungarian holidays. Minority students reported connection to the Slovak nation and culture in Slovakia on the level of *symbolic ethnicity* as Gans describes it; more on a superficial than on a substantial level.[103] This symbolic ethnicity is reflected in the appreciation of Slovak national heroes (e.g. L'udovít Štúr), artists and sportsmen (Ján Kollár, Peter Sagan), and Slovak food and drinks (bryndzové halušky).

Interestingly, this is in contrast with their perception of the Slovak culture in Hungary, which they describe not as associated with certain symbols or events, but in much more abstract terms, as "a feeling of community", "part of my identity" or "part of my town's history".

"For me being Slovak from Hungary means belonging to a community that is unique in its kind. The less people identify with it, the more special and precious it becomes." resp. 11

[103] Gans, *Symbolic Ethnicity*, 1-20.

I found interesting, that the elements members of the Slovak minority in Hungary considered important for symbolic connection with the Slovak nation, and as significant attributes of Slovak culture, were often not perceived as such by Slovaks from Slovakia:

"I tried to impress my friends with how much I know about Slovak Literature. But they were not impressed, they were just confused how and why do I know this." resp. 8.

In other cases, attributes of symbolic ethnicity found resonance with the kin-nationals:

"My friends were joking I cannot be a real Slovak, until I make bryndzové halušky [sheep cheese dumplings] at home." resp 3.

This ambiguity of the symbolic ethnicity and also reflected in the way how Slovak minority students perceived the national identity of the Hungarian minority youth in Slovakia:

"I think they [members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia] have this image of Hungarians, probably from MTV or ECHO TV [Hungarian pro-government TV channels] or from the politicians… they have a sort of ideal how Hungarians should act like, and they try to copy that. Like for example, listening only to Hungarian music, moreover, the old ones, that no one listens to anymore, like EDDA or Tankcsapda… and in reality, Hungarians in Hungary would not act like that." resp. 8.

Vast majority of the interviewees expressed, that they cannot identify with the Hungarians in Slovakia. The reason for this, interestingly, was not distinctness in language or culture, but an issue of the relation to Slovaks:

"I feel like it is more the Hungarians, not the Slovaks, who perceive us a bit… as being suspicious. They are astonished that we chose to come to Slovakia and we study Slovak. For them it makes no sense. And when we say we actually like Slovakia and the Slovak language they are a taken aback, some even sceptical." resp. 4

I really like Hungarians in Slovakia, I spend lot of time with them, and they are my very good friends. However… [long pause] sometimes I feel like they are too Hungarian… if you know what I mean… talking very badly about Slovaks… resp. 6.

Distancing from the ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia based on the attitudes they showed towards Slovaks occurred not only in case of students with strong Slovak identification, but also among those who previously identified as feeling more Hungarian than Slovak. I found this observation really interesting, because according to my interpretation, it shows

that even students with stronger Hungarian identity feel a certain sense of emotional attachment or solidarity towards Slovaks, and disprove negative attitudes about them.[104]

Although *as a group*, Slovak minority youth from Hungary felt in a "vacuum", interviewees perceived and appreciated, that *as individuals* they could switch between the groups with a relative ease:

"According to my observation, Slovaks and Hungarians do not mix. They live in separate dormitories, they go to separate parties. Our advantage is, that we could hang out with both groups without any problem" resp. 6.

All respondents emphasized, that although they interact with and connect to both Slovak kin-nationals and Hungarians in Slovakia, they expressed only weak feelings of commonality and belonging with either group. Respondents considered themselves as a clearly separate group that they feel most attached to: *Slovaks [or persons having Slovak ethnic origin] from Hungary*.

c) Group Boundaries

Based on the in-depth interviews with the research subjects, I aimed to identify what boundaries are perceived to be standing between in-groups and out-groups. My findings show the following:

Language as a Boundary

Vast majority of the interviewees expressed attitudes and described behaviours from which I could conclude that the main boundary they perceive to be standing between [ethnic] groups, is the *language*. And it is not the difference in language as such [Slovak, Hungarian], but the difference in language *competence.* Around half of the respondents expressed that they lack confidence in their language skills, which influences their social interactions:

[104] Although, it can also be the case, that research subjects disprove of all kind of ethnic or national prejudice, and emotional attachment toward Slovaks in not their primary or only motivation.

"I just don't think my Slovak is good enough. I do not know how to conjugate words properly. That's why at first I barely talked in Slovakia, I was too afraid to speak…" more respondents

The perception of language as a boundary was not only present in social interactions, but in the construction of national identity (both "ethnic" or "civic") as well:

"I think they [Slovaks] cannot imagine, how can a town, where the Slovak language is not commonly spoken anymore identify itself as being Slovak." resp. 11

"I think Slovaks are cold towards Hungarians in Slovakia, because they think they do not want to learn the Slovak at all." resp. 6.

Some of the participants furthermore described experiences that comply with Collins & Clément's findings [105] on the association between language competence and personal competence, and which influenced the students social interactions: "*Sometimes I felt like my classmates or the teacher would see me less intelligent, because I could not express myself flawlessly*." resp. 7.

Vast majority of the students however reported that the Slovaks they encountered [classmates, flatmates, teachers, strangers] were very patient and helpful in overcoming linguistic barriers[106] – as soon as they found out they are coming *from Hungary*, not from Slovakia.

Moreover, the role of language as a boundary is ambivalent, as language is perceived not only as a dividing line, but often the exact opposite, as a source of connection and access to the Slovak nation and culture, where higher language competence facilitated closer group connection.

[105] Collins & Clément, "Language and Prejudice Direct and Moderated Effects" 376–396.

[106] This was a significant difference from interviews conducted within the framework of the pilot study with students studying in Bratislava, who reported frequently feeling the experience of prejudice or even discrimination from Slovaks, since they do not speak the language fluently [even after explaining they are from Hungary]. A possible explanation is that at the university in Bratislava, there are proportionately less Hungarian students, so their environment were not as used to the presence of possible language variations or language barriers. However, as these students finished their studies already more than 3 years ago, it is also possible that these negative experiences were reported more frequently because they were more memorable for the students.

Ethnic Prejudice as a Boundary

The other main observable boundary in the process of othering was ethnic prejudice.[107] Interestingly however, although the students registered prejudice as being present, participants in my research sample did not perceive ethnic prejudice between the Slovaks and the Hungarians [in general terms] as a source of boundary-construction in their everyday interactions, they did not feel it applies to them. This actually confirms Wimmer's argument that boundaries are only relevant if they are perceived as such by the individual.

"I often hear phrases like "[a person] is acting like a Hungarian" which means you are doing something silly. Sometimes they forget I am Hungarian, because we talk in Slovak. Then I throw them a fake strict look, but usually I just laugh about it. I know they do not actually mean it, otherwise they would not be friends with me. I think it's just a phrase and they do not realize what they are saying." resp. 8

*"I often hear people say bad things about the Hungarians in general… you know, some people say '*The Hungarians'*, as in Hungary you would hear '*The Gypsies'*… that very disturbed me initially, but now I do not even notice it. Personally, I have very good relations with everyone."* resp. 4.

According to the interviewees narratives, they expected ethnic prejudice being there 'as part of the everyday experience', although some of them was aware of this bias and exercised self-reflection:

"*When I think more about it, I do not feel they [Slovaks] were prejudiced against us, I felt more like we were prejudiced against them. I think it is because even before we go abroad, everyone is saying, they hate Hungarians, they will beat you, don't speak Hungarian in public*." resp. 2.

This section concludes that Slovak students from Hungary perceived 'language usage' and 'ethnic prejudice' as the boundaries between groups. However, these boundaries were relative, situational and penetrable, and according to the interviewees' perception they stand more between the Slovaks and Hungarians [in general] than between the members of Slovaks minority and any of their reference groups.

[107] The content of ethnic prejudice revolved around two main issues: 1) The first issue was referring to a historio-political context in which Hungarians were seen as the *aggressor*. Prejudice often included suggestions that Hungarians are arrogant, violent or oppressive, and look down on Slovaks. 2) The theme issue revolved around language usage. The content of prejudice was that Hungarians in Slovakia lack proper Slovak language knowledge, which was then associated with lower personal competence.

This sub-chapter aimed to analyse the perceived group-belonging and group boundaries as it is experienced by the Slovak minority students from Hungary, when they are encountering the kin-nation (and other ethnic groups). Based on the empirical data discussed in this chapter, we can draw the following illustration of the perceived [national] group-belonging and inter-group ties of the Slovak minority youth:

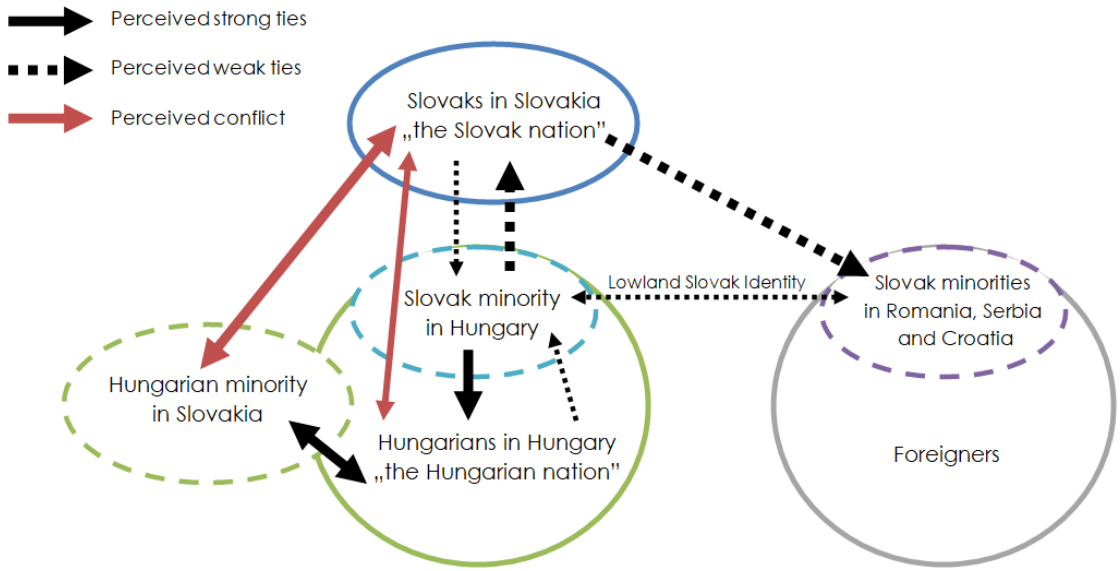

Figure 2.: Perceived [national] group-belonging and inter-group ties of the Slovak minority students from Hungary

According to the interviewed students' narratives, the Slovak minority in Hungary is a separate national unit within the Hungarian nation. They do not see the Slovak minority in Hungary as part of the Slovak nation, whom they only have weak ties with. Although the narrative of the 'common national belonging with the Slovak nation' is present in the Slovak minority education in Hungary and is also communicated trough certain "official channels"[108] this is not sufficient to change the students' national self-perceptions.

[108] such as the official rhetoric of the Office of Slovaks Living Abroad in Slovakia, and the National Slovak Self-Government in Hungary

Slovaks in Hungary have a certain connection to other Lowland Slovak communities, but they are still perceived as foreigners, as an out-group (although interviewees feel that other Lowland Slovaks have better relations with the Slovak nation because of the lack of political conflicts). Although this research did not aim to study the relationship between the Slovak minority and the Hungarians in Hungary, based on the insights to the subject gained through the interviews we can draw the following conclusions: [national] group boundaries are used by the minority students to distance themselves from the "Slovak nation", however not from the "Hungarian nation". This is identification is heavily influenced in a broader context by the 300 year history of Slovaks in Hungary and their complete economic and social integration to the Hungarian society, and on the personal level by Hungarian socialization, emotional attachment towards Hungary and the Hungarian nation, as well as linguistic assimilation. Furthermore, the strong hegemony of "Hungarianness" over ethnic minority identities in the Hungarian political and media discourse might also play role in the Slovak youth's national identification.

Despite of their strong Hungarian national identity, Slovak minority students from Hungary [as a group] clearly distance themselves from the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, whose position they feel ambivalent about: despite the perceived strong mutual connection between Hungary and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, in the students' narratives the Hungarian minority in Slovakia does not appear as integral part of the Hungarian nation. Moreover, many of the interviewees expressed surprise at the [perceived] lack of attachment of Hungarians in Slovakia towards the Slovak nation and state. Apart from ties, students also perceived conflicts to be present between groups, namely between the Slovaks and the Hungarians in Slovakia, and to a lesser extent, between Slovaks in Slovakia and Hungarians in Hungary. The sources of these tensions, that are simultaneously perceived as boundaries between groups were *language usage* and *ethnic prejudice*.

5.5. The Possible Effects of Studying in the Kin-State on the National Self-Perception of Slovak Minority Youth

Having in mind the expectations of the representatives of the Slovak minority in Hungary towards the study-abroad programme (such as the strengthening of Slovak identity and evoking interest in the Slovak community in Hungary) I considered important to study the possible influence of the scholarship programme regarding the national self-perception of the minority youth. To analyse the possible effects of studying in the kin-state on the national identification of the Slovak minority youth, it would be necessary to study a larger research sample in a wider time frame. A longitudinal study would also be an interesting way to map the Slovak minority youth's national identification processes. However, even this one-time research sample studied in this thesis provides interesting insights to the subject, which can help us trace some common identification-patterns expressed by the Slovak minority youth.

I found the most interesting, how research subjects experience the process where 'being a Slovak in Hungary', as a salient idiom of belonging (reinforced day by day on varying levels by attending Slovak minority schools) turns into a national category that is almost constantly challenged by their environment. Applying Brubaker's analytical insights[109], we can observe that the members of the Slovak minority youth from Hungary studying in Slovakia constitute one *category* (characterized among others by dual national attachment, high awareness of their Slovak origin, and by attending Slovak minority education), but two *groups*: one, where identification with the Hungarian nationality is more dominant, and the second, where identification with the Slovak nationality is more salient.

[109] Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups. 4-27.*

This difference in national self-understanding shapes their whole experience in the kin-state: those who expressed more salient Hungarian belonging reported having mostly positive outcomes from the study abroad programme, regarding their national self-perception: they felt more connected to Slovakia, the Slovak culture, and the Slovaks, from whom they experienced positive reception:

"They were very appreciative that we, as Hungarians from Hungary show interest in their culture and language. My friends often expressed how impressed they are." resp. 1

"I felt like they are a bit surprised, but nevertheless proud that Hungarians go there to study Slovak" resp. 8.

On the other hand, those who reported stronger Slovak identification expressed more negative feelings about their experience, including disappointment and frustration:

„I was telling them in vain that Békéscsaba has been the centre of the Slovaks of the Lowland, I was telling them in vain 1000 reasons why we are Slovaks, but they will always consider me as Hungarian. I could not convince them otherwise for 8 years now. It disturbed me a lot in the beginning, but now I've sort of given up on persuading them." resp. 11

"I was disappointed that they did not know anything about us, as we learnt so much about them" resp. 4.

This lack of acceptance from the kin-nation however, did not result in the devaluating of the students' minority identity, but conversely, the strengthening of the appreciation of the distinctiveness of its features:

"As I started to study in Slovakia, I suddenly realized how different our identity is, with elements of both traditional Slovak and Hungarian cultures. I started to value it more and it felt closer to me, than this "pure" Slovak version." resp. 11.

On the other hand, some effects of the study abroad programme that strengthened Slovak national belonging are notable regardless of the students' initial national identification:

"One year ago, for sure I would have said that I am Hungarian. But now I feel like I am in a process of a change, it is really hard to express it by words. But I also feel more and more Slovak." resp. 4

"Now I know much more about, and feel much more connected to the Slovak culture." resp. 6

"I feel proud of my origin and that I study in Slovakia. My family is proud of me too. When Slovaks finally wrap their head around the situation [of Slovaks in Hungary] I think they feel proud of me too, that we kept this language and culture alive, and now we want to learn more about it." resp 3.

Another notable outcome of the study abroad programme, which can have an impact on national identification, is the strengthened language competence of the minority students - especially if they would then transmit the Slovak language to the subsequent generations.

However, it is important to note, that given the complexity of the subject of ethnic identification, one must be careful to avoid the traps of simplistic inductivism in qualitative research: as (national) identity is complex and multi-layered, attributing any change or impact only to the factor of studying in the kin-state would be misleading.

VI. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to study the ethnic minority - kin-nation relations between the members of the Slovak minority in Hungary and the Slovaks in Slovakia, within the framework of Slovakia's government-sponsored scholarship programme for Slovaks living abroad. After providing theoretical grounding for the studied subject, *national identification* in Chapter II., I contextualised the experience of the Slovak minority youth from Hungary, by briefly presenting the main characteristics of the Slovak minority in Hungary, the Slovak education system in Hungary and the emerging need to study in Slovakia (Chapter III).

Chapter IV. addressed Slovakia's perception of the trans-border Slovak communities, as reflected in Slovakia's official rhetoric and kin-state engagement measures. Autochthonous Slovak minorities in Central Europe receive only modest attention from the Slovak state, moreover, external Slovak minorities are not present in the Slovak public and political discourse. These factors highly influenced the perception of the members of the Slovak minority from Hungary by Slovaks in Slovakia, studied in the Empirical Chapter (V).

The empirical research had a double objective:

1) to explore the under-studied phenomenon of ethnic minority – kin-nation relations in the context of Slovaks in Hungary, from a subjective [emic] perspective: My aim was to identify important categories of *meaning*, behind the motivation of minority students for choosing to study in the kin-state, and their expectations from the study-abroad programme. Research findings show, that although the influence of national identity could be traced back behind the students' decisions and expectations, it was rather framework, than a driving motivation.

2) My second objective was to uncover and explain the student's personal interpretations and narratives around their experiences of encountering the kin-nation.

The empirical research focused on analysing perceived group-belonging and the means of group-formation between the members of the Slovak minority in Hungary, and the Slovak kin-nation, aiming to connect the findings to relevant theories of Nationalism Studies.

Research findings reveal a discrepancy between the self-perception of Slovak students from Hungary, and the perception of them by their environment. Slovak minority students from Hungary upon their arrival to the kin-state realize that Slovaks in Slovakia have very little knowledge about the existence of Slovak external minorities, which are generally not seen as integral parts of the Slovak nation. The perception of the Slovak students from Hungary becomes even more complex, as they are often mistaken to be ethnic Hungarians from Slovakia. This lack of acceptance from the kin-nation however, did not result in the devaluating of the students' minority identity, but conversely, it led to the strengthened appreciation of the distinctiveness of the minority culture's features.

While all research participants expressed variations of hybrid identity, exhibiting elements of local, national and global identification, they often reported founding themselves in situations, where national identity appeared as a bounded, or exclusionary category. Main boundaries between groups as perceived by the students were *language usage* and *ethnic prejudice*. However, our research proved Cohen's thesis, based on which he warns for strict caution when talking about 'collective boundaries', as boundaries are always interpreted through the individual's perception. [110] Applying Wimmer's typology on ethnic boundary construction [from the perception of individuals *as actors]* [111] to the context of the Slovak minority students, we can draw the following conclusion: as the vast majority of students could not cross ethnic boundaries, (and only very few managed to use *passing* as Slovak successfully), the most commonly applied strategy was to reject the principle of ethnic boundaries.

[110] Cohen, "Culture, identity and the concept of boundary" 54-56.
[111] Wimmer, „The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries" 986-987.

Brubaker and Cooper suggest *social location* as an analytical category to understand and describe better the phenomena behind group identity.[112] With a phrase borrowed from Cohen, one could illustrate the experience of the members of the Slovak minority youth in Slovakia as "*being in the social equivalent of no-man's land*".[113] However, as the research findings show, they did not try to fill this gap by trying to pass as either one of the perceived pre-determined national categories (Slovakian Slovaks or ethnic Hungarians), but preserved and expressed the distinctness of their own hybrid group belonging.

The study abroad programme certainly had positive outcomes, concerning the connectedness between the Slovaks form Hungary and the Slovaks from Slovakia on the individual level, and it contributed to deeper knowledge about Slovakia and the Slovak (modern) culture. Yet, the programme carries untapped potential, especially in the areas of community building between the members of external minorities and the kin-nationals. However, building stronger ties is not only the responsibility of the two groups, but also of the political actors in both states, especially when it comes to raising awareness of the Slovak external minorities, and combating ethnic prejudice. Close relations between the members of external minorities and their kin-nationals may prove to be especially important, if political actors in their host-states do not incorporate ethnic minority identities and cultures sufficiently to the majority's nation concept, or these identities and cultures are not adequately represented.

Limitations and Further Research Avenues

The next possible step of this research would be to conduct a qualitative study with Slovaks from Slovakia, to be able to study the subject also from their perspective. Furthermore, it would be interesting to study the experience of Slovak minority youth contrasted to the experience of Hungarian minority youth studying in Hungary, and their relation to the kin-nation. Given the limited scope of this thesis and restricted time-frame however, including these perspectives would exceed the feasibility of the current thesis.

[112] Brubaker and Cooper, *Beyond Identity*, 28-63.
[113] Cohen, "Culture, identity and the concept of boundary" 55.

Appendices

Appendix 1.: List of the themes discussed in the personal interviews[114]

- Personal background information, as found relevant by the interviewee
- The decision of studying in Slovakia – motivation, push and pull factors
- Expectations about the study abroad programme
- First experiences in Slovakia and at the university
- First encounters with the members of the kin-nation
- Most memorable experiences from the study abroad programme
- Social interactions in everyday life
- Language usage and language competence
- Relations with Slovaks in Slovakia

  (such as relations with friends, classmates, teachers, neighbours, officials, strangers)
- If relevant: Relations with Hungarians in Slovakia
- If relevant: Relations with other [ethnic] groups
- Feelings of national belonging and group membership
- Reflections on own national identity
- Evaluation of the study abroad programme
- Any further comments wished to be shared by the interviewee

[114] The sequence of the discussed themes varied based on the flow of the individual conversations.

Table. 1.: General overview of the interview respondents

Respondent	Gender	Date Of Birth	Hometown	University	Major	Year Of Starting University
resp. 1	f	1998	Békéscsaba	Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa (Nitra)	Slovak Language and Literature - English Language and Literature (BA)	2018
resp. 2	m	1996	Szarvas	UKF (Nitra)	Slovak Language and Literature - History (BA)	2015
resp. 3	f	1997	Békéscsaba	UKF (Nitra)	Preschool Pedagogy (BA)	2016
resp. 4	m	2000	Békéscsaba	UKF (Nitra)	Slovak Language and Literature - History (BA)	2018
resp. 5	f	1997	Budapest	Univerzita Komenského (Bratislava)	Management (BA)	2015
resp. 6	f	1997	Békéscsaba	UKF (Nitra)	Preschool Pedagogy (BA)	2016
resp. 7	f	1999	Gyula	UKF (Nitra)	Slovak Language and Literature - English Language and Literature (BA)	2018
resp. 8	f	1997	Budapest	UKF (Nitra)	Culture and Tourism Management (BA)	2016
resp. 9	f		Békéscsaba	UKF (Nitra)	Preschool Pedagogy (BA)	2016
resp. 10	f	1998	Tótkomlós	Univerzita Veterinárskeho Lekárstva (Košice)	Veterinary Medicine (BA)	2017
resp. 11	m	1992	Békéscsaba	UFK (Nitra)	Cultural Studies (PhD)	2011

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