

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**The formation of national identity in the Hungarian-
Serbian intermarriages**

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I. The aims and frames of the dissertation, overview of the topic

Nowadays the issue of heterogeneous marriages is an important part of thinking about national identity. In countries with a significant national minority, the issue of intermarriages is a priority. Coexistence between nations and existing social distances cannot be understood without the analysis of heterogamous marriages. Both their absence and their large presence can be important indicators of the relationship between nations. Intermarriages are also of particular importance to minorities, as they can transform the ethnicity of those involved and play a key role in leaving the identity to the next generations. The ratio and characteristics of intermarriages are important issues both for the relations between the nations and for the situation and acceptance of minorities, which is why many researchers have dealt with the topic.

It is also important to clarify the concept of heterogeneous marriages. By heterogamy we mean the relationship of individuals from other social groups. Social groups can be formed along several variables, such as income, education, prestige, and so on. During my dissertation I deal with national identity, so the basis of heterogamy is the different national identity (Hungarian and Serbian). Hereinafter, when I mention intermarriages, I mean only mixed relationships in terms of nationality, the other aspects are not part of the analysis.

Basically, two theories dominate the study of heterogeneous marriages. Both theories are based on ideas already present in antiquity. Proponents of *assimilation theory* say intermarriages promote the inclusion of a minority into the majority. In intermarriages, the national identity of minorities disappears and is replaced by the identity of the majority nation. As a result, the minority is slowly merging into the majority nation and ceasing to exist as an independent ethnic group. The *social cohesion theory*, on the other hand, sees heterogamous marriages as a clear indicator of integration. Proponents of the theory say that the more mixed marriages there are, the better minorities will be able to fit into majority society. Marriages reduce social distance, reconcile ethnic groups, and create a unified society. Marriages with members of the majority nation often reflect the relationship of nationalities. Almost all researchers agree that mixed marriages are an important part of the relationship between a minority and a majority. However, researchers are divided on whether the minority is positively or rather negatively affected by these relationships.

The *aim of the dissertation* is to present the identity-shaping role of heterogeneous marriages. I analyse the the marriages of a specific minority, the Hungarians in Vojvodina and the Serbs who make up the majority society. I structure the dissertation around three main

issues. During my first question, I am looking for the answer to whether assimilation occurs in the life of the local Hungarians. In my second question, I examine whether different eras can be identified in the proportion of mixed marriages and whether the influencing factors have changed. My third question concerns the forms of assimilation. My results show that assimilation is not a binary variable (assimilated or not), but there are many additional, transitional categories.

There are two dominant theories about heterogamous marriages (assimilation, social cohesion) in sociological thinking. Although both theories have been criticized, their systematic comparison has not yet been made. One of the aims of my dissertation is to implement the comparison that has so far lagged, in a concrete example, in the case of Hungarian - Serbian intermarriages in Vojvodina. Another important innovation of the dissertation lies in the approach. Mixed marriages have so far been studied almost exclusively by quantitative methods, mainly logistic regression analysis on census data. As a result, we have several statistical analysis of mixed marriages, but the internal functioning and dynamics of marriages are virtually unknown.

II. Overview of the methods used in the research

During the research I used both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the qualitative study, I conducted semi-structured interviews, and during the quantitative analysis, a secondary analysis of census data and representative surveys (Magyar Ifjúság 2016) was performed. I created the qualitative database based on the main demographic variables (age, gender, number of children). The analysis was performed along the 5 main identity dimensions. The first is language use, where I examine communication within family and with friends. The second is the dimension of religion, as in a multi-ethnic environment, different elements of religion are also associated with ethnocultural meaning. The third is gender roles and family habitus. The fourth is the undertake of identity, and the fifth is the transmission of identity. If there is a change in any of the dimensions, it can have a serious impact on the individual's national identity.

In both assimilation and social cohesion theory, language use is a priority, both within and outside the family. However, from census data, analysis of this dimension is virtually impossible. There were censuses when asked about the languages spoken, but in most cases this question was left out and we have no knowledge at all about communication within the family. Conducting interview research is therefore also a key, as it allows us to gain detailed knowledge about this factor that greatly influences identity. Both assimilation and social cohesion have been measured by quantitative methods only. Another important advantage of the qualitative

method is that it allows categories and groups to be distinguished, thus making it possible to treat assimilation or integration not just as a dichotomous variable.

The two theories can also be interpreted in the case of identity commitment and culture. In the case of assimilation, Serbian culture will be dominant, while in the case of social cohesion, the two will appear in equal proportions. Closely related to identity is its inheritance, so it is also important to examine the proportion of children from intermarriages who identify themselves as Hungarian or Serbian, or perhaps identify themselves along some other form of identity. Analysing the gender ratios of marriages can also yield important results. Examination of the demographic data revealed that a higher proportion of Hungarian women intermarry than Hungarian men.

My own interview research on Hungarian-Serbian intermarriages was conducted in the northern part of Vojvodina, where most of the Hungarians live. The study took place in 5 neighbouring settlements, where both Hungarians and Serbs live in significant numbers. In the case of 3 out of 5 settlements, the Hungarians are in the absolute majority, and in the case of 2 they are in the relative majority - the smallest proportion of Hungarians is 40% and the largest 90%. Viewing the region as a unit, the Hungarians live in an absolute majority.

I conducted a semi-structured interview with a total of 32 interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Hungarian, and the recording was also conducted in this language. Of the interviewees, 28 lived in intermarriages. In 6 cases, I asked prominent people and opinion leaders in the region about intermarriages and the relationship between Hungarians and Serbs. Expert interviews were conducted with the mayor, the bartender, the local priest, two doctors, and the regional ombudsman. Two of them live in intermarriage themselves, so in addition to the expert questions, I also asked them about intermarriages.

During the selection of the interviewees, I primarily looked for Hungarians, as I examined mixed marriages from the perspective of the minority. Sampling was done using the snowball method, the interviews were taken in person, but I used the online method in case of three interviews. In most cases, the recordings were made at the subjects' homes, but interviews were also conducted at the subjects' workplace and at the author's home.

In terms of gender distribution, women are in the majority, with 22 interviewees being women and 10 men. According to the statistical data, Hungarian women are more likely to intermarry than Hungarian men, so the gender distribution of the interviewees is close to the real situation.

According to the ethnic distribution, 24 interviewees declared themselves as Hungarians, 4 as Serbs, 1 as Bunyevac and 3 as a mix. Most non-Hungarian-speaking

interviewees spoke Hungarian perfectly, but there were also those who had difficulty expressing themselves, in which case I translated what they said into Hungarian during the recording. In the family, I tried to interview the Hungarian interviewee. Most of the time, the partners did not speak Hungarian, so the question of asking about the partner did not arise either. Where the Hungarian wife could not answer due to absence or other reasons, but the Serbian husband did, and was able to communicate in Hungarian on some level, I conducted the interview with the Serbian husband.

During the anonymization of the interviewees, I used coding. In the dissertation I refer to the interviewees based on the codes. The first 2 digits of the code are age, the next letter indicates gender, the next letter is nationality, and the digit at the end is the number of children. The letter N indicates a woman and the letter F a man. When coding nationality, M stands for Hungarian, SZ for Serbian, K for mixed, and B for Bunjevac. For example the interviewee with the code 28NM1 is 28 years old woman of Hungarian nationality and has 1 child. Divorced interviewees were marked with an “E” after the code (38NM2E). During the analysis of the interviews, I created types, which I also used during the analysis. The separation of types took place along the dimensions of national identity. To preserve anonymity, I also modified the personal names in the citations. I changed the Hungarian names to other Hungarian names and did the same for Serbian and international names. I omitted the names of the settlements from the quotations.

Demographic data come from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), which was collected during censuses or other surveys. Most of the data comes from publications available online, in English and Serbian. However, some data were not public, I had to request them from the owner of the data. The graphs and maps in the dissertation were based on data obtained from SORS.

I also used the database of the Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás 2016. Heterogamous relationships were also included in the 500-person sample, so the database provides an opportunity for further analysis of the topic. During the research, only the members of the youngest generation were interviewed, and the focus was not explicitly on mixed marriages. For this reason, the results cannot be generalized, but they can be a useful starting point for further analysis of mixed youth relationships. The survey included young Hungarians, who were also asked about their relationship status, as well as the nationality of their partner. This allows heterogamous relationships to be identified in the sample. Although the data in the database are only representative of young people under the age of 30, I still managed to draw important conclusions from the data.

III. Enumerating findings in the form of thesis

The aim of my research was to examine Hungarian - Serbian intermarriages in Vojvodina. Because marriage is an important milestone in an individual's life path, its role in identity is indisputable. The dissertation has succeeded in adding important new results to previous scientific discourses in three areas. The first is the systematic comparison of the theory of assimilation and social cohesion, as well as the examination of its validity among the Hungarians of Vojvodina. The second is to define the eras of intermarriages in Vojvodina. So far, no one has studied the historical eras of ethnically heterogeneous marriages in Vojvodina or in any other geographical area. The third new result of the research is the categorization of assimilation in intermarriages. Due to their quantitative nature, most of the previous research has interpreted the concept of assimilation mainly as a static variable. However, due to the qualitative nature of my research, I was able to point out that assimilation is not a static phenomenon, some elements in the individual's identity refer to assimilation, while other elements help the survival of the minority identity.

Examining the dimensions of national identity - language use, religion, gender roles, undertaking of identity and the transmission of it, we have seen that most of the ideas of the theory of social cohesion do not prove to be true. A significant part of family communication takes place in Serbian, and in most cases the Serbian partners do not even speak Hungarian. In the case of religion, many Hungarians convert to their partner's Orthodox religion, and many do not accept or are not proud of their Hungarian heritage. During the transmission of identity, Hungarian identity is at a significant disadvantage compared to the Serb.

In a significant proportion of mixed marriages, we can witness clear signs of assimilation, which justifies the theory of assimilation. Loss in population and low status preclude successful integration, so intermarriages do not integrate Hungarians. However, certain elements of the theory of social cohesion are also present in the case of Hungarians. In cases where there is a large social distance between the minority and the majority (Albanians and Serbs), the number of intermarriages is very low. However, when the social distances are low, the proportion of heterogamous marriages is high. In the case of the Hungarians, this can also be observed in the eras of intermarriages, because in the age of socialism the social distance was low, but the proportion of intermarriages was high. During the Yugoslav Wars, tensions between nations increased and as a result, the proportion of heterogeneous marriages decreased. In the *age of troubled relief*, the relationship between nations settled, and as a result, the proportion of intermarriages increased. The theory of social cohesion is thus confirmed in this area. Examining the two theories, I also received an answer to my first research question.

1. According to former research, some Serbian minorities, such as Bosniaks and Albanians, have been segregated. The first research question is that like them, Hungarians are characterized by segregation, or is assimilation more prevalent?

The Hungarians in Vojvodina are one of the most open nationalities in Serbia, as more than a third of their marriages are heterogamous. This far exceeds the proportions of other nationalities in the country. Even among Hungarians in other countries, Hungarians in Vojvodina have the highest proportion of intermarriages. However, this openness also comes at a price: the Hungarians of Vojvodina assimilate the fastest in the Carpathian Basin. On this basis, the Hungarians are not segregated, the elements of assimilation are present. We can also observe differences in the territorial distribution, as the heterogamous marriage rate of Hungarians is much higher in the diaspora than in the northern regions, where Hungarians are the majority. The phenomenon is due to the narrowed marriage market in the diaspora, as it is much more difficult to find a suitable Hungarian partner than a Serbian due to the small population of the Hungarians.

2. The intermarriage proportion of the Hungarians changed a lot since the Second World War. Can specific eras be defined, and if so, what characterized the relationship between the Hungarians and the Serbs?

The second new scientific result is also the answer to my second research question. Three eras can be distinguished in heterogamous marriages. In **the socialist era**, the number of intermarriages was high, and the state leadership did not try to openly assimilate the Hungarians. However, assimilation pressure continued to be present through hidden channels, as the goal of the state leadership was to create a Yugoslav nation and in the long run, to peacefully (and quietly) assimilate minorities. This was ended by the **Yugoslav Wars**, and this marked the beginning of a difficult era for the Hungarians in Vojvodina. The rate of intermarriages has decreased, but assimilation pressure has increased. The declared goal of the state leadership was to assimilate or expel minorities. After 2012, the third era of mixed marriages, the **age of troubled relief**, began. There is no assimilation pressure from the state, neither covertly nor overtly. The rate of intermarriages is currently the highest. The problem stems from the large-scale assimilation and declining population of the Hungarians. Although the state leadership no longer prosecutes the Hungarians, it also does not provide them with help or remedy. As a result of the assimilating power of the majority society, the population of the Hungarians is constantly decreasing.

3. Based on statically interpreted assimilation, the individuum who has left his identity is no longer bound to the minority. With my third question, I am looking for the answer to whether

assimilation really occurs so statically, or can different degrees or categories be distinguished along the dimensions of national identity?

The analysis shows that assimilation does not end in the assimilated and non-assimilated categories, but several degrees can be distinguished along different dimensions of the national identity. This is the third new result of my dissertation. The first analysed dimension of the national identity is the language use. I have distinguished three categories of assimilation. **Conscious assimilants** rarely use their mother tongue, with Serbian dominating when communicating with family and mutual friends. In the field of media consumption, I classified the consumers of Serbian media as conscious assimilants. The Hungarian language is only marginally present in these relations, the communication takes place in Serbian. The **intermediate category** contains those interviewees who also have a dominant position in the Serbian language, but the Hungarian language does not disappear completely either. In the case of communication with friends, parallel communication characterizes this group, part of the fellowship speaks Hungarian, while the other speaks Serbian. In the case of media use, parallel use can also be observed. The joint media consumption takes place in Serbian, but the interviewee also continuously watches Hungarian TV channels. In the case of those with a **dual identity**, the Hungarian language plays a secondary and non-subordinate role. Within the family, they communicate as often in Hungarian as in Serbian, and they also communicate with friends in a mixed language. They also watch the TV together, switching between Hungarian and Serbian language content. The survival of the Hungarian language is ensured in this case.

The undertaking of identity, the identification as Hungarians is the second dimension analysed. **Conscious assimilants** leave their Hungarian identity and prefer to declare themselves Serbs and consider their children to be members of the majority. Those with a **marginal identity** do not feel like members of any nation. Those with a regional identity emphasize their attachment to the region rather than their national attachment and are identified on a territorial basis. Those with a situation-dependent identity switch between Hungarian and Serbian identities, activating or leaving one depending on the situation. Yugoslav identity also formed an intermediate path between the two national identities, as it provided an opportunity to avoid choice. However, with the disintegration of the country, identity also disappeared, and the former Yugoslavs became mainly those with marginal and regional identities. The choice of intermediate solutions is also an assimilation loss for the Hungarians, as those who choose these forms do not consider themselves Hungarians, and during the censuses they also do not end up in the ranks of the Hungarians, whose population will be smaller. **Double identification**

does not involve assimilation loss. This includes interviewees who identify as Hungarian, but also have a Serbian identity in their lives through their spouse and children.

In the case of religion, the conversion to the Orthodox faith represents assimilation. According to the interviewees, this is not the result of a change in religious beliefs, but to create family unity and to conduct a church wedding. The motivation of assimilation is clearly present, it is not the change of belief that is the basis of the conversion. The most common case, however, is the preservation of religion and double celebration. In this case, the Hungarian spouse preserves its own Catholic or Protestant religion, but it also celebrates the feasts of the Orthodox Church and participates in the liturgies. And during family life, the holidays of both religions are celebrated. Assimilation then, in this case means a mixture of religious elements.

Different habits and unbalanced gender roles associated with national identity can determine mate selection but can also create serious conflicts. The more determined habitus and virtuous performance of Serbian men may be an advantage for them in mate selection, as Hungarian women may see them as a more suitable partner than the Hungarian men. On the other hand, the patriarchal family structure linked to Serbian identity is more likely to cause the assimilation of Hungarian women, and they may also play a subordinate role in the family. And the resulting conflicts can easily cause divorce.

The transmission of identity is one of the most obvious indicators of assimilation, which I have inferred from naming and school choice in my research. Serbian naming of children refers to assimilation, the choice of an international name means an intermediate path, and the choice of a Hungarian name means Hungarian identity. In more than three-quarters of the cases, the children were given Serbian or international names, so we can observe the dominance of assimilation. In the field of school choice, I inferred assimilation from the choice of the Serbian school and dissimilation (dual identity) from the choice of the Hungarian school. The choice of the Serbian school was motivated by the more favourable position in the labour market and more prominent place in society. In most cases, the Hungarian mothers themselves argued in favour of sending the children to a Serbian school. In the case of some Hungarian women, it can be observed that they want to give their children a more favourable status than they have, even if it involves assimilation. Among the motivations of the parents who chose the Hungarian school was the preservation of the national identity and the appropriate acquisition of the Hungarian language. Men played a more passive role in school selection than women.

Intermarriages often lead to a partial or complete assimilation of the Hungarian national identity. The process usually takes place over generations, with each generation loses more of its Hungarian identity. However, heterogamous marriages do not always lead to assimilation.

In the case of several marriages, a balanced national identity can be observed, where the influence of the Serbian identity and the preservation of the Hungarian identity can be observed. If there is an adaptability on the part of the Serbian partner and an effort on the part of the Hungarian spouse to preserve the Hungarian identity, a state of equilibrium can be developed and both identities can coexist.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (4)

1. Csoba, J., **Ladancsik, T.**: Az Ezüst Generáció a munkaerőpiacon: A 65+ generáció munkavállalása és időgazdálkodása.
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3. **Ladancsik, T.**: Vizsgálatai szempontok a vegyes házasságok kutatásában.
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8. **Ladancsik, T.:** Hasonlóságok és különbségek: magyarországi és vajdasági fiatalok területi identitása.
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11. **Ladancsik, T.:** Hungarian-Serbian mixed marriages in Vojvodina.
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