ASPECTS OF ETHNICITY, CLASS AND RELIGION IN CASE OF SLOVAK IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN THE UK

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Abstract: *Since 2004 several tens of thousands of Slovaks arrived in the United Kingdom. A number of Slovak communities have emerged that bear the characteristic marks of diasporas. This paper displays an analysis of these immigrant groups based on online surveys and interviews. Questions of integration versus assimilation are discussed in the light of class, religious affiliation and ethnic identity.*
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1. Introduction

To better understand the existence, position and evolution of any given minority group in a society it is inevitable to analyse the situation in the light of the present state of art in the field of diaspora concepts. Diaspora definitions have evolved in a maze of concepts and produced explanations that are not only difficult to conceptualize but also deform and transform under the changing influence of the sociological, political and economic understanding. "The concept [of diaspora]", as Kokot, Tölölyan and Alfonso unanimously agree, "has become an element of self-reference and political identification wherever – by access to new channels of communication, by economic exchange or physical mobility – extraterritorial groups or organizations seek political influence in their homelands and communities of the same perceived origin, or vice versa" (2004:3). Thus it is evidently not sufficient to return to the earlier definitions that had long been associated with traumas, a forced exodus from the homeland and dispersal in a hostile majority environment inspired predominantly by the two world wars and connected with the pogroms and persecution of the Jewish communities. Modern disaporic groups may be formed on different bases and can follow a number of alternative ways of evolution. Most studies converge in the understanding of diasporas within the boundaries of de-territorialisation, transnational migration and cultural hybridism. What is more, in the light of the recent changes that have brought about and amplified a multicultural, multiethnic and a more cosmopolitan approach in connection with the development of human communities, a new understanding of identity, concepts of multiple belonging and multi-ethnicity have merged with concepts of diaspora allowing an analyst to decompose the concept in alternative ways. Thus, it seems perfectly acceptable that, "The rising significance of 'transnationalism' and 'disapora', as terms of self-designation

chosen by political, artistic and intellectual elites of diasporic communities, as well as in Western academic discourse, is closely related to increasing relevance of representations of 'identity' and 'culture' in international politics" (Kokto; Tölölyan; Alfonso, 2004:3). It is therefore evident that any diaspora concept cannot be limited to the traditional measures of understanding it in relation to integration – assimilation anymore since it has gained a much broader space in the modern multiethnic societies. Though diaspora has long been characterized as a "unilinear and irrevocable movement from a place of origin to a new place of residence" (Kokot; Tölölyan; Alfonso; 2004:3), the limitations of this approach become disturbing as soon as the characteristics of our globalized world are taken into consideration. The once evident isolation in a bipolar world where ideological, political, economic and militaristic opposition was dominant has dissolved in the changing realities of the end of the 20th century. Borders, at least in transatlantic relation, have undergone a considerable transformation and in the structures of the ever-evolving European integration have gained new meanings. The new reality required the introduction of such concepts as transnationalism and transmigration. This fact, however did not allow any simplification of the case as the concepts of transnationalism equally to disapora require a much more precise definition to be possible to work with. According to Landolt, "Differing from connotations of 'international' and 'multinational', 'transnationalism' focuses on lasting relationships and repeated movements across borders, the agents being not states or nations, but individual actors or associations" (1992:2). Glick Schiller's definition of 'transnationalism' concentrates on the process of constructing and actively maintaining social fields, i.e. relationships between the immigrants in their communities of residence and to their homelands, across borders (1992:2). Modern audiovisual means of communication, high level of mobility in combination with the unprecedented transparency of state borders and accessibility of a wide range of fast and cheap transportation have only contributed to the process of growing transnational communities that go beyond the traditionalistic isolationist approaches of the diaspora definitions. This results in a situation where the members of any immigrant community have easy access to information concerning the political, economic and social changes of their homelands even if the physical distance between the host country and the homeland is measured in thousands of kilometres. These communities no longer behave like isolated islands in the sea of the mainstream population, but are characterize by, "a high degree of social cohesion, and a shared repertoire of symbolic and collective representation" (Tauber 1999; Faist 2000; Alfonso 2001; Wonnenberg 2001). There is a much stronger connection between them and their homeland, which counteracts the host country's culturally erosive power in terms of assimilation. Several authors agree that Robert Cohen's typology of: victim-, trade-, labour- and colonial diasporas need further expansion and are not entirely sufficient for the understanding of modern transnational communities. In the 21st century the concept of diaspora, "cannot be [...] limited to any single type of community or historical situation" [...] but a diaspora is rather understood as, "a deep symbolical [...] relation to the homeland – be it an independent nation state or set in a quasi-mythological distant past – is maintained by reference to constructs of common language, history, culture and – central to many cases – to religion" (Kokot, Tölölyan, Alfonso, 2004:3). The key concept in understanding the characteristics of a disaporic existence therefore lies in the understanding of

the already present connections. If an immigrant group is socially coherent and is able to maintain interpersonal networks by any means, a disaporic way of life can come into existence providing a protective shield against the assimilative pressure of the majority society as well as maintaining the romantic concept of the 'real homeland'. Tölölyan further argues that,

> Diasporas must be considered within their historical as well as their spatial contexts. [...] Any diaspora is still a space of real and imagined relations between diasporic communities as well as between them and the homeland. But this space is still composed of places, of localities that are both sites of settlement and nodes in a transnational network of mobility and communication (Kokot, Tölölyan, Alfonso, 2004:5).

However charming is this concept though, still bears limitations and seems to neglect the power of virtual spaces created by the modern means of telecommunication. The availability of satellite television and radio programmes in combination with the interactive Internet communication facilities and the omnipresent and unlimited access to the latest information about the homeland such as about the host land redefine and broaden the sociological, anthropological, historical and political explanation of the diaspora concepts.

Ackermann adds that

> Diasporas are disproportionally advantaged by the many changes in technology, economic organization, and modes of travel, production and communication. To the extent that travel as well as communication across long distances become easier and cheaper, more and more diaspora members can afford to keep contact on regular base. Besides telecommunication and video technology it is particularly the Internet that becomes more important in every day life. As it is affordable and thus available to a comparatively wide range of 'users', quite difficult to control by state authorities, and able to transport vast amounts of text, pictures and sound very quickly around the globe, irrespective of national boundaries, it constitutes a major 'technology of diasporization' (Ackermann, 2004:157).

As William Safran further explains, "the label [diaspora] has been stretched to cover almost any ethnic or religious minority that is dispersed physically from its original homeland, regardless of the conditions leading to the dispersion, and regardless whether, and to what extent, physical, cultural, or emotional links exist between the community and the home country (Safran, 2004:9)". This definition may sound too broad, but Safran also emphasizes the need to differentiate between real diasporas and other ethnic groups of expatriates. Thus, a diaspora can be classified as an island community separated in many ways from the mainstream society, though the concept suggests suspicion since members of a diasporic community retain the idea that they are not or cannot be fully accepted by the majority. It can and in many cases does create opposition and lead to greater isolation. Therefore, by conducting a further analysis of the Slovak migrant groups the author seeks to discover whether these communities have already reached the level of the above-described diasporic existence.

Separation is only one aspect of diaspora. Another important aspect is the presence and availability of institutions reflecting the communities' homeland cultural traditions, religious beliefs, political orientation, economic power, etc. The range of these institutions can be wide: reaching from simple pubs preferred by the members of the given community, even run by native citizens who are members of the majority mainstream society, through cultural centres, schools, libraries, churches, hospitals maintained by the immigrant groups to politically significant centres with strong economic background, embassies, as well as seats of international corporations that can have a direct impact on the majority society. According to Safran, "Diasporas cannot exist without facilitating institutions; but their creation and maintenance require a demographic thickness – a sufficient number of diasporas to constitute a critical mass in urban settings." (Safran, 2004:17). The active day-to-day use of these institutions can be a significant cohesive power that provides a continuous contact with the home culture enforces in-group solidarity and creates a perceivable hierarchy within the immigrant society. Naturally, the above-described extensive institutional system requires a high level of monetary independence and a sufficient influx of financial means. Whether the community alone, or with the help of the homeland is able to maintain these systems is a crucial question when analysing diasporic existence.

Safran concludes that

If we leave aside religiously 'minoritized' communities and focus on expatriated ones, we conclude that there are now many more dispersed communities than existed before. In the past half century, tens of millions of people have been leaving their native countries for a variety of political and economic reasons; they may be political refugees, expellees, displaced persons, or voluntary emigrants; but unlike traditional immigrants, most of whom have left their homelands with the full intention to assimilate into the hostland culture, members of diasporas appear to be hedging their bets: they do not wish to cut themselves off completely from their homelands, and they prefer to live, as it were 'in two worlds' (Safran 2004).

Our continuously transforming world is gradually changing into a totally interconnected space where the national traditions of the past are colliding and merging at an extraordinary speed creating the stage for the birth of a new society – a new world order – where isolation can not be a dominant characteristic mark of those groups of people that decide to continue their lives in a foreign country. Separation from the influence of the dominant culture and direct transplantation of the cultural heritage and social traditions of the home culture is impossible in a completely different, highly mixed society, however the so characteristic demand of the past decades for a total assimilation and an uncritical acceptance and obedience of the host country's lifestyle is not as tangible and pushing as it was even twenty years ago. Since the primary targets of any immigration are usually the largest urban areas the chance that the newcomers arrive in a more cosmopolitan community that is usually characterized with a higher level of tolerance towards differences and with an accepting aptitude towards foreign habits is higher than ever before. The above-described state of affairs and Safran's description of the perception of the notion of 'diaspora' converge when he states that "The label diaspora has come to be used rather freely, because multiple identities are now

more acceptable than they were before" (Safran 2004:12). Multiple identities are not only acceptable, but in many cases have simply become an unavoidable necessity in order to survive and achieve success in the globalized world. It is becoming evident that when the position of a foreigner is critically analysed, it is often the subjective judgement of the observer only that creates the picture of the expatriate associated immediately with a strong social, economic, political and cultural background – therefore considered as a fully acceptable element within the different cultural environment – on the one side with the right to define himself as separate from the mainstream, and the picture of the immigrant with a weak social position, almost immediately and unconsciously associated with a subordinate culture that is not worth preserving and is not deserving respect on the other end. As Safran continues "Former convictions about the superiority of certain national cultures have become weakened [...] in part because of the shortcomings of the [white-dominant Euro Atlantic societies once considered superior], and in part because democratic and [...] positive values found in host lands are now increasingly also found in the minorities homelands" (Safran, 2004:12). As a result the people who have decided to choose to live and build up a venerable life in a different country – even with a considerably different cultural environment – have the full right to define themselves in terms of mixed or double identities and retain their homeland culture. As Taylor adds, "National boundaries have become more permeable, a development that has enabled minority communities to receive infusions of culture from abroad" (Taylor 1994). Therefore the once so depressing feeling of being a foreigner, an outcast and an incompatible member of the host land's society is being considerably softened and the present situation provides space and time for the immigrants to regenerate, accommodate and find their place in the new environment. Despite the lately re-emerging anti-immigrant feelings generated mostly by the heavy burden of the world economic crisis, most of the western democracies have developed and integrated cultural pluralism as part of their national politics and the basic aptitude towards the newcomers is essentially welcoming. Globalization is not restricted to the economic affairs. The total interconnection of cultures is perceivable in the diffusion of languages and lifestyles, in the gradual penetration of culinary traditions and folk customs, in the vast amount of cultural interchange fully supported by universities providing education for quantities of students originating practically from all corners of the world, in the breath-taking rhythm and speed at which communication facilities are developing. The inevitable result of these processes is the development of a more homogenous culture, a global and almost omnipresent standard where "...the retention of minority cultures facilitated by a connection with an anterior 'homeland', provides a modicum of uniqueness, authenticity and autonomy for the community in question, which has contributed to the maintenance of diasporas (Safran 2004:12).

2. Methodology of Research

Research is based on surveys and interviews, developed and used in social sciences, notably in sociology. According to Émil Durkheim social sciences are a logical continuation of the natural science disciplines and they should retain the same objectivity, rationalism, and approach to causality as natural sciences (Outhwite, 2006 pp.507-510). Encyclopaedia Britannica further declares that sociology is

viewed, along with economics and political science, as a reaction against speculative philosophy and folklore [...] a social science that studies human societies, their interactions, and the processes that preserve and change them. It [sociology] does this by examining the dynamics of constituent parts of societies such as institutions, communities, populations, and gender, racial, or age groups. Sociology also studies social status or stratification, social movements, and social change, as well as societal disorder in the form of crime, deviance, and revolution (Britannica, 2007:sociology).

Though this paper investigates questions that are close to the areas of sociology, the author would not dare call it a *true* sociological investigation since it might not fit all criteria of the discipline. Definitely, there is a perceivable flavour of sociology in the work as the author thrives to exploit his knowledge of the discipline to obtain usable data that might describe and better understand the position of Slovak immigrants within the British cultural environment. It is inevitable, however, to depict and describe in details the fields that are involved in research explaining the criteria according to which the work is planned, the research is designed and the results are evaluated. To narrow down the field of research three tangible domains were selected and examined in details: class, religion, and ethnicity and the following research plan was developed:

In the first phase, in the form of desk research, the situation of immigration in the United Kingdom was analysed with a special emphasis on Accession 8 immigrants. Emphasis was put on the following variables:

- *Number* of immigrants in the United Kingdom since 1989 and the fluctuations in

immigration patterns were put to investigation between 1989 and 2010, while a special emphasis was put to make clear distinction between short-term immigrants who plan to stay in the target country only for a limited period of time. The time span for temporary visitors was set to 6 months in accordance with the UK Border Agency regulations.

- *Geographical distribution* was considered as the following factor. National Insurance Numbers statistics, General Practitioner Registration Figures, and Total International Immigration statistics among other statistical data were studied, compared and contrasted to obtain a comprehensive overview of the geographical distribution of Accession 8 immigrants, with a special emphasis on the Slovak nationals.

- *Age distribution* of the Slovak immigrants was considered as the following variable. This research variable also exploited the publicly available data sources of Workers Registration Schemes in combination with further relevant sources, for instance Jobseekers' Allowance, etc. This variable allowed to narrow the research field and exclude the age groups (under 25) in which the overwhelming majority of migrants belong to the group for which high mobility and temporary residence is characteristic.

Beyond the above-described variables, contacting permanent immigrants in the United Kingdom allowed further relevant quantitative data collection. The first phase was followed by quantitative data collection and analysis based on a questionnaire containing 25 questions. Using the data obtained as the result of the preceding desktop research a series of multiple-choice and multiple answer questions were designed with the aim to map the situation and

motifs of immigrant Slovaks (with a special emphasis on immigrant Slovak families) in Britain. The prepared questionnaire was consulted with professionals in sociology and their comments were incorporated in the final form. The questions used in the actual data sheet can be grouped along the following criteria:

1) General data concerning the informant's status: age, place of origin in Slovakia, level of education (obtained in Slovak institutions), level of mastery in English etc. These pieces of information served the goal to build a frame of reference along which further data processing might have been realisable.

2) Further, a series of questions analyzing certain class markers were incorporated indirectly into the questionnaire in the form of multiple-choice questions. The following areas were deeper analysed from the point of class: *Residence in the UK* serves as an important class marker. A series of authors, emphasize the importance of the place and conditions of residence in this aspects. Previous research of the relevant literature showed that there *are* concrete, well-defined areas in the UK urban structures, which can be clearly associated with the distribution of the population along class structures. These data were later contrasted with the 'popularity charts' of British residential areas (e.g. Millionaires Neighbourhood Report) and the statistical data presenting the poorest parliamentary constituencies of the country (published by the Child Poverty Action Group) in order to estimate the class conditions of the informants.

Jobs done in the UK in contrast with the qualification of the informant and further to his/her employment situation in Slovakia were the second marker. Jobs, similar to residence can clearly mark class belonging, as job positions are closely associated with income perspectives – a further important class marker. Saturation of jobs – notably how often one changes or has to change his/her job position – also plays an important role in the analysis. *Income* and the financial situation of the informants are defined indirectly, in terms of level of 'satisfaction', taking into consideration the sensitivity of the question.

3) Questions connected with ethnicity and the problem of integration form a separate group in the questionnaire. Since active participation in social life – at least at the level of following the Slovak media – might serve as an excellent marker of identity definition questions investigating this field were incorporated into the used questionnaire. The following areas were put to detailed investigation: *Social networks*, in this respect not identical with the Internet term, were mapped. The questionnaire was designed to find answer for the following questions: whether the informant has been able to build and maintain active relationship with British 'friends'; and whether the informant still maintains some form of social contact with Slovak immigrants or friends and family members from the state of origin. These data can be excellent markers of the diaspora formation processes. Further investigation in this direction is realised by means of interviews. *Access to the media of the homeland* is a further criterion that is part of the research questions, since connectivity to the homeland can be maintained by this means of information channels. The will or wish to follow Slovak media is an important marker of the identity formation process revealing affection or ignorance towards the social and political happenings of the land of origin. *Efforts preserving Slovak as a mother tongue* is also part of the questionnaire. This is a crucial point from the point of further analysis as retaining Slovak national identity requires the use of the language of the homeland. Though

different analyses show that identity is not language dependent since a lot of second and third generation immigrants, who are not able to use the language of their ancestors' (Americans of Irish, Italian and other origins, European immigrants from Arabic and African countries, etc.) still define themselves as 100% belonging to the given culture, efforts made to preserve language as an important heritage can reveal a lot about the state and level of integration or assimilation. Further, sentiments and romantic images connected with the national folklore and mythology were put to analysis as part of the interviews. The very effort to hand down language of the homeland to the next generation was considered as a clear identity marker.

4) Questions concerning *religion* constituted only a minor part of the questionnaire. They were primarily incorporated to map the religious affiliation of the informants to the religious group they belonged in their homeland. Since religion is considered by many authors as an important cohesive power and a great protective barrier against the cultural erosion of the majority society the two questions investigating this field are rather processed as identity markers of ethnicity. The fact, whether the children in the family attend religious education and participate in common worship is also put to test, however clear contexts of religious practice can have been revealed only through further analysis that is part of the interview processes.

5) Nine questions in the questionnaire: 16-24 were designed to analyses the status of the children in contexts of education, immigration, integration and building national identities. Question 16 is the opening gate in this context asking for marital status. If the informant were single the further questions were omitted. This part of the questionnaire is used to narrow down the number of informants and filter families who were predicted to face problems of integration from a specific point of view. Notably, established families when decided to move to the United Kingdom were predicted to be less mobile and the attitudes of the parents and children could serve as excellent bases for further analysis of integration problems. *Level of Slovak language mastery of the children* was one of the analysed areas. By investigating this area the author hoped to discover cultural continuity and the ability or will of the family to preserve Slovak language. The following three questions (19,20,21) were designed to map the location of the education institution the children go to and the general knowledge of the parents about the schools and the British system of education. Further on, the interview part was designed to deeper analyse questions of education and to gain an overall knowledge on the choice making process from the point of class context primarily. The fact that ethnicity is 'publicized' or not is investigated in question 22. The choice to declare ethnic belonging openly reveals much of the attitudes of the given family towards the British and the Slovak society, too. Public declaration of ethnic belonging may show the will to be unique and to be considered as 'somebody' in the community; refusal, on the other hand, may suggest will of integration and openness towards assimilative processes. The following question, 23, is designed to analyse the will of the parents to maintain Slovak identity and their will to stay in contact with the homeland analysing the will of the parents to teach their children their mother tongue.

The primary quantitative data collection method applied in this research was based on a survey. Though Robson defines a survey as "...a research *strategy* rather than a method or technique" (1993:123) this seemed to be the appropriate choice offering applicability and by

realising it as a computer based self-administered questionnaire in combination with Skype-based interviews also providing a high level of accessibility and flexibility. Bearing in mind that "It is [...] difficult to give a concise definition (of a survey) precisely because of the wide range of studies that have been labelled as surveys" (Robson, 1993:123) the author made an effort to design a usable questionnaire that might provide the grounds for a data collection process that follows the general characteristics of a survey. Robson states that "The central features of the survey strategy were presented [...] as: the collection of a small amount of data in standardized form, from a relatively large number of individuals and the selection of samples of individuals from known populations (1993:123). Further, Bryman stresses "...that survey research is almost always conducted in order to provide a *quantitative* picture of the individuals, or other units concerned" (Robson, 1993:123). The goal of this phase of the research was to collect a usable amount of data in order to be able to generalize and extrapolate the results on the investigated population. This effort was supported and based on Robson's statement when he underlines that "The typical survey is passive in that it seeks to describe and/or analyse the world out there *as it is*. This often includes or even focuses totally on what the individuals surveyed think or feel about the topic" (1993:124). The primary goal was to transform the attitudes, feelings and thoughts of the Slovak immigrant population into manageable quantitative units as well as filter the attitude elements and concentrate on areas that are primarily characterised by conduct and not by attitudes, feelings and opinions. If we accept that "...the survey studies the sample not in its own right but as a means of understanding the population from which it is drawn" (Robson, 1993:125) it is easy to see that this research method is the right choice for conducting quantitative data collection though a series o problems should be clearly defined and eliminated as much as possible to achieve the highest possible level of reliability. Robson underlines that "In its simplest form, the survey involves collecting the same standardized data from an undifferentiated group of respondents over a short period of time" (1993:130). Thus standardization of the data collection process is one of the key questions when thinking about reliability of the process. The author agrees with Robson's statement that similar surveys are "... perfectly adequate if all you are seeking to do is to find information about the incidence and distribution of particular characteristics, and of possible relationships among them" (Robson, 1993:130-131). Also, "As the group of respondents is likely to incorporate naturally occurring variables with several levels (e.g. sex as female/male; or age as 15-20, 20-24, 29-29, etc.) it is also possible to view this as a 'comparison group' survey" (Robson, 1993:131).

Some of the biggest problems with questionnaire based surveys can be their *internal validity problem*:

> when we are not obtaining valid information about the respondents and what they are thinking, feeling or whatever. [...] [Because] [...] the findings are seen as product of largely uninvolved respondents whose answers owe more to some unknown mixture of politeness, boredom, desire to be seen in good light, etc. than their true feelings, beliefs or behaviour (Robson, 1993:125).

This problem is omnipresent with surveys and a series of steps were taken to minimize internal validity problems. First, the questionnaire was designed as short as possible to make

it manageable for the respondents. Second, though the majority of the questions offered the option to the respondents to write the answer with their own words, the respondents were offered a series of multiple answers to choose from to cover the needs of the data collection and produce a more manageable database. Third, during the design process the questionnaire was analysed and commented by experts on sociology and their advice and comments were incorporated to achieve a usable final version eliminating elementary mistakes. External validity problems, on the other hand, may spring from the faulty sampling leading to the case when generalization of our findings is impossible. This problem was more difficult to eliminate. It also has to be emphasized that probably the scope of this work does not offer the space and time for a large, general analysis that might involve years of data collection and processing. Also, the method of data collection – computer-based questionnaire accessible on the Internet – has its limitations allowing to participate in the survey only for those informants who have Internet connection, are able to use a computer and can communicate in English at least on a basic level. Therefore, a compromise was accepted and, though the results are valid, due to the time limitation and the above-described circumstances it has to be underlined that it is not possible to extrapolate the results on the whole population of Slovak immigrants in the UK. It is necessary to emphasize that the informants represent the group of immigrants who are able to use a computer, have Internet access, and can communicate in English at least at a basic level. Consequently, the results are not representative for the total population of Slovaks in the UK. On the other hand, the above-described problems cannot be considered as critical, since the primary goal of this research was to find the segment of population that is already established a solid standard of life in the UK and possesses the means that enable them to join the survey. The author therefore declares that though the survey results are not representative for the total population of the Slovak immigrants living in the UK, they truly reflect the attitudes, lifestyle and behaviour of those Slovaks, who already live in the UK under stable and well-established circumstances; are permanent residents and already achieved a certain standard of life compared to the British average. Robson emphasizes, "The lack of relation between *attitude* and *behaviour* is notorious" (Robson, 1993:126) in surveys. If it is true, than it becomes rather complicated to make a clear distinction between the opinions stated by the respondents and their true acts and conduct in real life situation based on the answers in surveys. To minimize the problem Robson suggests the following: "By presenting all respondents with the same standardized questions carefully worded after piloting, it is possible to obtain high reliability of response" (Robson, 1993:126). Thus the questionnaire was designed as a standardized form containing clear, understandable and manageable closed questions with a series of options only partially completed with the option to add self-designed answers. The very design was also preceded by a piloting phase, which was primarily based on unstructured interview-like discussions with a limited number of respondents bearing in mind that "Surveys work best with standardized questions where we have confidence that the questions mean the same thing to different respondents..." (Robson, 1993:127).

A further critical aspect of survey is sampling that "... is closely linked to the *experimental validity or generalizibility* of the findings in an enquiry; the extent to which what we have found in a particular situation at a particular time applies more generally"

(Robson, 1993:135). By considering further aspects it is possible to agree with Robson when he underlines that "A sample is a selection from a population" (Robson, 1993:136). Generally speaking the bigger the sample the highest the validity of the survey. In this case however, the goal of the research was not to map and analyse the attitudes, beliefs and lifestyle of a whole population, but rather to select the 'successful' ones who already achieved a certain level of integration in the British society and have already been faced with the dilemma of integration or assimilation. Therefore the author relies on Robson's words when he states, "It should not be assumed [...] that a full census is necessarily superior to a well-thought-out sample survey" (1993:136). Sampling in the survey was a combination of different techniques. The primary method was based on 'Snowball sampling'. Robson describes snowball sampling as a process where "[...] the researcher identifies one or more individuals from the population of interest. After they have been interviewed, they are used as informants to identify other members of the population who are themselves used as informants and so on" (Robson, 1993: 142). In the piloting phase the 'key people' of the community were addressed. These people are: leaders of Internet forums, editors of Slovak newspapers, leaders of different Slovak communities living abroad, managers of Slovak language schools, libraries and other institutions in the UK and pastors of Slovak communities. As they are usually the hubs, the central personalities of a given community, the probability that they will join with other informants was much higher. Sampling can also be partially described as Stratified Random Sampling because this involves dividing the population into a number of groups or *strata*, where members of a group share a particular characteristic or characteristics. In our case the different groups can be formed along the lines of geographical distribution, or age groups and the common characteristics are represented by the fact that all respondents were Slovak nationals. The sampling process can also be described as Disproportionate sampling, because this allowed the researcher "...to 'oversample' a small but important stratum or to ensure that there is at least some representation of certain 'rare species' even to the extent of including all examples" (Robson, 1993:137). Thus it can be said that the final questionnaire incorporated the characteristics of different sampling methods in order to provide usable database for further processing. This is also in accordance with Robson's statement that "Sampling theory shows that in some circumstances stratified random sampling can be more efficient than simple random sampling, in the sense that for a given sample size, the means of stratified samples are likely to be closer to the population mean. This occurs when there is a relatively small amount of variability in whatever characteristic is being measured in the survey *within* the stratum, compared to variability across data strata" (Robson, 1993:138). The survey and the used questionnaire can also be described as non-probability or purposive sample because as Robson marks small-scale surveys commonly employ non-probability samples. They are usually less complicated to set up and are acceptable when there is no intention or need to make a statistical generalization to any population beyond the sample surveyed. While in purposive sampling "A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy his/her specific needs in a project" (Robson, 1993: 141). Both of the latter described sampling methods characterize the used questionnaire and the survey process.

3. Quantitative Data Analysis

The objective of this paper is to present quantitative data obtained by the means of a questionnaire containing 25 questions. The questionnaire is outlined to collect data from volunteer Slovak immigrants from well-defined areas of their lives from the perspective of class, religion and ethnicity. Conclusions and assumptions are based on correlations among the answers, when the questionnaire is designed to obtain data utilizing cross questioning techniques, notably a series of questions investigate aspects of class, religion and ethnicity from different points of view. Thus, the result is a complex database, where tendencies can be deducted by combination of answers given to different questions. The goal of this technique is to better describe and clarify the situation of the Slovak immigrants in the British cultural environment. The main aim of this text is to present a thorough analysis of quantitative data that will serve primarily as a solid basis for further qualitative analysis – as the research is primarily based on a combined research technique using the data from the questionnaire in combination with the data collected by Skype interviews – as well as reveal the factual aspects of the integration process the Slovak immigrants are confronted with in the UK.

What is be possible to deduct from the data has a rather informative character and the author bears in mind that such a small-scale survey can hardly be the basis of wider generalisations; on the other hand it can serve as a peephole allowing e researcher to point out some tendencies in general while underlying the necessity of further, more extensive sociological researches including a much greater sample. While confessing that the data gained are not fully representative strictly from sociological point of view, it also has to be emphasized that the final results allow the author for drawing a series of conclusions and enable at least a rough sketch of the actual situation in the area of immigration and successful integration of Slovak immigrants in the UK which is still lacking basic research at the moment.

Data analysis is based on the frequency and the distribution of the markers that are observable in the answers provided by the informants. The more respondents choose a given pre-designed option in a multiple answer scale the more dominant the given aspect from the point of the analysis. The higher the frequency of an attitude represented by the answer the more possible to state that the given phenomenon is generally accepted, widespread, practiced and followed by the respondents and the wider public, too. As the questions were designed in order to interlock and complete each other, correlations and tendencies will be described as similar patterns appearing in different questions strengthening each other or in some cases opposing the forecasts. By this technique the author tries to present a coherent data analysis that might form the solid foundations needed for further qualitative replenishment.

One of the elementary characteristics that can serve as the basis for further conclusions is the age of the responding persons. The total number of the respondents reached 95. The age of the respondents spread from 19 the youngest to 61 the oldest. There were several dominant age groups identifiable. In the biggest group, belonged 24 respondents between 31-35. In the second most significant group belonged 22 respondents representing the age group 36-40. The third most significant age group with 21 respondents was the group of 26-30 years old respondents. There were recognisable further age groups with lower significance, for example: there were 12 respondents belonging to the age group of 21-25. There were originally three age groups created for the respondents between 41-60, but the low answer rate

and the relatively small representation of this age group allow to treat these people as one coherent group where 9 respondents belong the age group 41-45 and 6 respondents in the age group 46 plus. The average age of the respondents was 34 years, which also correlates with the most significant group of the respondents according to the statistical distribution of the data. When comparing the appearing age groups with the data published regularly by the Home Office some significant overlaps and differences are observable in the age distribution of Accession 8 immigrants. Home Office data emphasize that the biggest group of immigrants belong in the under 25 category, and only the second most significant group was the 25-34 years old. It is however, necessary to emphasize that the under 25-age group is characterized with much higher fluctuation rates concerning jobs, residence and plans for settling down. The younger people, though more significant in statistical findings in numbers do not represent the target group of this research: established families that have long-term plans and are characterized by lower rates of mobility. Therefore the biggest group in the survey, the 26-30-35-40 age group, can be characterised as the most relevant one from the point of further analysis as this produced the most significant answer rate in the survey, too.

The second category, the place of origin in Slovakia, was incorporated in the questionnaire with the intention to gain an overall picture of the Slovak immigration scheme from a domestic geographical aspect. The data were summarized and processed according to the districts of Slovakia. The goal of this data collection was to test whether the push-pull model analysed in the previous theoretical chapters is tangible in the immigration schemes. Notably, if the districts of Slovakia with lower economic power and productivity are more represented in the overall immigration schemes. The total number of respondents who entered the location of their home town was 92. The answers revealed the following facts: The majority of the respondents arrived from the areas with higher unemployment rates in Slovakia, 32 respondents originate from Eastern Slovakia and 15 from Central Slovakia. South-North distribution was not taken into consideration. According to the statistical data published by the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Slovakia (available at: http://www.upsvar.sk/media/medialne-spravy/miera-evidovanej-nezamestnanosti-jun-2010.html?page_id=21115 [accessed: July 6 2010]) the rate of unemployment reached 19,7 per cent in the District of Banská Bystrica and 18,3 per cent in the District of Prešov in 2010. This seems to underline the prediction that the push-pull effect is perceivable at least at the level of economic disparities. 51% of the informants marked the place of origin in Slovakia was a settlement in Central or Eastern Slovak districts. There were 30 respondents from the West Slovak regions without Bratislava. Thus, the well-known fact that the central and eastern Slovak regions with lower economic and productivity rates and higher levels of unemployment produce higher levels of immigration is verified. An interesting phenomenon is also revealed by the statistical summarization of the answers. Bratislava, the economically most advanced region in Slovakia with the lowest unemployment rate that in 2010 reached 4,4%, gave 16% of the informants. This fact allows for the assumption that there are further factors, not primarily of economic character, that may contribute to immigration: developing linguistic competences, adventure, travelling, etc. (see answers to question 8).

A further aspect of the push-pull effect is analysed by question (2) of the survey investigating whether the respondents were employed in Slovakia before the leave. The data

show that two-third of the respondents were employed. 64 of the total 95 respondents marked that they had had a permanent job before they left for the UK. 31 respondents were unemployed. When we compare these data with the answers that mark the highest level of education we see another correlation. 20 out of the 95 respondents that were unemployed had university degree. Only 7 respondents indicate secondary school as their highest level of education had been unemployed before their arrival in the UK. The evidence points out at least two possible conclusions. First, the respondents with university degree may be more mobile to search for better possibilities abroad and did not even want to be employed in Slovakia. Further, universities may not provide practical skills that are needed and well honoured by the Slovak market thus enforcing migration.

Question 7 is designed to gain further information about the economic situation of the respondents asking not only about employment but requiring a categorisation of their previous job on a quality scale. This question offered many options to define the reasons for immigration in a more sophisticated way. The distribution of the answers, however present a surprising result. 25% of the respondents stated that they had had a very pleasant and well-paid job before moving to the UK. This is a surprisingly high percentage even in the light of the fact that 36% of the respondents was unemployed. When only employment is taken into consideration the results show that 51 respondents out of 95 had been employed in Slovakia before immigration the majority defining their jobs as well-paid or pleasant but low-paid. The major problem with their jobs was marked as the low level of wages and the mismatch of the level of qualification and the actual job done at home. 64% of the respondents, however, did have a job in their home country and 36% respondents were unemployed.

As it can be seen from the answers given to the third category, place of residence in the UK, most of the respondents live in London and Central England. 36, out of 95 respondents marked London as his/her place of residence in England. 9 respondents live in Brighton, 3 in Aldershot, 2 in Edinburgh, 2 in Didcot, and 2 in Basingstoke. The rest of the answers marked different urban areas, which are relatively close to London (approximately within a 100 km circle). The most popular areas are Central England west from London. 13 respondents marked a settlement as their permanent residential area in this region. Naturally, the situation is very similar in case of other areas close to the east, north and south of London. This fact correlates with the data presented by the Local Governments Association in 2008 under the title: 'where have recent in-migrants gone?' in that they mark that the most popular destinations except London are the territories around Birmingham, Leeds and the North-East of England. There are only three respondents who mark their place of residence outside England; Edinburg and Inverness in Scotland and Oswestry in Wales appear almost accidentally in the list. This allows for the following conclusion: London is still the most popular destination for immigration from the Accession 8 countries, however in contrast with the total number of respondents it is evident that long-term immigrants more frequently choose their place of residence outside of but close to the British capital.

Another aspect of class belonging may occur when the places of residence of the Slovak immigrants are compared with the list of the most popular, or most expensive or most or least deprived areas of the United Kingdom represented by the Millionaires Neighbourhood Reports or produced by the Child Poverty Action Group. If we roughly compare the

settlements' list with the maps of the CPAG 2010 report (available at: http://www.cpag.org.nz/resources/) we can see that the Slovaks live mostly in the areas where poverty is average or is below the average. The Millionaires Neighbourhood Report in 2010 revealed that the 200 most expensive streets are in London and in the South East of England. The majority of the Slovak respondents marked London and the urban areas close to London as their permanent residents, which indicates that these people belong among the wealthier stratum of the population and the families rent or own their homes in 'better' areas. Thus, we can draw the conclusion that one important class marker – the place of residence – suggests that the responding immigrant Slovak families represent a group the members of which are able to maintain a lifestyle that characterises middle classes in the United Kingdom.

The time, already spent in the UK was the next quantitative element of the questionnaire. As emphasized in the chapter discussing methodology, only respondents with at least 6 months of continuous stay in the UK were taken into consideration in accordance with the regulations of the British government's immigration authorities, which underlines that people living and working longer than half a year in the UK can be defined as immigrants. Shorter stay indicates migration, but only of temporary character in general. The average time spent in the UK by the Slovak respondents according to the questionnaire is 8 years and 6 months. The shortest time marked was 8 months and the longest was 44 years. There were 29 respondents who spent more than 10 years in the UK as legal residents. 40 respondents have already spent more than 5 years in the UK. The data indicate that these people can be characterised as long-term residents according to the criteria of this research. Consequently, their answers are accepted as relevant and sufficient for further investigation of the characteristics of long-term immigration, diaspora formation processes and cultural erosion.

Level of education was incorporated in the questionnaire for a series of reasons. Primarily, class and education is considered as two very tightly connected factors. Most of the reputed authors (e.g. Bourdieu) emphasize the fact that education might be one of the most relevant factors that define class belonging and is one of the cardinal prerequisites of social mobility. The level of education of the respondents is not analysed separately from the other questions in the survey. It can tell a lot about class belonging, when compared with questions that try to investigate financial situation, satisfaction and life perspectives. To establish the framework for the time being it is sufficient to underline that there were no respondents with only elementary education. The overwhelming majority of the respondents had gained some diploma. There were 58 respondents with university degrees. They constituted the 61% of the total. 34 respondents marked secondary school as the highest level of education. The findings make it evident that with higher level of education the level of geographical mobility clearly rises. Higher level of education therefore can be considered as at least a contributing pull factor. When comparing this fact with the questions that analyse job positions, language abilities and long-term plans in the UK the survey reveals evident correlations.

Level of English mastery is an important factor in the process of successful integration in the British society. Though the British authorities do not define a concrete level of language mastery as a prerequisite for immigration into The United Kingdom it is, however, definitely inevitable for success and rises the chance of quick accommodation to the foreign

cultural environment. Out of the 95 respondents the overwhelming majority classified language level as advanced testified by certificates. It is 44% of the total number of respondents. When we compare level of education with level of English mastery evident correlations can be observed. The majority of the respondents that marked their highest level of education as university type own a certificate of language proficiency and mark their level of English as very advanced. There is, however, a further fact revealed by the data: 11 respondents with university or secondary school education levels, who have been granted a certificate about language mastery were unemployed in Slovakia before their leave. This can be interpreted as an important correlation of pull and push factors. Being unemployed as well as highly educated with language mastery seem to be the perfect combination that supports immigration to the UK. A further fact is also important to emphasize, notably that the majority of the respondents characterized language mastery as very good, good, and sufficient for work in the UK. Only 4 respondents marked their language level as poor. 3 of them have a university degree and only one respondent with secondary level education marked that his/her level of English is not sufficient. This also suggests that language mastery is not an obstacle when deciding for immigration. In summary, the majority of the respondents, 62 people, marked their level of English as very good or good. Since the average time the respondents have spent in the United Kingdom is 8 years and 6 months we can state that high level of language mastery and successful integration in the British society show correlation.

Language preferences show an even distribution. The majority of the respondents marked that use Slovak language. Slovak is used in families and in private communication. 20 respondents stated that English is the exclusive language they use privately and in everyday professional communication. This constitutes 21% of all the respondents. Roughly three quarters of the total respondents use Slovak for private communication and 14 respondents marked that Slovak is the exclusive language that is used for home communication. These data show affiliation to Slovak language and culture when compared to further points of the survey.

The use of communication channels in combination with language preferences in the family show the general attitudes and the level of cultural erosion, too. 25% of the informants watch Slovak TV channels and listen to Slovak radio stations. The majority of those who follow Slovak media use Slovak as the dominant language in the family, too. This fact can be considered as a mark of isolationist attitude that might contribute to diaspora formation processes. Further research is needed to clarify it, though. A relatively significant level of assimilation is represented by the high level of responses marking that regardless the respondents have access to Slovak media they do not use it. 47, out of 95 respondents, the biggest group, marked this option in the survey. If we add the 12 respondents who marked there is no access to Slovak media but they do not even want to have one the number of Slovaks who virtually show no interest in following the media of the home country is rather high. 61% of the respondents show little or no interest at all in Slovak media. 12 respondents chose the option that they would like to watch and listen to Slovak channels if they had a chance, which is 13% of the total. Thus it can be concluded that the majority of Slovaks living in the United Kingdom is rather reluctant or indifferent in connection with the political, cultural and popular events that are accessible via the media in the United Kingdom.

Many studies emphasize the fact that an important pull factor for the new immigrants is the already existent network of friends and acquaintances in the target country. The survey, however, does not discover a surprising fact in this aspect. 52% of the respondents answered they had friends and acquaintances in the country before they arrived. Though, this is a slight majority it is definitely not sufficient to allow us to sate that Slovak immigrants pull further waves of Slovaks to the country. According to the equal distribution of the answers this statement is not supported neither contradicted. Networks of acquaintances do not seem to be a definite pull factor for Slovak immigration.

What is more significant in this respect is connected with language and travel. Question 8 investigates what do the informants consider to be the most important factor that contributed to their move to the UK. Since the respondents were allowed to choose more than one option the cumulative results can add up to more than 100%, but the distribution of the answers show that the primary reason for the move was the will to study the language and to see the country. Naturally, economic reasons are also visible since the third biggest group of the answers clearly mark that quite a significant group moved to earn more money than in Slovakia. These people were employed and therefore, though the financial motif is undeniably present it is possible to assume that direct unemployment cannot be considered as the main motivating factor of Slovak immigration to the UK for the respondents of the survey. This is underlined by the fact that only 14 respondents, 15% of the total left the country to find *some* job without concrete plans.

Question 9 analysed the level of integration in the British society. The majority of the respondents have an extensive network of friends and acquaintances both British and Slovak. 45 people, that is 47% of the respondents belong into this group. 32%, 30 informants expressed that the majority of their friends are British and that they have less or much less Slovak friends. The high level of mixed group friendship and the size of the group with more British friends allows for the assumption that the Slovaks have already reached a high level of integration in the British society which excludes the chance or at least relatively hardens the formation and maintenance of diasporas. This leads to the conclusion that Slovak immigrants build social networks openly and successfully adapt to the foreign cultural environment. 14 people, 20% of the informants have more Slovak friends and acquaintances than British. When the data are examined in the light of the time already spent in the UK and in contrast with the level of language mastery there is observable some slight, but not very marked correlation. The average time the respondents have – who have many Slovak, but not very many British friends – spent in the UK is approximately 6 years. This seems to be insufficient for building extensive networks of friendship with the native population. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents categorised their English language mastery at a lower level, with the exception of 7, who stated they use English at an advanced level. Therefore, it seems to be valid to state that lover level of language mastery can contribute isolationist attitudes.

There is a relatively even distribution of answers concerning long-term plans and staying in the UK or returning home. 31 respondents, 33% would like to return home after 2-5 years, 35 respondents, 37%, would like to stay in the UK for at least 10 years. A relatively large number of respondents, 29 people, would like to stay in the UK definitely. This may indicate that the majority of the respondents still observe Slovakia as a possible shelter to

return to if their financial situation allows this. Immigration studies however indicate and underline that the 'myth to return' is a widely perceivable phenomenon among first generation immigrants. Some answers of the Slovaks who clearly marked their intention to stay in the UK forever show that the Slovak parents see better chances for their children in the UK and therefore are ready to give up plans of return or postpone it to a much later time.

When we compare return plans and answers expressing general satisfaction of the respondents it is immediately perceivable that the UK seems to be and will remain for a long time a very attractive country for the Slovaks. 29 people expressed great satisfaction and happiness in connection to their general situation in the UK. This is 31% of the respondents. 20 respondents chose the option that indicated satisfaction and stated that their situation is better in the UK than in Slovakia. Only 7 respondents marked their situation as not very satisfying. None of the respondents commented this question in a negative way expressing complete dissatisfaction. The level of satisfaction is highlighted by the answers given to question 12 that investigated the level of satisfaction in connection to the job facilities. 52% of the respondents answered that had a very well paid job in the UK that fully matched their qualifications. This is an amazing bias indicating a very high level of success in integration and clearly contradicting to the statements of some British experts who emphasize that immigrants from the Eastern European countries may be a burden for the United Kingdom. The saturation of jobs, which was investigated in question thirteen, shows an even distribution. 19% of the respondents have had more than 5 jobs, 44% have had at least 3 jobs, 20% have had 2 jobs, but 17% have been working in his/her first job position since the arrival to the United Kingdom. Though, a higher job saturation may indicate difficulty in the accommodation process in the foreign language and cultural environment, the general saturation of job changes is within a lower range. Approximately 3-4 jobs in 8 and a half-year average time of stay in the UK is not an extreme.

The description of different job positions revealed that the majority of the respondents is a professional and is doing a job that matches their qualification. 37% of the informants belonged in this group. When the answers to question 14 and the answers to question 12 (Do you have a good job?) are paralleled interesting correlations can be discovered. 28 respondents declared that they have university degree and did jobs that fully matched their qualification. 29% of the respondents thus show a high level of successful integration and satisfaction. A further 8 respondents belonged into the group who declared to have a well-paid job that fully matches their qualification. Together this adds up to 37% who were satisfied with their status quo, payment, and job position that fully matched their qualification.

14 respondents declared that they own a diploma, but their job in the UK did not

match their level of qualification. This group produces the higher level showing dissatisfaction with their job as far as payment was considered. 9 respondents out of 14 declared dissatisfaction. This fact seems to support status-inconsistency theories described in chapter. The high level of satisfaction 52% in question 12 combined with the fact that in question 14 51% declared that their job is well-paid fully matching their qualification (university or blue collar) testifies the success of the integration processes. Generally, it can be declared that the majority of the Slovak immigrants successfully integrate not only socially, but in the world of work as well. They are able to find jobs that match their

qualification and become regular tax-paying citizens. Thus, theories that highlight the possibility that Accession 8 immigrants might mean a burden for the British society are at a great extent contradictory. When combining these results with the distribution of answers for question 15 the evidence becomes even more perceivable where 55% of the respondents declared that they were very satisfied with their earnings and were able to lead a decent and very comfortable lifestyle. A further 34% of the respondents also expressed that they earn enough money to enjoy life in the UK. 4% of the respondents even felt that they belonged among the rich in the UK and only 4% declared that felt as a poor member of the society.

The following part of the questionnaire was designed to collect data from people who live in marriage (or in civil partnership) and raise children. 31 respondents had children from whom 22 respondents declared they lived in a common household with a Slovak person and 14 had British partners.

Question 18 was designed to map the level of Slovak language mastery at the children. 15 respondents declared that their children could speak English and Slovak equally well. 9 respondents declared that their children speak better English than Slovak and 6 stated that their children's Slovak is better that English. The question whether these children live in mixed marriages can be answered when comparing question 16 with question 18. 6 out of the 9 children who could speak better English than Slovak came from mixed marriages, however 3 were from families where the mother and the father were both Slovaks. There was one family, mixed marriage, where the children could not Speak Slovak at all. These data allow for the assumption that assimilation processes are relatively strong even in the families where both parents are of Slovak origin. When these data are put in contrast with the results presented in question 5, which investigated the respondents' will or wish to follow the Slovak media, it is possible to declare that interest in Slovak media and Slovak language is lower at the second generation of the Slovak immigrants. There is, however very little correlation between the Slovak language mastery of the children and the media usage of their parents.

Further aspects can be deducted when comparing the parents' will to teach Slovak language to their children. In question 23, which question was incorporated to map the parents' behaviour, 13 parents declared that their children speak Slovak, but the parents do not teach them the language. 12 parents declared that their children speak Slovak and they also teach them the language. 2 parents try to teach Slovak to their children who do not speak the language and 1 informant, whose children don't speak Slovak, does not teach the language at all. It can be assumed that there is a relatively weak effort from the side of the parents to handle down Slovak language to the next generation which underlines the conjecture that there is a relatively rapid assimilation process among the Slovaks living in the UK.

As far as education facilities are concerned, the overwhelming majority of the parents declared that their children study in state-maintained schools. 23 out of 25 parents marked this possibility in the questionnaire. When this result is put into contrast with question 20 it is visible that only 3 respondents chose a distant school of higher quality. Time and distance thus seem to play an important role in these families' lives which, according to Bourdeau and others, suggest working-class behaviour in the majority of the cases and shorter-term planning schemes when the future of the children is concerned. There were only 3 respondents declaring that their children travel longer distance for better education. On the other hand the

majority of the respondents, 12, declared that the local school their children are studying at belonged among the prestigious ones. Further investigation is needed to clarify the concept of 'prestigious' in the respondents' understanding.

When the quality of education in the British school was investigated 60 responses had to be analysed. To make a distinction between the comments from the respondents with and without children the answers were contrasted with parts of the questionnaire that were designed to map the couples with children and their answers are analysed separately from those ones that answered this question on the basis of their personal experience with one or more educational institution. It was thus possible to clarify the difference between adult education and elementary/secondary education. The comparative analysis of the answers revealed the following facts:

The majority of the responding parents, 11, declared that the British schools are worse than the Slovak schools. 5 of them stated that the British schools are better and 9 parents see the two systems as equal.

The respondents without children showed the following pattern:

4 informants with no children declared that the British schools are worse, 3 saw them as equal with the Slovak schools and 4 consider British schools as better ones.

4 respondents did not make clear declarations but commented on the question emphasizing that the British schools are different from the Slovak schools mainly in the act that in Britain the schools concentrate on creative work manifested in projects while the Slovak system enforces memorizing and encyclopaedic knowledge.

Naturally the results in this form are rather superficial and need clarification which is part of the qualitative analysis.

The overall results show that out of 60 respondents 15 respondents (9 with children) evidently see the British schools as worse than their Slovak equivalents. 13 declared the schools are equal and only 7 (5 with children) see British schools are better than the Slovak ones. The results reveal an important fact, notably the schools and education can hardly be considered as a significant pull factor for the immigrants.

As far as national belonging is considered 29 respondents answered the question whether the classmates of their children know about their Slovak origin. The overwhelming majority, 27 declared that the children know this information. It suggests that different nationality does not mean an obstacle and the schools are tolerant towards differences.

As far as religion and religious education is concerned, question 25 provided the following answers:

Out of 25 respondents 11 parents declared that their children receive religious education at school and they consider it as an important factor. 10 respondents declared that their children do not receive religious education and they do not consider this kind of education to be important. Further 3 respondents declared that their children did receive religious education, but they did not consider this type of education important. One respondent stated that he/she would wish his/her child received religious education, but it was not possible in their location. These facts reveal that there is still a relatively strong conviction from the parents' side that religion and religious education is important for their children. The fact that almost half of the respondents gave reluctant answers for this question allows for the

assumption, however, that religion does not play a crucial role in the life of immigrant Slovaks and cannot be considered as a powerful cohesive power. Thus it cannot contribute to disapora-formation processes, which is not characteristic for the Slovak communities in Britain if we compare this fact with the previous answers investigating social networks and friendships.

4. Discussion

This paper came to existence along the intersection of two extensive fields of cultural studies: education and immigration. The objective was to gain a comprehensive overview about the life of Slovak immigrants in the United Kingdom during a complex integration process in a culturally distinct environment. This work concentrates on the aspects of ethnicity, class, and religion and their interactions in the British system of education in order to understand and interpret the manifestation and impacts of these concepts on the integration process of Slovak immigrants in the United Kingdom. This part brings together the various findings of a multiple method exploration and contrasts it with the processes of change within the British education system in order to evaluate them against the research questions and the established literature. The limitations of the study and ideas for future research are also presented here.

4.1. ETHNICITY

Research revealed, and the results of this investigation support that there is en evident need for revaluation of concepts in the field of ethnic belonging and the characteristics of diasporic existence. The present open and, to a great extent, multi-ethnic societies – and the United Kingdom is evidently a shining example of one – perceive ethnicity differently than it was viewed in the pre 1989 period as Safran, Kokot, Tölölian, Alfonso and others suggest (2004). Ethnicity, in the modern democracies, is not an exclusive term any more but a possibility to precisely define identity in multiple spheres. Diasporas – perceived as the ultimate representations of minority existence – do not behave as isolated communities in the sea of the majority culture but are open constructions that organically integrate into the majority society while preserving a considerable part of their original identity and are able to present their connection with the homeland as a symbolical relation (see Kokot, Tölölyan, Alfonso, 2004:3) while maintaining active connections with the majority society. This observation is clearly supported by the research results. Evidence shows that there exist at least two groupings of Slovak immigrants (one in Aldershot and a following one in London) that bear the characteristics of this modern understanding of diaspora. Quantitative research revealed that the majority of the Slovak immigrants who participated on data collection have developed extensive social networks in the UK, where there is almost no evidence of observing themselves as separate from the mainstream society. This finding is greatly supported by the results of quantitative analysis where the informants emphasized the importance of integration on one hand while within close social interaction were able to successfully maintain national identity on purely ethnic basis. Ackerman's observation on diasporas exploiting the advantages of modern telecommunication technologies is also observable in the light of the research (see Kokot, Tölölyan, Alfonso, 2004:5). Results show that existing Slovak dasporic communities have access to the modern telecommunication

facilities and their members actively maintain contact with their families in the homeland on a daily basis. It is also possible to follow political, cultural and popular events of the homeland in Slovak language in the UK via satellite transmission which contributes to the stabilization and strengthening of the Slovak identity. According to the research results only a smaller proportion of the informants use these facilities actively, though the possibility is present and this fact definitely contributes to the preservation of the homeland culture – at least in case of the first generation immigrants. It was also discovered that due to the use of the modern communication facilities Slovak diasporas were able to expand into the Internet world where connections are easier to maintain and the members are able to exchange information more effectively. Thus, Safran's observation about the 'critical mass' (2004:17) should be expanded in the direction of the cyber world. Real physical presence is not inevitable anymore when talking about diasporic communities; the concept can be better characterized when Internet communities are taken into consideration, too. The numerous Slovak communities in the UK that present themselves on the web are the shining example of this change. This only underlines Safran's observation that "The label diaspora has come to be used rather freely, because multiple identities are now more acceptable than they were before" (Safran 2004:12). The results of quantitative and qualitative data collection support this statement at least in case of the British cultural environment where the Slovaks have the full right to define their diasporic groups as the highest form of minority existence that is able to go beyond separation and isolation that was so much characteristic for the earlier, trauma-motivated, concepts of dispora.

As far as education is concerned the results of the research proved a high level of integration, in a number of cases assimilation, among Slovaks. Primary importance was assigned to language mastery. The respondents, almost unanimously, underlined that language skills play a crucial role in successful integration; moreover language learning in its natural environment appeared as one of the key pull factors when motifs for immigration were analysed. When language mastery has achieved a sufficient level there usually appeared the need to obtain comparable and compatible education with the British one, though the respondents underlined the differences in the perception of the role of education for career building.

The second generation showed a higher level of integration-assimilation, where knowledge of English language does not mean a problem any more. On the other hand, fast integration processes are perceivable among the respondents that contribute to a rapid change of Slovak identity into a British one. It is not only the extensive legislative background that clearly contributes to the tolerance towards ethnic minorities in the British schools, since quantitative research revealed that the respondents do not feel the need to hide their Slovak identity. The majority of the respondents underlined that the classmates of their children know about their Slovak origin. This finding partially underline the success of the existing multicultural educational model in Britain and to a great extent contributes to the successful integration (in a number of cases assimilation) of the Slovak children.

In summary, the extensive and detailed legislative framework that governs and ensures tolerant and welcoming atmosphere in the British educational and other social institutions as well as the evident effort of the Slovak immigrants to successfully integrate into the structures

of the British social frameworks contribute to a high level of integration among Slovaks, while the expanded possibilities of diasporic existence enable successful identity building maintaining the cultural heritage of the homeland and active communication among the members.

4.2. RELIGION

Being an integral element of diaspora concepts as well as a dominant characteristic of the British system of education, religion and religious education play a crucial role when developing the complex picture of the state of art in the field of education. Religion cannot be treated separately from ethnicity in a society, where legal documents govern and regulate the process of religious education and common worship. This environment, however, is under close legislative control and research underlined the observation of Grace Davie, who defines Britain as "an advanced industrial society with Christian tradition" (1994:7). The role of religion in maintaining cohesion among the members of the British society has undergone a considerable shift and present legislation points to the direction where securing religious freedom for all members is one of the primary objectives. The British society has completed a long journey since the first Relief Act in 1778 and the present legislation does not enforce Protestantism as the one exclusively acceptable religious practice. Tradition, however, underlines the role of Christian teachings and the present legislation feels the need to adhere to it by defining the 'correct form' of religious education on 'broadly Christian bases'.

Religion, however, does not seem to play a crucial role in the life of Slovak immigrants. Results of the conducted research revealed a relatively high level of reluctance towards religious practices. The majority of the respondents do not perceive religion as one crucial element of their identity and qualitative research revealed that religious traditions (e.g. Easter festival organised by social clubs of the Slovak immigrants) has transformed into a possibility to meet other members of the community and enjoy each others community rather than strict following of the religious traditions and teachings. A similar tendency was observable in connection with the educational practice. Only a minor proportion considered religious education an important factor for their children, while qualitative research revealed that there is a perceivable bias towards Catholic schools, which springs from the perception that these institutions provide 'higher quality' education and is not connected with religious conviction or tradition.

To sum up, religious conviction and religious education do not seem to play a crucial role for Slovak immigrants neither in educational relations nor in the minority existence. Though, a smaller proportion of the respondents follow religious traditions these have rather personal character serving primarily as interesting elements of a cultural heritage than a strong cohesive factor as far as diaspora is concerned.

4.3. CLASS

Class has been perceived differently in the UK and in the post-war Czechoslovakia. While western theorists went beyond the Marxist explanation of class, Eastern Europe – having been devoted to the building of communism as the ultimately ideal social system – rigidly refused the validity of class stratification and social differentiation on class bases. The concept of a classless society, however, is much older and goes back as far as the 15th century in the Czech and Slovak understanding, when Petr Chelčický first preached about pacifism

and a classless society (Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: available at: http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/N010, accessed 17 September 2012). Research proved that immigrant Slovaks mostly ignore the concept of class and define their social status mostly on the ground of 'success' where the concept of success is imagined as the interaction of factors such as: ability to integrate into the British society (learn the language and find a job); ability to gain suitable education in Britain (i.e. which is equivalent or comparable with the British education); ability to develop extensive social networks of friendships with the British; and ability to settle down in a 'pleasant' region of the UK. Income and language mastery are the two crucial factors that actually count when defining the social status. Thus it is possible to agree with Levin stating that "Status honour is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific style of life is expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle" (Levin, 1998:49). Research underlined the validity of this statement. There has not passed possibly a long enough time that would have enabled the stratification of the Slovak immigrant groups according to the lines of status honour. This tendency is, however, vaguely perceivable as – at least at the level of diasporic groups – it is possible to differentiate 'leaders' and 'members' or the ones who have deeper integrated in the British society, for example respondents from mixed marriages.

Elements of defining minority existence along class lines are, however, perceivable when education is concerned. The respondents clearly perceived differences between the state-maintained and private educational institutions. A further class element that appeared during the investigation was the geographical location of schools. Respondents were aware with the 'qualitative differences' that sprung from the disadvantaged location of some state maintained educational institutions. A further factor that reveals how Slovak immigrants observe class within education was connected with the fact that among the respondents there was only a statistically insignificant minority who could afford private school education for their children.

Ball's discovery that "Ideas about school were often subordinated to considerations of family, and locality..." (Ball, 2006:162) was partially proved by the conducted research. Slovak immigrant families choose the education institutions for their children primarily according to the lines of practical considerations of time and space – providing that financial situation is not included as a main decisive factor. This follows very much the British working class patterns. Ball's statement that "Family life, and things such as school choice is, are played out within, and over against, a space and time budget" (Ball 2006:163) is perceivable when analyzing the research results. Ball's observation that "Parental aspirations are often vague and are often limited by the wants and needs of the children themselves" (Ball 2006:164) is also valid as Slovak immigrant families often follow this pattern when choosing schools. Mixed marriage families showed different tendency. They were more likely to invest time and money when education is concerned. The most important factors for them that determine school choice were: reputation, size of school, direct contact with the school, the image of schools conveyed by their students, school ethos and climate, etc. This type of thinking requires higher level of integration into the British society and for first generation immigrant families is not accessible as it requires long-term and extensive social networks which enable the transfer of information in connection with experiences and myths in

connection to the educational institutions. . As Ball in accordance with Bourdieu and Edwards underline "[middle-class] parents are often able to employ forms of direct contact and negotiation which can be vital in accessing ... [a] school" (Ball, 2006:170) which is simply unimaginable for 'fresh' immigrants living in the UK no longer than 6-10 years.

In conclusion, class consciousness of Slovak immigrants can be considered rather vague. The relatively short term of existence and active participation in the British society have not allowed for a perceivable class stratification of the already existing communities. Decision making, when choosing a suitable educational institution is not as much conscious among the immigrant Slovaks as for example among the respondents who live in mixed marriages. Limited social networks and lack of tradition in this respect block the development of a more sophisticated choice-making.

5. Conclusion

In the light of the theoretical framework of this paper as well as based on the data found through the data collection phase the following conclusions can be drawn: tradition and historical experience forced the British society to accommodate to the situation when the UK is perceived by many nations as a highly developed and very open democratic society that offers almost 'unlimited' chances for better life. British lawmakers – mainly from the second half of the 20th century – made an effort to prepare the legal framework of a multicultural society ensuring minority rights and enforcing education for those who primarily get into contact with the immigrant groups. Since cultural differences are not very much striking as far as Slovak immigrants are concerned it is possible to state that the process of integration of Slovak immigrants is less complicated than for example the integration of visible minorities. This fact, however, greatly contributes to a faster assimilation process that is clearly perceivable at the second generation. Therefore, it can be stated that the British society is prepared to deal with the problems that are connected with the integration of the Slovak immigrants; open and democratic and the actual legal framework is sufficient to handle these problems.

Slovak immigrant groups do exist in the United Kingdom. They are not extensive or numerous and their members maintain rather loose connections within the groups. Religion and religious tradition do not play a crucial role in the lifestyle of the immigrant Slovaks. Being of Christian character it is not in conflict with the mainstream society's concepts of religious practice. The traditions that are practiced within the disaporic groups are of rather 'informative' character and serve primarily the need to handle down the cultural heritage and Slovak identity to the next generations.

As the research results underlined education is not the key to become 'fully British' but evidently is among the necessary requirements. What kind of education is available for the immigrant Slovaks is however a much more important question that might have a significant impact on their integration process. Regional differences and financial possibilities can have a crucial impact on the level of their Britishness. The choice of school for the second generation may be a crucial element as it greatly influences the future possibilities and prospects for the children to achieve and maintain at least a solid middle-class status. At this moment, however, rather impossible for Slovak immigrants to enter the world of prestigious public schools or

other privately operated educational institutions. Most of the Slovak immigrant parents are not aware with the traditional connections between the different elementary and secondary educational institutions and therefore their only possibility is to rely on the publicly available data about the schools concerning purely GCSE statistics or OFSTED reports.

As far as legal framework is concerned the different acts that govern the functioning of the British schools ensure unbiased and fair approach towards the Slovak immigrant children and their parents. The number of these children, however, does not allow to design specialised programs for them which has the definite consequence that the children are unintentionally 'forced to assimilate'. Slovak identity is accepted and neither the parents nor the children have problems to confess it openly in the schools, but the possibilities of these institutions are rather limited when special 'Slovak' programs are concerned and the only available way to maintain Slovak identity for these children is connected exclusively with the social clubs where they have a chance to meet partners with similar ethnic background.

Limitations

When evaluating the possible scope and impact of this research it is important to underline that certain limitations must be taken into consideration: Firstly, extensive research concerning the actual life of Slovak immigrants does not exist or has not been published yet, which means that the amount of available data is rather limited to draw valid generalizations. Secondly, Slovak diasporic groups have had a short tradition in the UK. Slovak immigrants live rather scattered in the United Kingdom which hardens the establishment and maintenance of such communities. Moreover, Slovak immigrants are characterized by a relatively high level of mobility that also hardens the process of contacting them even when using the most modern communication facilities.

Therefore the present research should be understood as a springboard which at best might serve as inspiration for further investigation in the different fields that describe the life of Slovak immigrants in the United Kingdom. Aspects of class, religion and ethnicity have been analyzed in relation to education which does not allow to include a series of factors that might be useful for further investigation. Therefore, the present work should be seen as an initial effort to broaden the scope of immigration research towards the aspects of life of Accession 8 immigrants in the United Kingdom.

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