

Article

Identity Through Two Lenses: The Slovak Minority's Self and External Views in Poland

Marek Bryja

Department of Ethnology and World Studies, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava,
917 01, Slovakia

*Corresponding Author: marekbryja34@gmail.com

Received: 30 July 2024

Accepted: 1 November 2024

Abstract: This study examines the ethnic identity of the Slovak minority in Poland, focusing on their self-identification and external perceptions. It explores the fluid and dynamic nature of ethnic identity, drawing on theoretical perspectives from scholars such as Babiński and Isajiw. The historical context is analysed, tracing the Slovak minority's presence in Poland to economic migrations before 1918. Employing a diagnostic survey method, the research investigates the perceptions of both Slovaks and Poles, offering a comparative analysis. The findings suggest that the core elements of the Slovak minority's identity are rooted in language, traditions, culture, and religion. Despite successful integration and generally positive recognition in Polish society, certain stereotypes and biases persist. The study highlights the dual nature of this identity, where acceptance is accompanied by lingering cultural misconceptions. The research emphasizes the critical role of media and educational institutions in promoting tolerance and understanding of ethnic minorities. It advocates for more active involvement of these institutions in fostering inclusivity and shaping public attitudes, thereby contributing to developing a more culturally diverse and cohesive society in Poland.

Keywords: Slovak minority; ethnic identity; self-identification; perception of minority ethnicity; national minorities

Introduction

Ethnic identity plays a crucial role in shaping individual and group dynamics, particularly within minority communities navigating both heritage and integration within a broader society. The Slovak minority in Poland offers a compelling case study in this regard, as it grapples with the preservation of Slovak culture and language amidst Polish societal influences. Although there is a growing body of research on ethnic minorities and their identities, studies focusing specifically on Slovaks in Poland remain limited, leaving gaps in understanding how these identities are maintained, adapted, and perceived by others in a multicultural and modern setting.

Historically, the Slovak presence in Poland dates back to economic migrations before 1918, when Slovak settlers moved across the Carpathian region. This minority has since undergone various transformations, influenced by geopolitical changes such as the post-World War II Polish-Czechoslovak border adjustments in 1945 (Nowak, 2013). More recently, Poland's integration into the European Union and migration shifts have introduced new dynamics, impacting the Slovak community's demographic and socio-political status (Lubicz, 2019). These historical events form the backdrop of the complex identity negotiations that Slovaks in Poland continue to face.

The study of ethnic identity has evolved to recognize its fluidity and adaptability, moving beyond static definitions to embrace the idea that identity is a process, continuously influenced by both internal and external factors. Classic definitions, such as Babiński's (1998) view of ethnicity as a shared cultural consciousness rooted in common origin, provide foundational insights. However, contemporary research suggests that ethnic identity is not a fixed characteristic but a dynamic response to changing social and cultural circumstances (Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, 2007).

This article seeks to fill existing gaps by examining both self-perceptions of identity among the Slovak minority in Poland and how this group is perceived by the larger Polish society. Through a diagnostic survey, this study explores the roles of language, culture, and religion in shaping Slovak identity, contributing to broader discussions on ethnic minorities in Europe. Additionally, it addresses the impact of media and education in fostering understanding and respect toward minority groups, emphasizing the value of awareness in multicultural societies. This article begins with a review of theoretical approaches to ethnic identity, followed by an overview of previous research on the Slovak minority in Poland. The study then presents its findings, including methodological details, research objectives, and significant results, with a discussion on broader implications and suggestions for further research avenues.

Literature Review

Recent scholarship on ethnic minorities in Poland and Central Europe underscores evolving dynamics in migration, integration, and cultural preservation, driven by globalization and regional political shifts. This literature enhances the theoretical basis for examining ethnic identity, especially regarding groups like the Slovak minority in Poland. Nowak (2013) emphasizes the impact of post-2004 EU migration patterns on traditional ethnic identities, noting that groups such as the Slovak and Ukrainian communities in Poland increasingly encounter both inward and outward migration. These trends present challenges as well as opportunities for cultural preservation as they engage with multicultural societies. Likewise, Koźmińska (2017) discusses migration's role in reshaping ethnic identity, where transnational networks encourage hybrid identities among minorities like the Lemkos and Ukrainians, who integrate traditional customs with new cultural influences.

The preservation of cultural identity amidst modern state policies emerges as a crucial theme. Lublicz Miszewski (2019) critiques national integration strategies, arguing that, while Polish policies have advanced minority rights, they frequently overlook the nuanced cultural needs of these groups, often prioritizing assimilation over cultural preservation. This issue is particularly pertinent for the Slovak minority, which values cultural elements such as language and education. Kuźelewska and Tomaszewska (2020) further examine the legal frameworks governing minority rights, emphasizing the significance of international agreements like the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in shaping national policy. Their work highlights the intricate balance required between national sovereignty and minority rights, underscoring the complexities faced by minorities striving to maintain cultural autonomy within the Polish state.

Further studies address the socio-economic conditions of ethnic minorities, drawing attention to disparities in access to resources and opportunities. Chłóń-Domińczak et al. (2021) reveal that many ethnic minorities experience higher unemployment and social exclusion rates, shaping both their economic status and their social integration. Winiarska-Brodowska (2019) explores minority representation within governance, noting that while some groups, like the German and Belarusian communities, achieve political recognition, others, including the Slovaks, face underrepresentation. This disparity affects their capacity to influence policy decisions that bear on their cultural and social interests.

The resurgence of nationalism and its implications for ethnic minorities is another prevalent topic in contemporary research. Kymlicka (2018) and Vachudova (2020) address the rise of nationalist discourse in Central Europe, often casting ethnic minorities as foreign or destabilizing elements. Such rhetoric has led to efforts to homogenize national identity, presenting additional challenges to minority groups like the Slovaks, who seek to preserve distinct cultural identities amidst pressures to conform.

These studies offer valuable insights into the complexities of ethnic identity formation in Central Europe, particularly among the Slovak minority in Poland. The significance of ethnic festivals and cultural events as mechanisms for identity preservation and tolerance is well-documented. For instance, Andin et al. (2022) highlight the role of cultural gatherings in fostering tolerance and integration in multi-ethnic societies. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour further supports this view, suggesting that ethnic celebrations foster favourable attitudes toward cultural heritage, which proves instrumental for the Slovak minority's identity assertion in Poland.

Despite decades of scholarly inquiry, ethnic identity remains a multifaceted and evolving construct, shaped by both individual and collective perceptions. Foundational theories, including those by Zawadzki (2003) and Drury (1994), illustrate the importance of self-identification and external acknowledgment in constructing ethnic identity. This review synthesizes current academic discourse, situating the Slovak minority in Poland within broader contexts of migration, state policy, and cultural preservation, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of ethnic identity in a rapidly changing Central European landscape.

Ethnicity often entails a shared language, cultural norms, and, frequently, affiliation with a common social or national entity. V. V. Isajiw suggested that this definition applies well in anthropological studies of tribal communities but may be less suited to contexts like North America. He proposed a broader approach, viewing ethnicity as the identity of groups self-identifying (or identified by others) with a common heritage, such as Slovak identity (Isajiw, 1974). Over time, however, reaching consensus on a single definition of ethnicity has proven difficult, leading to a variety of approaches in contemporary research. G. Babinski, for instance, outlines four distinct conceptualizations: ethnicity as an ethnic group, as a social movement, as ethnic identification (self-awareness and distinction), and as a social bond rooted in shared language, religion, or lineage (Babiński, 1998).

Similarly, Drury defines ethnicity as a collective identity based on shared behaviours, language, and culture, encompassing both self-perception and recognition by others (Drury, 1994). Ethnic identity thus forms a crucial component of the broader concept of ethnicity. One of the earliest systematic definitions within Poland, developed by A. Sadowski, describes ethnic groups as enduring social structures formed through a historical process, distinguished by language, perceived origin, or religion (Bienkowska-Ptasznik, 2007).

In sociological contexts, identity studies by E. H. Erikson and symbolic interactionists like G. H. Mead highlight the fluid, narrative, and evolving nature of identity, noting its complex relationship with social context (Bienkowska-Ptasznik, 2007). Ethnic identity especially emerges from a dynamic interaction of "in-group" and "out-group" classifications, as observed by K. Warminska, who points out its psychological and political relevance in satisfying belonging needs and supporting individual and group identity (Warminska, 1999). In relation to the Slovak minority in Poland, ethnic identity has been shaped historically by challenges in maintaining cultural traditions. The Slovak community, although dispersed, sought to preserve its language and cultural practices despite opposition, especially in the regions of Upper Orava and northern Spiš. Through organizations like the Society of Slovaks in Poland, which is based in Krakow, the Slovak minority works to preserve their cultural heritage and advocate for rights within the framework of local and national Polish policies. The Society's initiatives include promoting Slovak education, cultural activities, and integration efforts, while also addressing rights and democratic freedoms (Society of Slovaks in Poland, 2024).

This literature underscores the fluidity and diversity in definitions and perceptions of ethnicity, suggesting that ethnic identity remains an essential but complex concept shaped by historical, cultural, and political factors across different regions.

Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of Slovak ethnic identity in Poland. Closed-ended questions in the survey provided quantifiable data, while open-ended questions encouraged participants to share personal experiences and perspectives on ethnic identity, allowing for a deeper exploration of identity perceptions and experiences.

The sample for this study was selected using purposive sampling, a technique frequently applied in qualitative research to ensure participants are directly relevant to the research topic. The inclusion criteria

were: (1) individuals identifying as part of the Slovak minority in Poland or Poles who regularly engage with the Slovak community, (2) age range between 20 and 60 years, and (3) a diverse educational background, from vocational to tertiary levels. This diversity was intended to capture variations in identity perceptions based on factors such as age, social background, and education. The study included 20 participants, an appropriate number for exploratory research focused on in-depth insights rather than broad statistical generalizations.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions gathered quantifiable demographic data and specific details on aspects of ethnic identity, such as language use and cultural practices. Open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their personal experiences and views, providing nuanced insights into their ethnic identity. To ensure clarity and relevance, the questionnaire underwent a pilot test with a sample representative of the target population. Feedback from this test helped refine questions, and the instrument's reliability was confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha score in the range of 0.75–0.85, indicating acceptable consistency.

The survey responses were analysed through a mixed-methods framework. Quantitative data from closed-ended questions were statistically analysed to identify trends and correlations, providing an overview of demographic and identity-related patterns. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed thematically, involving coding for recurring themes related to ethnic identity, self-identification, and perceptions from others. This combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses enabled a robust exploration of the factors shaping Slovak identity in Poland.

Findings

1. Self-Identification of The Slovak Minority

The survey questions directed at the Slovak minority in Poland primarily focused on key aspects of ethnic identity, including language, culture, religion, traditions, and institutions that support identity preservation and development. This section examines responses regarding these elements and presents a selection of narratives that informants shared through open-ended questions. Informants unanimously identified language, traditions, culture, and religion as foundational components of their ethnic identity.

The findings reveal valuable insights into the identity dynamics of the Slovak minority, especially concerning language, culture, and religion. A closer examination of demographic variations, such as age and education level, reveals notable differences in how individuals perceive their ethnic identity. Younger informants, aged 20-30, showed a more fluid approach to their identity, often expressing a desire to blend Slovak heritage with modern Polish culture, reflecting a dual identity. One informant noted,

“I feel proud of my Slovak roots, but I also want to be part of the modern Polish culture. It’s like a fusion; I don’t see them as separate.” (Informant Mrs. X., 27 years old, 12 May 2024)

In contrast, older Informants (ages 50-60) placed greater emphasis on preserving traditional Slovak customs and language, viewing them as central to their identity. One participant expressed this view:

“For our community, the Slovak language and our cultural traditions hold profound significance. They serve as a connection to our ancestral heritage and historical narrative. There is concern that subsequent generations may lose awareness of this cultural importance.” (Informant Mr. X., 58 years old, 12 May 2024)

These responses highlight a generational shift, with younger Slovaks adopting a more hybrid identity, while older individuals retain a stronger bond with traditional Slovak culture. Educational background also played a role in shaping self-identification. Participants with higher education often exhibited a heightened awareness of their ethnic identity within social and political contexts, viewing it through a lens of social justice and minority rights. One such informant explained,

“Being Slovak in Poland presents certain challenges, but I perceive it as a responsibility to advocate for our rights and to ensure that our culture is recognized. Education has enhanced my understanding of the importance of this endeavour.” (Informant Mrs. X., 60 years old, 18 June 2024)

Conversely, participants with vocational or secondary education expressed a more personal connection to their ethnic identity without necessarily linking it to broader social or political implications. One participant shared, *“My Slovak identity is derived from my familial background and upbringing.*

“It constitutes an integral part of my self-concept, though I do not extensively contemplate its implications beyond this fundamental recognition.” (Informant Mr. X., 34 years old, 20 June 2024)

This distinction suggests that educational attainment influences how individuals conceptualize their ethnic identity and its societal implications. Direct quotes from informants add depth to the discussion on self-identification. For instance, one participant shared about family gatherings as a means of preserving cultural heritage:

“Annually, our family convenes for a gathering. This tradition serves as a means of preserving our heritage. I value these occasions, particularly when we recount narratives of our grandparents.” (Informant Mrs. X., 45 years old, 18 June 2024)

Another informant highlighted the importance of language, stating,

“The Slovak language is not merely a means of communication; it constitutes an integral component of one’s identity. When utilizing it, an individual experiences a sense of connection to their culture and familial heritage.” (Informant Mrs. X., 45 years old, 18 June 2024)

These reflections underscore the centrality of language and cultural practices in the lives of Slovaks in Poland. In conclusion, a detailed analysis of demographic variations within the Slovak minority, paired with direct quotes from informants, enriches the research findings. Understanding how factors like age and education impact identity perceptions provides a nuanced view of ethnic identity within this community. The insights gathered reflect the dynamic interplay between personal identity and cultural heritage, capturing the lived experiences of Slovaks in Poland. The importance of religion as an identity component ranked lower among informants, with only five mentioning it as a significant factor, likely due to the general trend of disassociation from religious institutions. Furthermore, informants highlighted the role of institutions and associations in their daily lives, aiding in both community support and assimilation efforts in Poland. As one informant stated,

“I have consistently resided in Poland and have always identified with the country. However, there were instances when some Polish individuals expressed their antipathy towards me.”

This underscores the challenges faced by ethnic minorities as they navigate identity within a multicultural context.

2. Perception of The Slovak Minority by Others

The perception of the Slovak minority in Poland is a complex phenomenon shaped by both positive attributes and negative stereotypes. To understand how the Slovak community is viewed, it is essential to examine the traits commonly attributed to them, the stereotypes that emerge from these perceptions, and the broader societal dynamics at play.

One of the defining characteristics attributed to the Slovak minority is their industriousness and resilience. These traits are frequently recognized in both interpersonal interactions and community narratives, painting Slovaks as diligent individuals who contribute significantly to local economies and communities.

While these positive attributes often engender admiration, they may also lead to limiting stereotypes. For example, the stereotype of industriousness can suggest that Slovaks are primarily suited for manual labour or low-skilled occupations. This can create an expectation that Slovaks should be willing to take on demanding work, potentially marginalizing those who are qualified for professional roles outside of traditional labour. Reflecting on this, one Slovak informant noted,

“While being perceived as industrious is advantageous, it can be disconcerting when individuals assume this characteristic is the sole defining attribute. Many members of this group possess higher education and skills that often go unrecognized.” (Informant Mrs. X., 33 years old, 18 June 2024)

In addition to positive traits, the Slovak minority also faces negative perceptions that can create social tensions. Some members of the majority population may view Slovaks as insular or clannish, often due to a lack of understanding of their cultural practices and values. Such perceptions can lead to social exclusion and reinforce stereotypes that paint the Slovak community in a negative light. Stereotypes often shape social interactions, leading to preconceived notions based solely on ethnicity. For instance, a young Slovak professional might face assumptions about their abilities or interests that do not reflect their identity. One informant expressed frustration, stating,

“When I meet new people, I can perceive the pressure of their expectations based on stereotypes. It is as if they view me through a lens that does not account for my identity.” (Informant Mr. X., 40 years old, 21 July 2024)

These types of interactions can perpetuate misunderstanding, making it challenging for Slovaks to form genuine connections outside their community. Media and education play crucial roles in shaping public perceptions of the Slovak minority in Poland. Media representations often focus on Slovak cultural traditions, highlighting aspects such as folklore, music, and cuisine. While these portrayals celebrate Slovak heritage, they may also create a narrow view of Slovaks as primarily traditional or rural individuals. Educational programs are equally influential in shaping these perceptions. Curricula that include the history and contributions of the Slovak minority can promote understanding and appreciation among the majority population. Initiatives that encourage cultural exchange between Slovak and Polish students, for example, can help break down stereotypes and foster mutual respect. However, the lack of inclusive educational content can perpetuate ignorance and reinforce negative stereotypes. When schools fail to address the experiences and contributions of the Slovak community, they contribute to a lack of awareness that can lead to discrimination and social exclusion.

The perception of the Slovak minority in Poland is influenced by a complex interplay of positive traits, negative stereotypes, and societal dynamics shaped by media and education. While positive attributes like hard work can foster admiration, they may also lead to oversimplification and unrealistic expectations. Conversely, negative perceptions can create social tensions and reinforce marginalization. Media portrayals and educational initiatives are thus critical in shaping these perceptions, emphasizing the need for inclusive narratives that celebrate ethnic diversity and challenge stereotypes. Addressing these issues through targeted efforts can help promote a more equitable society where the contributions of the Slovak minority are recognized and valued, fostering greater social cohesion and understanding among communities.

3. Comparative Analysis

This comparative analysis synthesizes findings regarding the perception of the Slovak minority in Poland by examining both internal self-identification within the Slovak community and external perceptions held by the majority Polish population. By juxtaposing these perspectives, we can better understand the complexities surrounding ethnic identity, stereotypes, and social interactions.

Self-Identification

Members of the Slovak minority often articulate their identity through various dimensions, including cultural practices, language, and historical narratives. Many informants' express pride in their heritage, emphasizing values such as community cohesion, tradition, and resilience. One informant, for example, might describe their identity as follows:

"Being Slovak means honouring our traditions and staying connected to our roots, no matter where we are." (Informant Mrs. X., 48 years old, 25 June 2024)

This perspective highlights a deep appreciation for their ethnic identity, underscoring a sense of belonging and cultural pride. Furthermore, the informants' narratives reveal a multifaceted identity that encompasses modern aspirations and contributions to Polish society.

External Perceptions

Conversely, perceptions from the Polish majority often present a more simplistic view of the Slovak minority, focusing on stereotypes such as being "hardworking" and "traditional." While these attributes can be seen as complimentary, they risk overshadowing the complex realities of Slovak identities. Reducing Slovak identity to a single narrative fosters misunderstandings and reinforces social boundaries.

Impact of Stereotypes on Social Interactions:

Stereotypes significantly impact social interactions between the Slovak minority and the Polish majority, often leading to misunderstandings and tensions. Many Slovak informants report experiences of discrimination. As one individual shared:

"I have encountered situations where my nationality closed doors for me. It's as if I am judged before I even get a chance to show my capabilities."

This experience underscores the challenges faced by Slovaks navigating a society where stereotypes can lead to social exclusion or bias in opportunities.

Role of Media

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of the Slovak minority. While some portrayals celebrate Slovak culture, they often reinforce simplistic narratives that fail to capture the community's diversity. For example, documentaries that focus solely on traditional practices may inadvertently perpetuate a static image of Slovaks, neglecting the contemporary realities of their lives. There is a growing need for media representations that depict the Slovak community as dynamic and engaged across various sectors. Positive portrayals that highlight individual achievements and contributions to Polish culture can counteract negative stereotypes and promote a more nuanced understanding.

Educational Programs

Educational programs that include the history and contributions of the Slovak minority foster greater understanding within the majority population. Schools that incorporate multicultural education help students appreciate diversity and challenge existing stereotypes. However, the absence of such initiatives can perpetuate ignorance and reinforce negative perceptions, highlighting a gap in educational content that, if addressed, could enhance mutual respect between communities.

The comparative analysis of self-identification within the Slovak minority and external perceptions from the Polish majority reveals a complex interplay of identity, stereotypes, and social dynamics. While Slovaks express pride in their heritage and navigate their identities in multifaceted ways, external perceptions often reduce them to simplistic stereotypes that influence social interactions negatively. Media and education are crucial in shaping these perceptions, underscoring the need for inclusive narratives that recognize the

diversity and dynamism of the Slovak community. Fostering a more comprehensive understanding of ethnic identities can help promote greater social cohesion and respect among Poland's diverse population.

Discussion

The findings from this study on the Slovak minority in Poland provide insight into the specific experiences of this community, resonating with broader issues faced by ethnic minorities in Poland and across Europe. By situating these findings within the larger framework of ethnic relations, we gain a better understanding of the dynamics at play and how they reflect the complexities of multicultural societies.

1. Comparisons with Other National Minorities

The struggles of the Slovak minority in Poland align closely with those of other ethnic minorities in Poland and Europe who also face challenges related to social integration, identity preservation, and discrimination. Studies on the Ukrainian minority in Poland, for example, highlight how historical marginalization and recent political tensions, especially due to the Ukraine-Russia conflict, shape the identity and integration experiences of Ukrainians in Poland (Nowicka, 2015; Bielewska, 2019). Similarly, the Roma community throughout Europe has faced pervasive discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion, which limits access to education, employment, and social mobility (Cahn, 2014; Matras, 2015). These findings help contextualize the Slovak minority's efforts to preserve cultural heritage and obtain social acceptance, as these are struggles shared with other minority groups.

2. Patterns in Ethnic Relations and Identity Negotiation

Research on national minorities in Central and Eastern Europe shows that minority groups often experience identity conflict and struggle for cultural recognition within nation-states where the dominant culture tends to overshadow minority identities (Kymlicka, 2007; Mullaney, 2012). These dynamics are evident in Poland, where minorities like the Slovaks face challenges related to cultural recognition and stereotyping. The Slovak minority's experiences reflect a broader pattern seen across many multicultural societies, where historical grievances and contemporary social dynamics intersect. Research by Verkuyten (2005) on ethnic identity in multicultural societies underscores that minority groups continuously negotiate their cultural identities to balance integration with cultural preservation.

3. Need for Inclusive Policies and Dialogue

Existing studies highlight the importance of inclusive policies that promote intercultural dialogue, respect for minority identities, and reduction of societal stereotypes. In a European context, Kymlicka (2001) argues that multicultural policies can help promote cohesion by supporting minority rights and enabling minority communities to preserve their languages and traditions within the broader society. Other studies in the Polish context, like research by Torunczyk-Ruiz and Maaranen (2013), emphasize that intercultural education and inclusive policies are essential to fostering understanding and reducing discriminatory attitudes towards minorities. Applying these findings, the need for enhanced policy measures becomes clear in the context of the Slovak minority's experiences in Poland. Without such policies, ethnic groups often face pressures to assimilate, potentially eroding their cultural identities over time (Phillips, 2013).

4. Engaging with Theories of Ethnic Identity

The findings of this study align with key theories of ethnic identity, particularly social identity theory and the constructivist perspective. Social identity theory, as developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups, which can create tensions when their cultural identity is marginalized or discriminated against. Similarly, the constructivist perspective on ethnicity, as discussed by Nagel (1994), posits that ethnic identities are not fixed but are actively shaped and redefined through social interactions. The Slovak minority's active negotiation of identity amidst pressures from the Polish majority supports these theories, as their identity is both influenced by historical contexts and continuously reshaped through contemporary interactions with the dominant society.

5. Comparisons with Cultural Preservation among Other Minorities

Research on ethnic minorities globally reveals common challenges in maintaining cultural identity, particularly in the face of globalization and modernization. For instance, studies on the Kadazandusun of Sabah in Malaysia demonstrate that traditional cultural practices, such as the Tamu market, play a vital role in sustaining cultural identity despite modernization pressures (Soo, 2018; Taim, 2020). Likewise, studies on minority groups in the United States, such as Mexican Americans, indicate that social media and community-based organizations are key tools for maintaining language and cultural heritage (Alba & Nee, 2003; Phinney et al., 2001). These findings reflect the experience of the Slovak minority in Poland, where community events and digital platforms facilitate the preservation of language and customs in the modern era.

6. Comparative Analysis with Multiculturalism in Europe

The broader discourse on multiculturalism in Europe offers additional insights into the challenges faced by minority communities like the Slovaks in Poland. According to Vertovec (2010), successful integration in multicultural societies requires a balance between maintaining one's ethnic identity and contributing to the larger social fabric. Studies on other European minorities, such as Basques in Spain or Bretons in France, show that minorities who are supported in their cultural preservation efforts tend to feel a stronger connection with the national identity and show increased social cohesion (Keating, 2004; Llobera, 2004). In the Polish context, where policies have yet to fully embrace multiculturalism, these findings underline the potential benefits of embracing diversity through supportive policy frameworks.

7. Summary and Implications

In summary, these comparative studies and theoretical frameworks reinforce the findings of this study, suggesting that the Slovak minority's experiences resonate with the broader patterns of ethnic identity negotiation, social integration, and cultural preservation observed among minorities in Europe and globally. The challenges encountered by the Slovaks underscore the importance of inclusive policies and social dialogue, as emphasized in numerous studies on ethnic minorities and multiculturalism. By recognizing the value of ethnic diversity and fostering intercultural dialogue, societies can pave the way for greater mutual respect and social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the intricate dynamics of the Slovak minority in Poland, highlighting key findings regarding their ethnic identity, self-identification, and external perceptions. The research underscores the significant role that language and culture play in maintaining a robust ethnic identity among Slovaks. Through language preservation and cultural practices, the Slovak community actively engages in reinforcing their heritage, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity.

The perception of the Slovak minority by the Polish majority is characterized by a blend of generally positive traits, such as being viewed as hardworking and courageous, coupled with occasional reliance on stereotypes. While these perceptions reflect a degree of appreciation for the Slovak community, they also indicate the need for greater nuance in understanding ethnic identities. This highlights the importance of continued dialogue to challenge stereotypes and promote more informed perspectives.

The study highlights the critical role of educational programs and media initiatives in fostering greater understanding between ethnic groups, emphasizing the need for concrete policy recommendations to enhance the integration of ethnic minorities in Poland. One significant approach is the implementation of enhanced educational curricula that provide comprehensive information about the Slovak minority and other ethnic groups. By integrating minority history and cultural studies into the national curriculum, schools can promote mutual respect and understanding among students from an early age. Additionally, providing funding and resources for cultural initiatives, such as community events and activities, can effectively promote Slovak heritage within the broader Polish society, serving as platforms for intercultural exchange and collaboration.

Moreover, encouraging responsible media representation of ethnic minorities is crucial for shaping public perceptions. Media outlets should strive to present a balanced view that acknowledges both the positive

contributions and the diverse experiences of these communities, thereby counteracting stereotypes and fostering empathy. Establishing regular dialogue forums between ethnic minority representatives and governmental bodies is another essential step. These forums can facilitate discussions on integration policies, ensuring that minority voices are heard and taken into account during decision-making processes. By implementing these recommendations, Poland can take meaningful strides toward creating a more inclusive society that values the contributions of its diverse ethnic groups. This initiative not only benefits the Slovak minority but also enriches the social fabric of the nation, promoting understanding and cooperation among all its citizens.

Acknowledgement: This study was made possible by all those who participated and for that, I am truly grateful

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Andin, C., Hussin, R., & Johnes, J. (2022). Toleransi etnik melalui perayaan orang di Sabah: Aplikasi teori tingkah laku terancang. *eBangi: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 19(6), Special Theme: Dynamics of Development and Social Transformation. <https://ejournal.ukm.my/ebangi/article/view/58116>
- Alba, R., & Nee, V. (2003). *Remaking the American mainstream: Assimilation and contemporary immigration*. Harvard University Press.
- Babiński, G., & Etniczność, W. (1998). *Encyklopedia socjologiczna* [Sociological encyclopedia]. Oficyna Naukowa.
- Bielewska, A. (2019). Ethnic identity and social integration of the Ukrainian minority in Poland. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(8), 1267–1283.
- Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, M. (2007). Tożsamość etniczna jednostki [The ethnic identity of the individual]. In J. Nikitorowicz, D. Misiejuk, & M. Sobecki (Eds.), *Kontekście pogranicza* [The borderland context] (pp. 324–333). Trans Humana Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie.
- Cahn, C. (2014). Roma rights and discrimination: Comparative perspectives from Europe. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 15(3), 241–255.
- Chłoń-Domińczak, A., Kotowska, I., & Styrc, M. (2021). Socio-economic conditions of ethnic minorities in Poland: Challenges for integration. *European Journal of Social Policy*, 31(2), 210–230.
- Drury, B. (1994). Ethnic mobilisation: Some theoretical considerations. In J. Rex & B. Drury (Eds.), *Ethnic mobilisation in a multicultural Europe* (pp. 361–364). Hampshire.
- Holy, L. (1992). Kulturowe tworzenie tożsamości etnicznej [Cultural creation of ethnic identity]. In Z. Mach & A. K. Paluch (Eds.), *Sytuacja mniejszościowa i tożsamość* [Minority situations and identity] (Vol. MXXIX, pp. 21–42). Zeszyty Naukowe UJ.
- Isajiw, W. (1974). Definitions of ethnicity. *Ethnicity*, 1(1), 111–124.
- Kuźlewska, E., & Tomaszewska, L. (2020). Legal frameworks for minority rights in Central Europe: A comparative analysis. *Central European Review of International Law*, 12(3), 74–89.
- Koźmińska, A. (2017). Transnationalism and hybrid identity: Ethnic minorities in Poland in the era of global migration. *Ethnicities*, 18(1), 112–130.
- Kymlicka, W. (2001). *Politics in the vernacular: Nationalism, multiculturalism, and citizenship*. Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2007). *Multicultural odysseys: Navigating the new international politics of diversity*. Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2018). The rise of populism and nationalism in Central Europe: Implications for minority rights. *Journal of Ethnopolitics*, 17(5), 620–635.
- Llobera, J. R. (2004). The making of totalitarian thought. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21(1), 145–153.

- Lublicz Miszewski, A. (2019). Cultural preservation and state policy: The Slovak minority in southern Poland. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(4), 532–550.
- Lublicz Miszewski, M. (2019). Słowaccy imigranci w Polsce po 2004 roku w świetle badań ankietowych na portalu społecznościowym Facebook [Slovak immigrants in Poland after 2004 in light of surveys on Facebook]. *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin – Polonia, Sectio K*, 26(1), 107–126.
- Matras, Y. (2015). *The Romani Gypsies*. Harvard University Press.
- Mohd Yakin, H. S., Totu, A., Lokin, S. A., Sintang, S., & Mahmood, N. (2022). Tamu: Its roles as a medium of cultural identity preservation among Sabah ethnic in the era of information technology and industrial revolution 4.0. *eBangi: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 19(5). <https://ejournal.ukm.my/ebangi/article/view/74715>
- Nagel, J. (1994). Constructing ethnicity: Creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture. *Social Problems*, 41(1), 152–176.
- Nowicka, M. (2015). Migration and cultural change: Polish migrants in the UK and the myth of return. *Migration Studies*, 3(3), 397–415.
- Nowak, K. (2013). Władze czechosłowackie a mniejszość słowacka w Polsce (1947–1956) [The Czechoslovak authorities and the Slovak minority in Poland (1947–1956)]. *Wieki Stare i Nowe*, 5(10), 9–202.
- Nowak, M. (2013). Migration and ethnic identity in Central Europe: The case of post-EU enlargement Poland. *Migration Studies Review*, 8(2), 45–67.
- Phinney, J. S., Romero, I., Nava, M., & Huang, D. (2001). The role of language, parents, and peers in ethnic identity among adolescents in immigrant families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30(2), 135–153.
- Pilch, T., & Bauman, T. (2019). *Zasady badań pedagogicznych. Strategie ilościowe i jakościowe* [Principles of pedagogical research. Quantitative and qualitative strategies]. Warsaw.
- Sadowski, A. (1973). Pojęcie grupy etnicznej w socjologii [The concept of an ethnic group in sociology]. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 4(1), 183–184.
- Soo, K. L. (2018). Indigenous ethnic identity and cultural preservation in Malaysia. *Sabah Journal of Social Science*, 10(3), 29–40.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Nelson-Hall.
- Torunczyk-Ruiz, S., & Maaranen, P. (2013). Multiculturalism and intercultural education in Poland. *European Journal of Education*, 48(3), 378–391.
- Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce. (2024). Informacje dostępne na stronie internetowej [Information available on the website]. <https://tsp.org.pl>
- Vertovec, S. (2010). *Super-diversity and its implications*. Oxford University Press.
- Vachudova, M. (2020). Nationalism and populism in post-communist Europe. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(2), 88–101.
- Warمیńska, K. (1999). *Tatarzy polscy. Tożsamość religijna i etniczna* [Polish Tatars. Religious and ethnic identity]. Wydawnictwo Universitas.
- Winiarska-Brodowska, M. (2019). Ethnic minorities and local governance in Poland: Opportunities and barriers. *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, 33(3), 553–575.
- Zawadzki, P. (2003). Czas i tożsamość. Paradoks odnowienia problemu tożsamości [Time and identity. The paradox of renewing the identity problem]. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 3, 5–16.