

Balizs, Dániel¹ – Somogyi, Kitti²

Suburbanization in Multi-ethnic Area – Conflicts and Local Strategies

The effects of suburbanization can be examined from several aspects, but beyond the individual decisions that initiated it, the real estate market aspects, or the transformation of land use, the effects on local communities and their reactions are rarely highlighted in professional circles. In our work within the agglomeration of Bratislava, the Slovak capital, we researched individual and collective opinions on suburbanization, as well as the questions and potential conflict situations arising among members of the “host community.” A striking element of the study area is that migration also means a change in the linguistic environment, as the newcomers often arrive from a predominantly Slovak-speaking city to an area mostly inhabited by the Hungarian minority. This adds additional dimensions to suburbanization and the responses it generates. Experiences show that the municipalities affected by the process use independent, yet in certain respects similar, strategies to manage it, and as part of these strategies, the ethnic factor also appears prominently in some topics.

Keywords: suburbanization, local strategies, ethnicity, Bratislava

¹ Research fellow, Department for Urban Planning and Design, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, H-1111 Budapest, Műegyetem rkp. 3., Tel: +36305047564, E-mail: balizs.daniel@epk.bme.hu

² Assistant professor, Department of English Linguistics, University of Pécs, H-7624 Pécs, Ifjúság útja 6., Tel: +36303406054, E-mail: somogyi.kitti@pte.hu

INTRODUCTION

Žitný Ostrov (Csallóköz), an ethnically homogeneous area of the Hungarian community in Slovakia, is expected to become a mixed-ethnicity region in the near future. The underlying migratory process is the suburbanization of Bratislava's agglomeration, involving the movement of large numbers of people from the Slovak capital to small towns and villages, which are traditionally in close connection with the city but rural in character. These two milieus have already been encountered in many other cities in Slovakia and even in Europe. However, in the Bratislava agglomeration—besides the differences in culture, lifestyle, income, qualification, and several other factors—, the linguistic effect also prevails; most of the newcomers are Slovak, while the target area is predominantly Hungarian-speaking. Suburbanization generally entails local reactions, but the ethnic dimension is also significant in this case. All the groups involved in intensive migration inevitably respond to the process. In the present study, I focus on the areas affected and shaped by suburbanization, especially the communities that originally lived there.

The main question is, where and how migration—to the suburbs—can affect the linguistic and ethnic patterns of the target area. More specifically, the study aims to answer the inquiries of how the municipalities receiving migration react to the altered social, real estate market, linguistic, and other circumstances through local (municipal and communal) decisions and strategies and concerning this, what differences can be found among various municipalities belonging to the agglomeration. For my research, we have chosen the suburban zone around Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. The study aims to answer the following questions:

- Question 1: How does ethnicity affect the relationship between indigenous and migrant populations, and how do they perceive each other?
- Question 2: How has the identity (local and/or minority) of the indigenous inhabitants changed as a result of migration?

Apparently, suburban processes can affect the ethnic character of the target area if ongoing migration crosses linguistic and cultural boundaries; in other words, the migrating population arrives in an area that is different from the core city in character. In my interpretation, mobility to a multicultural environment increases the intensity of ethnic interactions. The positive outcome of this process can be knowledge transfer between ethnic groups, or an increasing dialogue within the community. However, the process can be negative—meaning the deterioration of the relationship between different cultural groups—, if the indigenous-newcomer contrast is fueled by prejudice which is associated with an ethnic dimension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Slovak capital was slightly touched by the negative effects of the regime change; Slovakia's economy and regional position were dynamically increased by its independence after 1993. Its

population grew rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century—from 193,000 to 442,000 within four decades. The influx of workforce to operate new industrial facilities contributed to this significant growth. The expansion of the city’s agglomeration began decades ago; first, along the main transport corridors—towards Brno and Trnava—, then towards Žitný Ostrov and the other side of the border. Suburbanization is prevalent around several urban centers in Slovakia, especially the two largest cities, Bratislava and Košice, but also in the regions of Banská Bystrica, Prešov, Trnava, Nitra, Trenčín and Žilina (Sveda, 2014). Authors on the subject emphasize that the process is highly significant on the Slovak scale but modest by Western European standards (Sveda & Krizan, 2011). The only exception is Bratislava, where the proportion of the population affected by suburbanization and the speed of the process are particularly striking. The urban core of Bratislava began to lose population in the mid-1990s, while the surrounding settlements started to gain significant population through migration around the turn of the millennium (Slavík et al., 2011). The migration rate is still high, and the steady stream of new housing projects and investments shows that there will be a strong demand for new housing in the municipalities around Bratislava in the next decade. (Sveda, 2011; Sveda & Suska, 2014). People who “flee” from densely populated urban areas are leaving due to changing housing preferences—as is the trend in other European cities (Sveda, 2014)—, and host communities face similar challenges: the spread of urban lifestyle is causing resentment among many “indigenous” people. The surroundings of the city are constantly changing both in terms of land use and functions. This transformation can be observed by looking at built-up areas and land use (Baus et al., 2014), and by recognizing that suburbanization processes are now extending to commercial activities—mainly as an economic reflex to social mobility (Sveda & Krizan, 2011). Looking at the map, it is easy to see that a considerable part of the suburban zone around Bratislava does not belong to Slovakia, but to Austria and Hungary. It is a unique phenomenon in Central Eastern Europe that the suburban zone of a capital city extends into (an)other country(ies). The proximity of the borders has motivated a large number of inhabitants in Bratislava to look for a new home outside Slovakia. This could only begin after the country’s accession to the European Union and the symbolic opening of the borders (2007). The inclusion of new areas in the suburbanization of Bratislava was motivated not only by the exploitation of new opportunities but also by the drastic transformation of Slovakian settlements. In addition to the undoubtedly positive effects, like the demographic, economic and infrastructural dynamization of local communities, suburban settlements have also faced a number of negative consequences of this process, such as environmental and traffic problems, conflicts between old and new residents, or profiteering on the real estate market (Podolák, 2007; Sveda & Suska, 2014). The saturation, caused by the increase in construction and growing social tensions, has turned the attention of both the potential migrants from Bratislava and real estate agents to the neighboring Austrian and Hungarian municipalities (Dillinger, 2004; Slavík & Kurta, 2007; Ira et al., 2011; Balizs & Bajmócy, 2018, 2019).

Suburbanization has been studied from many different angles, and there is a large amount of literature on the causes and characteristics of the process (e.g. Berg van den et al., 1982; Fishman,

1987; Enyedi, 1988; Dövényi & Kovács, 1999; Timár, 1999; Bajmócy, 2007). However, these are not discussed in this article. In line with the research topic, it is more appropriate to focus on the possible effects of suburbanization on linguistic and ethnic patterns. The latter can be divided into two main categories:

1. as part of the cross-border process, some individuals migrate from the core city—due to its eccentric location—to a neighboring country;
2. the other case may occur when the city and its suburbs belong to the same state, but the ethnic relations between the two territorial units are different.

Bratislava is an excellent example of both types. Professional interest in the first type, which includes socio-geographical and sociological aspects, is very strong throughout Europe. The topic covers a wide range of cross-border regions, therefore, the number of studies on the subject is growing (see Strüver, 2005; Van Houtum & Gielis, 2006; Terlouw, 2008; Jagodič, 2010, 2011, Lovas Kiss, 2011). The topic has already been addressed in the context of Bratislava (Hardi & Lampl, 2008; Hardi, 2010; Hardi, 2011; Balizs & Bajmócy, 2018, 2019; Sveda & Suska, 2021), although the significant dynamics of the transformation of the environment, the property market and social conditions keep the issue on the agenda. However, cross-border suburbanization is not the subject of the present study.

The second type can be divided into four subcategories based on the linguistic differences between the two territorial units, the city and its “hinterland”—in the context of the current research, it is the agglomeration or suburban zone—, as well as their distinct ethnic patterns. The latter aspect can be either homogeneous (monolingual or nearly monolingual) or heterogeneous (multilingual):

1. Homogeneous city - homogeneous hinterland: in this case, both territorial categories are monolingual, which is relevant to the present topic if homogeneity means the dominance of a particular ethnic group, so the city and the surrounding area are home to different language communities.
2. Heterogeneous city - homogeneous hinterland: the city is linguistically and ethnically more diverse than the surrounding areas; a typical type of metropolis that is located within a coherent, relatively monolingual area.
3. Homogeneous city - heterogeneous hinterland: the core is monolingual or nearly monolingual, while the surrounding area is ethnically mixed; this is often observed in cities located in a language contact zone.
4. Heterogeneous city - heterogeneous hinterland: both territorial units are multi-ethnic, but the proportions are significantly different; thereby both the city and the surrounding area are multilingual, but the ethnic community that constitutes the majority is different.

Currently, the first type is quite rare due to the relatively high mobility rate; however, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was present in several parts of the Carpathian Basin (e.g. Transylvania). The second category—a city that is linguistically much more heterogeneous/diverse than its surroundings—is nowadays exemplified by Lugano, Switzerland, where 40% of the city’s population is of non-Swiss origin. The diversity of residential preferences manifests in the location of

various ethnic groups within the city, for example, in the degree of segregation. They are also extremely varied when residents are moving to the suburbs; this means that the city makes its hinterland more heterogeneous through migration processes than before. It is also noteworthy that certain communities are much less involved in this process than others; in parallel, other groups, which were initially highly segregated, continue to move to a more homogeneous linguistic environment after leaving the city, while some nationalities follow the patterns of the majority in this regard (Ibraimovic & Masiero, 2014). Certainly, the process will make the neighboring rural settlements much more mixed in terms of language. Research (Alba et al., 1999; Fong & Shibuya, 2000; Howell & Timberlake, 2014; Massey & Tannen, 2017) suggests that urban populations show greater linguistic complexity than their surrounding areas. In addition, these communities (African American, Hispanic and Asian) exhibit significant differences in terms of suburbanization and housing preferences. For instance, African Americans are less likely to relocate from urban areas.

The dichotomy of heterogeneous city - homogeneous countryside is not only an important feature of suburban processes in the Western regions but can also be found in Central Eastern Europe. The most spectacular examples can be found in the Baltic region, where industrialization combined with the influx of Slavic (mainly Russian-speaking) populations during the Soviet period were combined, drastically changing the local ethnic relations. More than a third of the population of Tallinn and Riga is still Russian, but other cities (including Tartu in Estonia) also have significant Slavic populations. As the latter arrived in an organized way, they were mainly accommodated in prefabricated housing estates, while the Estonian and Latvian populations tended to live in the lower-density, detached housing areas of the cities. Although housing segmentation has decreased since 1991, it remains an important feature of Baltic cities and has a differentiating effect—in terms of majority and minority—on suburbanization. Segregation between the majority Estonians and Latvians and other ethnic minorities has increased in recent years, showing that social and economic disparities between these groups are mainly related to ethnicity. The latter is notable even though the importance of ethnicity (as a factor influencing residential choice) has declined since the regime change (Kulu & Billari, 2006; Kontuly & Tammaru, 2006; Hess et al., 2012; Krisjane & Bezins, 2012; Leetmaa et al., 2015).

There are several examples of the third type in Slovakia: in addition to Bratislava, Košice and Nitra can also be mentioned—although the latter two are becoming less exemplary. As the focus of the research is on Bratislava, there is no need for further examples in this chapter for this type. In the fourth category (heterogeneous city and heterogeneous countryside), the core is in an area where a language community other than the majority ethnic group also resides. An example of this is Vilnius, where the Lithuanian-majority capital is surrounded by villages that are (also) inhabited by Poles. The Lithuanian capital has a linguistically heterogeneous population, with a majority of Lithuanians, as well as Russian, Polish, Belarusian minorities, and other ethnicities in the core city. The same applies to the surrounding settlements, although the local majority is constituted of the Lithuanian Polish minority in many places. Suburbanization in the Vilnius area has resulted in the intensification of the Lithuanian character, to which the mainly Polish-speaking communities in the target settlements have

responded. The response to the influx of Lithuanians has strengthened the local Polish (minority) identity, resulting in a measurable increase in the number of votes for Polish parties in Lithuania (Ubarevičienė et al., 2015). Although Bratislava and Vilnius belong to different categories, the issue of changing voter behavior is also relevant for the Slovak capital in the present research, because the political representation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia—apart from the otherwise important issue of parliamentary presence—has been well-organized for decades. The parties representing the Hungarian minority are active factors in regional and even national politics.

The degree of attachment to minority political parties is a crucial issue for ethnic groups in the Central Eastern European region, including the Carpathian Basin. The influence of political groups depends on various factors, such as the current size of the minority community, internal political divisions within the community, or even the economic weight of the home country. Since the renaissance of “ethnic parties” in the 1990s, it has been widely accepted until recently that these formations are predominantly voted for by minority citizens (Ilyés & Tátrai, 2013; Farkas, 2016). Furthermore, minority communities tend to vote primarily—though not exclusively—for parties representing their own interests, while the political palette of the majority society can mobilize much fewer minority voters (the above is not typical for minorities in Hungary, see. Dobos, 2013; Tar, 2015; Vida & Kovalcsik, 2018). In much of Central Eastern Europe, ethnic identity is closely linked to a particular electoral behavior, where individuals tend to vote for their own party. Therefore, the popularity of minority parties can serve as an indicator of the strength of ethnic identity and its changes (Balizs, 2016).

Slovakia and the Hungarian parties in Slovakia provide an excellent example of the previous point: between 1998 and 2009, at least 95% of the voters of Strana Maďarskej Komunity (SMK)—Party of the Hungarian Community—, the only party representing the Hungarian minority, were Hungarians or of Hungarian identity, while at least 80% of the entire Hungarian community in Slovakia voted for SMK. Although Hungarian political life in Slovakia has changed significantly with the formation of Most–Híd, which was officially established as an ethnically mixed party but can be defined as essentially Hungarian in this research, the proportions mentioned above have not changed significantly. Most–Híd was able to appeal to a wider range of people, who had assimilated to some degree into the majority society or had a hybrid identity, more than SMK was. However, even after the emergence of this new political organization, 90% of the total votes for the two Hungarian parties were still cast by Hungarians from Hungarian-populated Southern Slovakia (Ilyés & Tátrai, 2013).

In the 2010s, Hungarian political life in Slovakia was shaped by the rivalry between SMK and Most–Híd parties, as well as the relationship between the majority society and the current government in Bratislava and the Hungarian minority. In the 2020 elections, the Hungarian community in Slovakia expressed their dissatisfaction with the political battles and disillusionment with party leaders by voting for non-Hungarian formations, to a greater extent than before (Harrach, 2020). In the 2020 parliamentary elections, only 70% of Hungarians in Slovakia voted for Hungarian parties, resulting in

an unprecedented loss of popularity for the two Hungarian parties and leaving Hungarians in Slovakia without parliamentary representation for the first time (Czímer, 2021).

METHODS

The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Before using mathematical-statistical methods, a database was constructed that contained property market data, data from the 2001, 2011, and 2021 Slovak censuses on population change and ethnicity, and the results of the 2002–2020 Slovak elections. When analyzing the data, the aim was to explore whether there was a correlation between the change in the proportion of Hungarians in the settlements around Bratislava and the increase/decrease in the election results of the Hungarian parties in Slovakia (SMK, Most–Híd). The comparison was based on paired census and election data from 2001–2002, 2011–2012, and 2016–2021. Although a comparison with the 2020 elections could have been justified for the 2021 census, I chose to use the votes from the previous election in 2016 due to the previously mentioned erosion of Hungarian political power in Slovakia and the trend toward a decreasing proportion of Hungarians in Slovakia voting for Hungarian parties.

The two databases can be compared using various mathematical-statistical methods. In this research, correlation and linear regression calculations were used, which, by examining the databases, reveal the strength of the correlation between the variables (the proportion of Hungarians and the proportion of votes cast for Hungarian parties) and the extent to which the data of one variable can predict the data series of the other.

Quantitative methods are often used as a preparation for qualitative research, as it is widely acknowledged that the latter provides a much richer professional experience. The fieldwork aimed to gather local opinions and information from communities in the selected municipalities. This information was used to refine the data obtained from the mathematical calculations and to reveal previously undetected correlations. The fieldwork consisted mainly of interviews; however, I tried to avoid a predominance of elite interviews, because as I see, the research topic (How does suburbanization from Bratislava, which mobilizes mainly Slovak-speaking people, change the settlement and the life of the local Hungarian community?) concerns all residents, who approach the same question from different perspectives. The first contact with the local people was often spontaneous and took place in public or community spaces in an unstructured or unguided way. After listening to their opinions, I asked them to recommend someone who could formally answer my questions. The individuals typically recommended the mayor, “or someone in the town hall”, but the list also included the author of a local history work or the local priest. The structured interviews were conducted after obtaining the views of residents in the sample settlements, which provided a valuable basis for comparison during the formal interviews. A total of 23 interviews were conducted with mayors, service workers and other residents.

One method worth mentioning is mapping. The cartographic database includes three districts in southwestern Slovakia: the districts of Dunajská Streda, Galanta and Senec, which are inhabited by Hungarians, as well as the city of Bratislava. The research area contains 133 settlements in total. The experience of the past decades shows that most of the settlements in these three districts, which are also inhabited by Hungarians, have been affected by the suburbanization linked to the Slovak capital. It is important to note that there is no agreement in the relevant Slovak literature regarding the exact boundaries of Bratislava's suburban zone. Demographic and real estate market data indicate that the area affected by suburbanization extends beyond both the Bratislava district (the official administrative unit) and the functional urban area category often used by Slovak experts (e.g. Šveda & Suska, 2014). Although not all municipalities in the three districts included in this study are necessarily part of the suburban zone, due to the highly fluid nature of the latter, I found this spatial framework to be the most appropriate, which I supported by demographic and real estate market data. Accordingly, the study did not include the part of the Bratislava agglomeration that has a predominantly Slovak population.

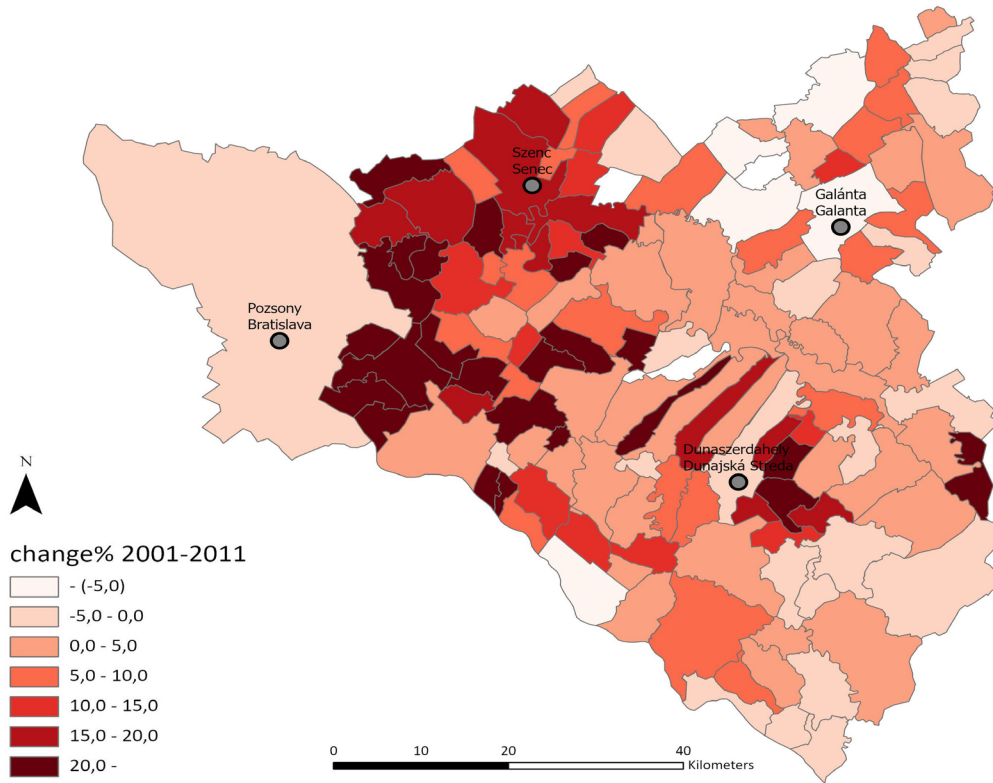
RESULTS

The demographic, real estate market and ethnic profile of Bratislava and the three districts

The total population of Bratislava and the three districts included in the sample area did not change between 2001 and 2011 (689,400 and 689,600 inhabitants), and the rate of population redistribution remained moderate; the population of Bratislava decreased from 428,700 to 411,200, while the population of the three districts increased from 258,700 to 276,400. Of course, more remarkable mobility is “hidden” behind the apparent trends in population change; without the influx from the rural (mainly eastern) regions of Slovakia, Bratislava's population decline would probably have been much higher. Nevertheless, population growth in the suburbs was still relatively low at the time, so the smaller suburban areas were mainly concentrated near the capital (Figure 1).

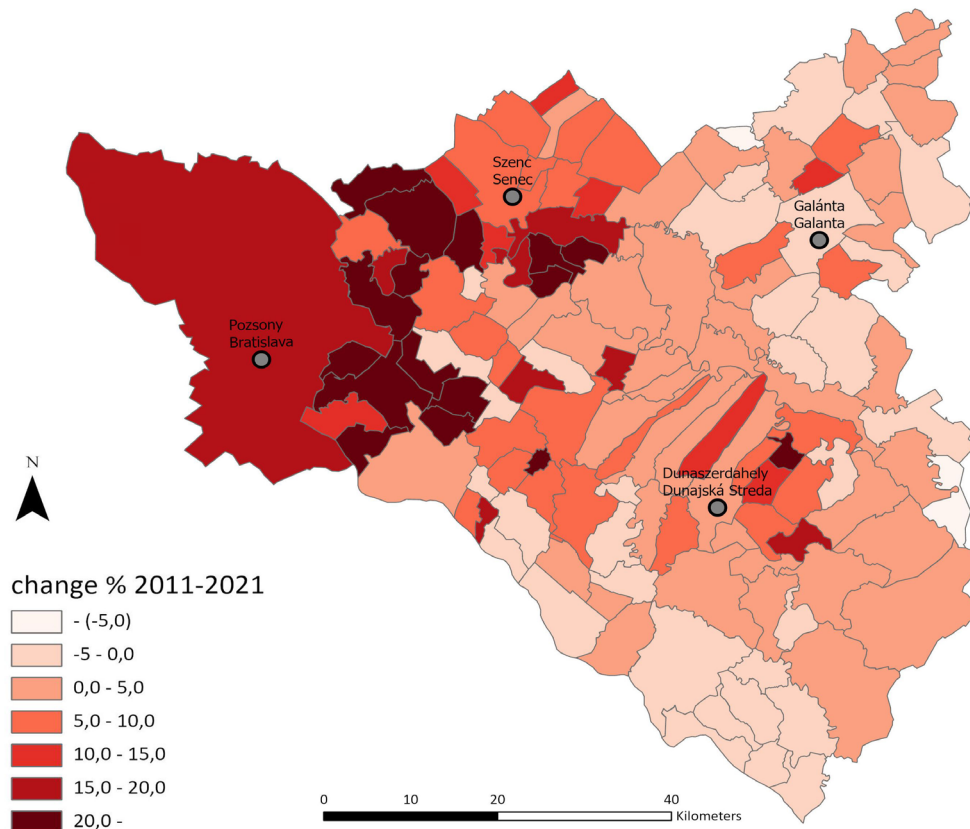
This zone became more extensive between 2011 and 2021, as people moving out of the capital increasingly choose settlements relatively far from Bratislava (40–50 km) as their destination. The other reason is the growing importance of internal migration, which affects not only Bratislava, but also a significant part of the municipalities in the agglomeration (Šveda, Výbošťok, & Gurňák, 2021). The population of Bratislava has also grown dynamically (from 411,200 to 475,500), as have the districts of Senec, Dunajská Streda and Galanta (276,400 and 316,500). It is worth mentioning, however, that the rate of population change varies considerably at the municipal level, with villages located far from the capital often growing faster than those located near it. Moreover, a secondary suburbanization process has also started around smaller centers and district centers, which is most prominent in the case of Dunajská Streda (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Population change in the study area 2001–2011



Source of data: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

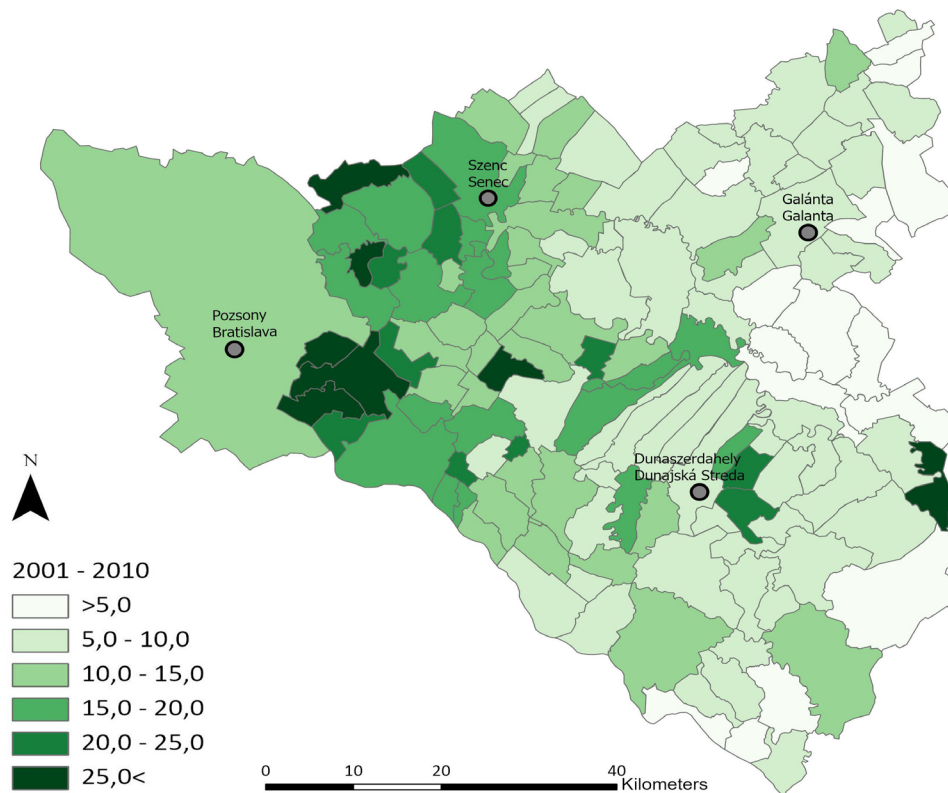
Figure 2. Population change in the study area 2011–2021



Source of data: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

The change in the number of real estate properties—more specifically, the ratio of residential properties built between 2001–2010 and 2011–2020 to the total building stock—, the continuous increase in the dynamics of suburbanization (and any other migration) processes, as well as the spatial differences in the agglomeration confirm the population change. However, the rapid increase in the share of new housing between 2011 and 2020 is even more striking in comparison with population change. The growing divergence between these two indicators, which are closely related, may reflect the fact that as migration intensifies, a smaller proportion of the migrating population registers officially in their new settlement, which is a noticeable phenomenon at the national level—although the COVID epidemic has brought many changes since then (Šveda, Výboštok, & Gurňák, 2021). The above-mentioned regional differences are therefore even more striking in terms of new housing construction, suggesting that the response to migration varies considerably between municipalities and local communities (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. The proportion of residential properties built 2001–2010 in the study area

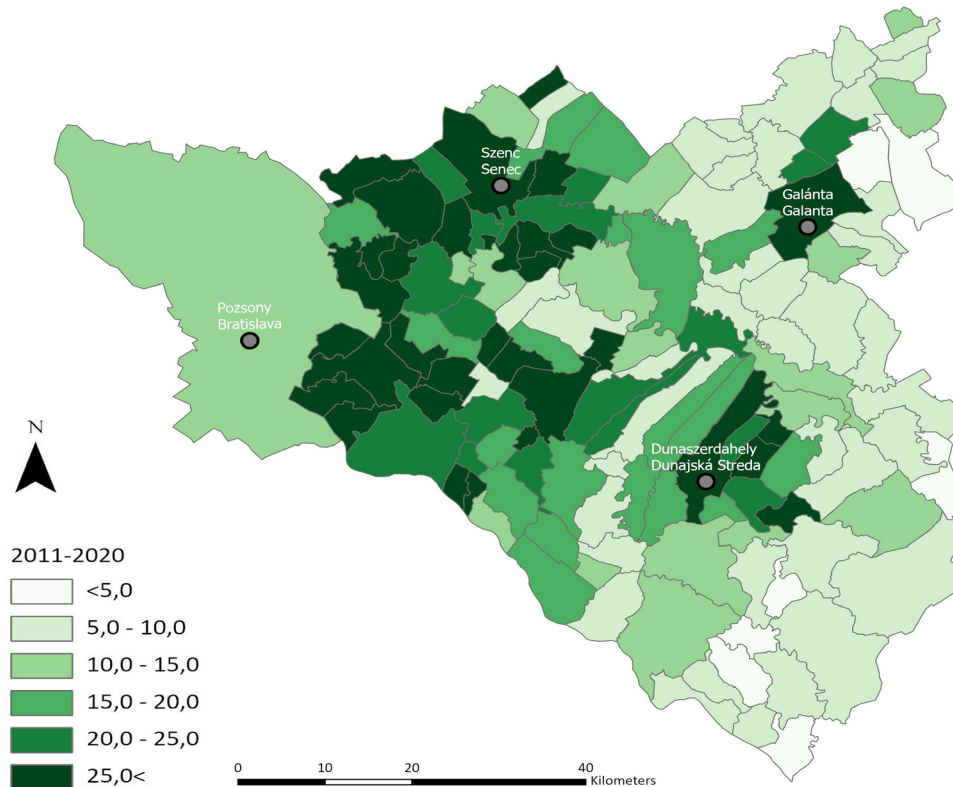


Source of data: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

After examining the two factors that describe suburbanization, the study of the indicators follows that are related to the Hungarian minority in the region. Between 2001 and 2021, the number of Hungarians in Bratislava decreased from 16,500 to 11,300, and their proportion dropped from 3,8% to 2,4%; in the three districts surrounding the capital, their total number changed from 140,700 to 123,900 and their ratio lowered from 54% to 39.1%. The decrease was spatially differentiated; municipalities closer to Bratislava experienced a more significant decline, but this is far from exclusive. The decline was most intense along the main transport axes (Bratislava–Galánta, Bratislava–Dunajská Streda) and along the

Danube, which is closely linked to migration processes (Figure 5). However, the ethnodemographic pattern seems completely mosaic in municipalities that are not affected by these routes; some of them show a rapid decline in the proportion of Hungarians, while in others stagnation is more likely to be observed. This, together with the changes in population and real estate market trends, shown in Figures 1 to 4, highlights significant differences among the municipalities of the Bratislava agglomeration, which are far from being described simply as “suburban”.

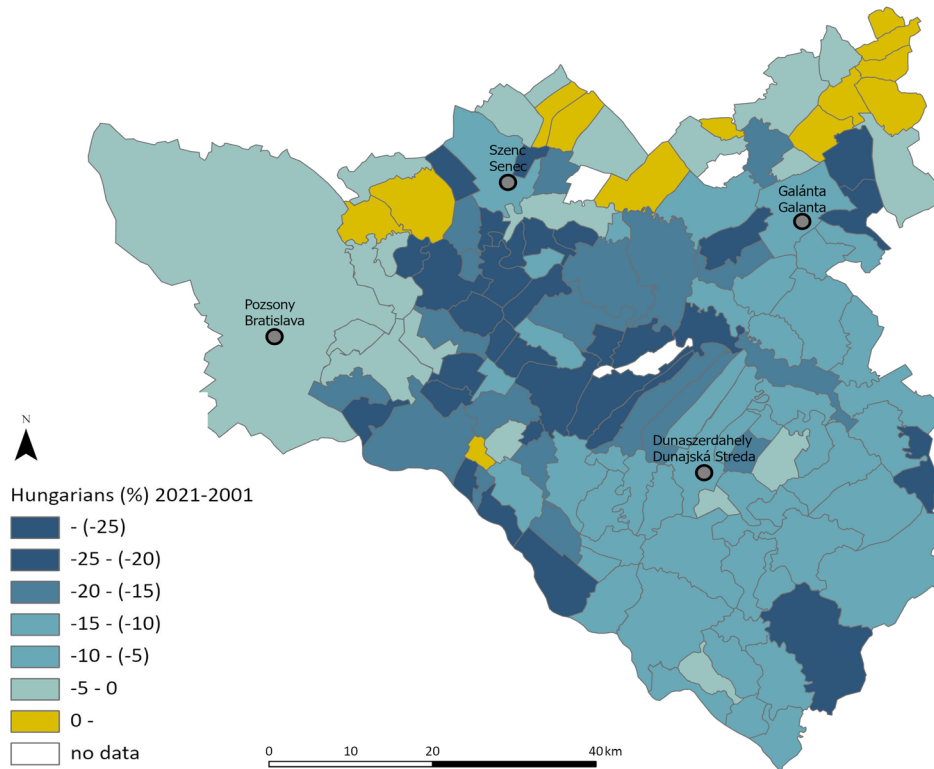
Figure 4. The proportion of residential properties built 2011–2020 in the study area



Source of data: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

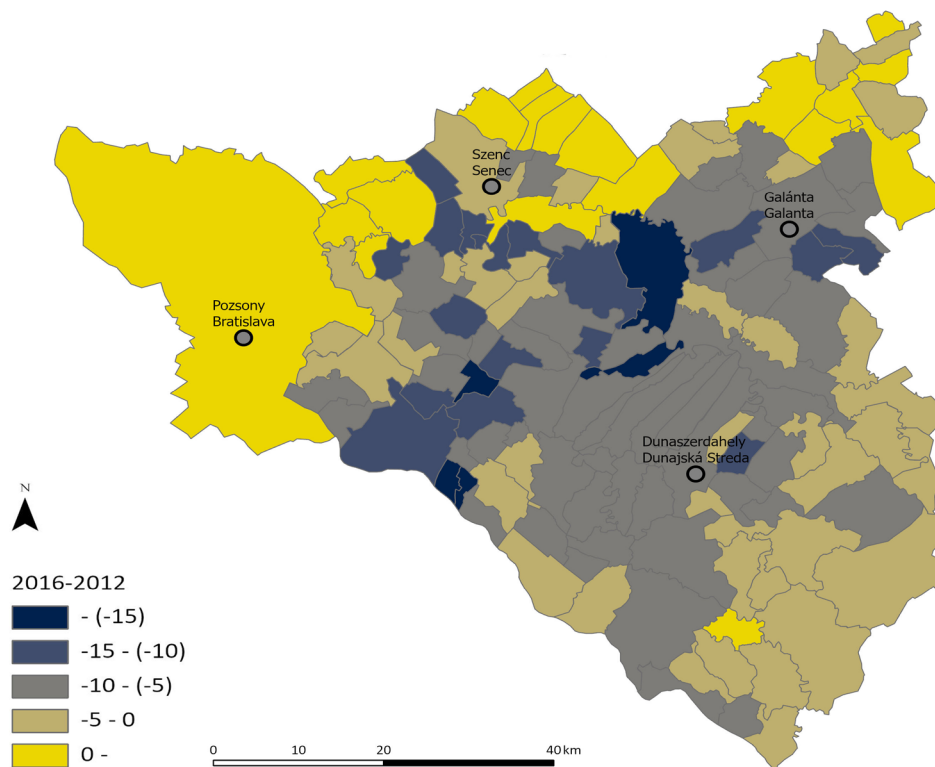
There were also substantial changes in the total share of votes cast for Hungarian (or partly Hungarian) parties in Slovakia, for instance, SMK and Most–Híd—as they were named in 2016. In 2012, SMK and Most–Híd together received 95,100 (25.2%) votes, of which the former got 33,400 (8.9%) and the latter 61,700 (16.4%). In 2016, a total of 90,500 (22.6%) votes were cast for Hungarian political formations in Bratislava and the three districts, of which 35,100 (8.7%) were for SMK and 55,500 (13.8%) for Most–Híd. Excluding Bratislava, the two parties together reached 54.1% in 2012 and 45.9% in 2016. It is worth noting that both of these figures are significantly higher than the 39% share of ethnic Hungarians in 2011. As far as spatial differences are concerned, the share of “Hungarian votes” had decreased in municipalities with a Hungarian majority. This process was generally more pronounced in municipalities closer to Bratislava or more exposed to suburbanization. However, as can be seen from population change, the changes in the proportion of real estate ownership and ethnic Hungarians, this is by no means exclusive; the spatial pattern can be described as mosaic-like (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Changes in the proportion of Hungarians in the study area 2001–2021



Source of data: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Figure 6. Changes in the proportion of votes for Hungarian parties in Slovakia in the study area 2012–2016



Source of data: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Correlations between the proportion of Hungarians and the popularity of Hungarian parties

As presented in the previous chapter, there are geographical similarities and differences in the changes in proportion of Hungarians and votes cast for Hungarian parties. However, the map analysis does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the direction and intensity of the relationship between the two indicators, or whether the identity-strengthening changes in party preferences that are well-measured among Poles in Lithuania can be observed among Hungarians living near Bratislava. To answer the question, correlation and regression calculations are used referring to the total proportion of votes for Hungarian parties, by breaking down the changes over two periods (between 2002–2012 and 2012–2016). The other variable is the proportion of ethnic Hungarians in a given year and how it changes between different censuses.

Table 1. The results of the correlation and regression calculation based on the proportion of Hungarian nationals and votes for Hungarian parties in Slovakia

	Examined period	Methods	The proportion of ethnic Hungarians		Change in the proportion of ethnic Hungarians	
			2011	2016	2001–2011	2011–2016
			The change in the proportion of votes for Hungarian parties	2002–2012	Correlation	0.492
R-square					0.248	
P-value					<0,05	
	2012–2016	Correlation		0.208		0.518
		R-square				0.268
		P-value				<0.05

Source of data: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Based on the results of the mathematical calculations discussed above (shown in Table 1), we can conclude that

- the “co-movement” of the two variables is relatively well documented by correlation (three of the four corresponding values are around 0.5), but the correlation is not strong;
- the regression (r-squared: 0.25–0.27) makes it clear that this co-movement does not suggest that the two variables explain each other to any meaningful extent, nor that the data for one variable can be used to predict the other;
- the partial co-movement of the two variables may simply be the result of a statistical effect: unsurprisingly, where the proportion of Hungarians falls rapidly, so do the votes for Hungarian parties;
- in light of the above, we can say that using mathematical-statistical methods, there is no significant correlation between the proportion of Hungarians (or its change) and the proportion of votes for Hungarian parties in Slovakia (or its change);

- this means that by applying these methods, it cannot be confirmed that the migration of the predominantly Slovak majority had a detectable impact on the identity of local Hungarians—at least not in terms of political activity.

The relationship between election results and ethnic identity

Throughout the fieldwork, I aimed to use the views of the local community to refine the quantitative results of the study and, where necessary, to add new elements to the research. The interviews revealed that voting for a Hungarian party is an essential element of the ethnic identity of Hungarians living in the Bratislava area, while their voting behavior is not influenced by social but primarily by political processes and conflicts. Since their local and Hungarian identities are intertwined, they do not react to changing social conditions by increasing their support for the Hungarian party(ies) in Slovakia, but by increasing their attachment to their settlement. In other words, the fact that many new Slovak residents want to move to the municipality does not increase the number of votes for Hungarian political formations. On the one hand, the results of the Hungarian parties follow the changes in the proportion of Hungarians to some extent. The partial co-movement of the two values suggests that—as a general trend—where the proportion of Hungarians decreases, the same happens with the votes, so we cannot speak of protest votes in response to the migration process. On the other hand, the overall popularity of Hungarian parties has declined since 2016 due to internal tensions in the Hungarian political sphere in Slovakia, which is perceived as a divisive issue by voters of Hungarian nationality, or affiliation, who fear losing their votes due to these circumstances.

“More Hungarian parties were not good for the municipality. There were problems among the inhabitants, politics was more divisive than nationality. For a while, there were two pubs and two political parties. Since then one of them has closed” (middle-aged Hungarian woman).

“The fact that the Hungarian parties did well in our village could be due to the local Csemadok organization, the strong campaign, the personal participation of Hungarian politicians in local events and the organization of forums” (middle-aged man from a mixed marriage).

However, the scale and speed of the migration processes are a source of concern for the local (Hungarian) community, which is not approached from the perspective of party preferences, but from the perspective of the changes that are occurring or foreseeable in the life of the settlement.

The effects of suburbanization on the local real estate market and the character of settlements

The changes that suburbanization has brought to the municipalities are becoming more and more visible closer to Bratislava. This process is intensified by the fact that not only part of the population living in Bratislava is moving, but the agglomeration of the Slovak capital is also a major destination for people living in the central and mainly eastern parts of Slovakia. In many cases, people from

the Košice and Prešov areas, or even from the Gemer region, do not move to the capital at all, due to the extremely high cost of housing and the need for a rural living environment, but buy property directly in a suburban settlement; after a few years in Bratislava, they may even move out of the city. Not surprisingly, real estate market players are constantly looking for investment opportunities and potential plots for new housing developments. This kind of interest also affects the local population, but it is primarily directed at the local authorities.

“Investors are pressurizing us” (middle-aged Hungarian woman).

According to the respondents, suburbanization has accelerated in recent years, and in the case of the settlements around Bratislava, somewhat exaggeratedly, the growth in population and built-up area depends on the attitude of the locals. The demand for real estate seems to be endless, a trend that has been reinforced by recent investments in transport (suburban bus and train services, motorway construction). Settlement leaders face a serious dilemma: new real estate development may lead to the loss of the original character of their neighborhoods, which is considered valuable by the majority, while excluding new development may lead to maintaining the status quo and falling behind in the competition between settlements. The dramatic rise in property prices intensifies the contradictory nature of the situation; in one of the municipalities where the survey was carried out, residents reported that the price of a building plot has tripled in two years.

“If we had allowed all settlement, the population would have quadrupled by now. There is a community and a culture, and that is because there has not been much migration. But of course, we have to develop in order to maintain our institutions and organization” (middle-aged Hungarian woman).

The appearance of suburban settlements is another sensitive issue: when the construction of a new street or housing estate is completed, “indigenous” people, who are used to a completely different layout, are often confronted with buildings that do not fit in with the local character: with massive fences, small plots, and high building density. They claim that the character of the new neighborhoods reflects the attitudes of the newcomers: they have no attachment to the settlement, they are seen as an isolated mass, overburdening the local infrastructure and not forming meaningful relationships with the community. Newcomers bring with them a different way of life, of course, so they do not share the concerns of the locals, just as they often do not understand their language.

“We try our best to remain a small village, but we want to grow in a healthy way. First we have to provide the infrastructure, then we can build” (middle-aged man from a mixed marriage).

Conflicts between “indigenous” people and “newcomers” (with an ethnic dimension)

Although the vast majority of newcomers do not speak Hungarian, and many are unaware that they are moving into an essentially Hungarian environment, there are no direct ethnic conflicts. The relatively

low level of interaction between indigenous people and newcomers obviously helps to avoid them, as does the fact that for locals with a high level of social mobility (often studying, working, etc. in Slovak environments), language differences are not unusual, but rather differences in lifestyle and way of life. According to the interviewees, Slovak-speaking newcomers also try to avoid ethnic tensions. Nevertheless, there are two types of conflict situations in which the ethnic factor is present. The first category includes situations that are actually the result of the aforementioned lack of knowledge on the part of the new residents, as well as the different content and approach of educational materials in Slovak and Hungarian. Migrants are not always prepared for the fact that changing their place of residence also means changing their language and, to some extent, their culture. Therefore, they complain about signs, advertisements, and publications in Hungarian, or are surprised by programs at local events that are partly in Hungarian. Experience shows that such misunderstandings can be resolved quickly.

“Slovaks are often surprised to find themselves in a Hungarian environment” (young Hungarian man). “There have been some examples where the local government has been criticized for having to provide information in Hungarian. Many newcomers did not know that Hungarians were living here, they were taught about Trianon or the population exchange in Slovak schools in a completely different context (...) Slovaks know that the population exchange was completely voluntary” (middle-aged man from a mixed marriage).

The second category of conflicts is much more complex and involves more potential sources of tension. Across Europe, the infrastructural, institutional, and organizational challenges posed by rapid population growth are well-known and are mostly associated with suburbanization. In the context of the present study—due to the prevalence of a minority group, more precisely the Hungarian-language educational network—the latter can lead to conflicts in which the ethnic dimension sometimes prevails. Some of the newcomers, most of whom are Slovak-speaking, prefer to have their children educated in their new place of residence or a neighboring municipality rather than in Bratislava, especially at the pre-school and primary school levels (older students tend to move to Bratislava). In many settlements, such institutions no longer exist. They were closed or merged with other settlements decades ago due to the small village network. The capacity of the operating units is limited. In Hungarian-majority villages, there are often only Hungarian-language classes available. Slovak residents claim that they are not bothered by the Hungarian language of education and that they aim to send their children to an institution as close as possible to where they live. However, with the increase in the number and proportion of Slovak-speaking children, this open-minded attitude is rapidly changing and the local Hungarian community is turning against the newcomers.

“The Slovaks have no problem when they come to a Hungarian village or institution, but once they are in and reach 40–50%, they start to demand, and what is Hungarian starts to bother them. One of my neighbors stopped me and said: “Listen, they’re telling me why I speak Hungarian to my child, where are we going to develop?” We had one year when we got to the point where almost half the children in the kindergarten were Slovak. Since then we have tried to control this a little bit, so now the kindergarten is less mixed (...) we should not be selective, but we always try to maintain the Hungarian character” (middle-aged Hungarian woman).

Local strategies and settlement types

The findings of the research show that each of the municipalities affected by suburbanization in the Bratislava region is responding to the changing migration processes with independent strategies based on local development plans, real estate market regulations and institutional capacity. Local strategies depend on a number of factors: in addition to those mentioned before, the attitudes of the local community, the linguistic and ethnic character, aspects of transport accessibility (distance from Bratislava, train and bus services), or the condition and cross-section of infrastructure (roads, railways, sewerage) may be important, but not exclusive factors. Moreover, municipal cooperation, the informal network of municipalities, along with the attitudes and ideas of municipal leaders can actively shape these strategies. This suggests three basic types of municipalities.

The first category, where rapid development and becoming a “suburb” of Bratislava are the declared goals, is characterized by broad support for the activities of real estate market players and flexible management of local development plans and building regulations. Population and housing are growing very quickly (even rapidly), so more and more areas are becoming zones for construction investment, and urban lifestyles and services are becoming common. Along with the creation of new residential areas, the core of the settlement is gradually losing its original character through the acquisition and densification of older residential properties and the subdivision of land. The cost of development in these settlements is delayed infrastructure development, lack of institutional capacity and the rapid decline of the rural way of life. The distance from the capital and the ethnicity are well-defined for this category, but it is by no means limited to the Slovak villages in the vicinity of Bratislava.

“Yes, they have thrown in the reins, they want to be a suburb of Bratislava. They have sold off all the plots, so the municipality has no land left to build a new school or kindergarten”(middle-aged Hungarian woman).

The second category includes the majority of municipalities. They represent a transition between the first and third categories. These municipalities consider it important to increase the population, create new streets and residential areas, but they try to regulate and slow down the process by official means. In these municipalities, the differences between the original and new settlement patterns are still clearly visible, and the changes are rapid but occur at a slower pace than in the first group. There is a balanced distribution of “indigenous” people and newcomers. The level of interaction is low and the presence of parallel micro-societies is typical. Delays in infrastructure development are less common, but municipalities are constantly facing the challenges of increasing demand and recurring capacity constraints, which place a heavy financial burden on local authorities. For both the first and second categories, the high proportion of residents who do not officially register their new address is a serious problem.

“We want the village to keep its small village character. The village development plan can help regulate settlement. The plan has been in use since 2003 and specifies where one can build. It has changed two or three times since then, and in the last change we did not add any new areas,

we just regulated and enlarged the plots where building is allowed, so that they will not become dense” (middle-aged man from a mixed marriage).

“This village is a good example: the mayor has built apartment blocks and is recruiting applicants to see how involved they will be in community life” (young Hungarian man).

The third category includes municipalities where suburbanization is not seen as a harmful process, but where the available means are used to minimize its local impact. This includes decisions that prevent people living outside the municipality from buying property, thereby favoring local residents. Another preventive solution could be the local authority’s refusal to change the building regulations. This obviously makes it more difficult for developers to expand. One more complicating factor is when regulations set conditions that are difficult to fulfill. An example of the latter is a predominantly Hungarian village where the municipality has designated a property development area, but under current Slovak regulations, new housing can only be built if it is connected to the sewerage system. However, the sewage treatment plant serving the communities in the area has reached its maximum capacity and will not allow a new unit to be connected, so the property development plans have been postponed indefinitely. Another solution for a municipality could be to refuse people, with addresses outside its administrative boundaries, from its own educational or social institutions because of a lack of capacity. Transformation in these municipalities has been slow, but some of the changes, including a significant rise in property prices in recent years, have affected them, as they have in the other two categories.

“On a daily basis, we are struggling with the phenomenon of Slovak migration and the transformation of the village. The aim was to remain a typical rural village. To achieve this, we need to limit development to some extent. Only locals or people with local connections could buy a house here” (middle-aged Hungarian woman).

CONCLUSIONS

In my research, I sought answers to the question of how suburban processes in and around Bratislava, the Slovak capital, are reshaping the life of settlements and communities close to the city, with a particular focus on Hungarian settlements and the ethnic identity of their inhabitants. Among the identity-forming components, I measured changes in voter behavior and then included other aspects in the analysis. The application of various mathematical and statistical methods, as well as fieldwork, made it clear that possible changes in the identity of Hungarians living in the Bratislava area cannot be detected based on party preferences. Other factors in local responses, such as institutional and property market, to the ever-changing environment through suburbanization became much more prominent. Finally, they are grouped into local strategy types, which are not so exact but relatively well-defined. Based on the differences between these strategies, we can distinguish three categories of municipalities in the Bratislava agglomeration. One group of municipalities are those where the effects of suburbanization are essentially unrestricted and unregulated, the second group of municipalities

are transforming but trying to slow down the process, and the third category of municipalities are trying to preserve the original rural character by all means. Ongoing migration has led to a dynamic increase in the proportion of the Slovak-speaking population in Hungarian settlements, while in local community discourse and potential conflicts, the ethnic component is present only in specific situations, mostly related to language use in educational institutions.

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