

# Some Features of Slovene Research on Emigration



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## Emigration from the Slovene ethnic area

The past 120 years have witnessed several waves of emigration from the Slovene area just like from many other European countries. What makes the Slovene experience particularly interesting are the many political changes the territory has undergone during this period.

The first wave of European mass emigration to America began in the 1880s and 1890s. North America was also the main destination for Slovenes until the First World War. At that time the Slovene area belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918 the Slovene area was incorporated into the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was later to become Yugoslavia.

The USA introduced restrictions on immigration in 1921, after which the Slovene emigrants turned to countries like Australia, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Vene-

zuela and Mexico. Also some Central European countries started to attract them. In the period between the two wars 300 000 Slovenes were estimated to be living abroad.

## The post-war emigration

After the Second World War Europe was divided into blocs, which resulted in a "powerful psychosis of fear of the new political authorities", to quote an expression of Marina Lukšič-Hacin (2001,326). This started an exodus to the Western European countries. The first Slovene emigrants were political refugees leaving their motherland when the one-party communist system was established. An estimated 20 000 Slovenes left their homes at that time, heading particularly to Western Europe but also overseas. For instance the mass emigration to Australia started after 1945, when the country urgently needed new labour.

In the 1950s the Yugoslav borders were closed and migrants crossed them illegally, coming first to refugee camps before travelling onwards to their new countries of destination. The formation of the EEC in 1957 was a step towards creating a common labour

market, which resulted in a remarkable South-North immigration lasting until the 1970s.

Yugoslavia re-opened its borders in 1963 and West Germany, France, Switzerland and Sweden now became the main targets of emigration. There was a ten-year period (1965–1975) of organized emigration which was even supported by the state of Yugoslavia. These emigrants were treated as economic migrants, who were expected to return home after a short period abroad – hopefully bringing their extra income to support domestic progress. The term "temporary work abroad" was commonly used by Yugoslav authorities, and it fitted perfectly with the immigration policies of European countries at that time. Germany called these economic migrants guest workers (*gastarbeiter*), in France they were foreign workers (*travailleurs étrangers*) and in Sweden immigrants (*invandrare*).

In the middle of the 1970s many European countries stopped the flow of foreign workers. It became evident that the expected temporary nature of the migration was changing into permanent emigration; the percentage of returning migrants was very low.

New integrational immigration policies needed to be developed

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The Dragon Bridge (built in 1901) is guarded by four bronze dragons, which are emblems of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia.

in the receiving countries as the immigrants stayed in their new societies. Questions dealing with cultural adaptation, language learning and so on were discussed. Also the complicated relations between new immigrant groups and the host populations were scrutinized.

### **New era of independence**

The latest turn in the emigration situation happened in 1991 when Slovenia gained its independence.

Under the Yugoslav regime all emigrating Slovenes had been treated as Yugoslavs. This has caused recently a number of problems when trying to establish the number of Slovene migrants. An additional problem has been the fact that Slovene researchers have not had access to the archives of the former Yugoslav embassies. Due to the intense emigration of the past century, every fourth Slovene is estimated to live abroad.

### **The Institute for Slovene Emigration Studies**

The Institute for Slovene Emigration Studies at the Scientific Research Center of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) is situated in the academic quarter of the beautiful old centre of Ljubljana, in the top floor of a renovated building.

The institute was founded in 1986, and it has grown from a small research unit into a dynamic institute with some 4–5 researchers working full time. They represent different academic fields, e.g. history, sociology, ethnology, anthropology and geography. Since 1990 the institute has also published a multidisciplinary and bilingual journal called *Dve Domovini/Two Homelands*. It is devoted to the publication of essays, scholarly and specialist papers, reports, reflections and book reviews from the field of international migration. The latest volume includes a comprehensive bibliography of the first ten volumes. In addition a separate *Bilten/Newsletter* comes out once a year.

### **Research among Slovenes around the globe**

The researchers have carried out some intensive research projects dealing with Slovene emigration to various countries, the following projects can be mentioned as an example:

Dr. Marina Lukšič-Hacin has conducted fieldwork among the Slovenes residing in Sweden. The study describes the integration,

various forms of organizational life, preservation of language and the complicated questions of identifications. Yugoslav immigrants, Slovenes included, were some of the largest immigrant groups in Sweden. It is very interesting for the Finnish reader to learn about the Slovene situation in Sweden as the country also was the main target for Finnish emigration in the 1960s and 1970s. It is estimated that the number of Swedish Slovenes of all generations, including those who have changed their nationality, would range from 9000 to 12 000 people.

Dr. Irena Gantar Godina has studied the Slovenes in the Slavic world, especially the intellectuals in diaspora. She shows how the Slovene intellectuals have been particularly interested in the Slavic countries, and how they have had a lot of cultural and political contacts.

Dr. Marjan Drnovšek has published a great deal of studies dealing with the history of Slovene emigration in Europe and the USA. A recent achievement is a video film on Slovene emigration to America which is designed for teaching of emigration history in schools.

Dr. Breda Čebulj-Sajko has conducted her research among the Australian Slovenes by using the autobiographical method interviewing the emigrants. She has also focused on the development of ethnology in Slovenia in connection with the research done on Slovene emigration.

Dr. Zvone Žigon has studied the ethnic identity of political emigrants in Argentina. He continues working on the question of

Slovenes in Africa. A great deal of them emigrated to Egypt and to the South African Republic, but there are also significant groups of Slovene missionaries e.g. in Zambia, Madagascar and on Ivory Coast.

Dr. student Jernej Mlekuž has also studied Slovene emigrants in Argentina. He is at present working with an anthropological research project in the borderland of Slovenia and Italy.

The institute has also published a three part monograph on Slovene emigration literature edited by Dr. Janja Žitnik. There is quite a lot of research on emigrant literature; maybe the most famous Slovenian emigrant writer was Louis Adamič who lived in the States where he died in 1951.

In sum, when visiting the Institute I was impressed by the very dynamic atmosphere which

characterizes the institute. This small team has given out many extensive publications in the recent years and has various ongoing projects and many contacts abroad.

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