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Topography of the Ruthenian Population in Slovakia in the 18th century through the first half of the 20th century

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Abstract

The Ruthenian population appeared on the territory of Slovakia during the so-called Wallachian colonization period, which took place from the 14th century to the 16th century. They settled in mountainous and foothill regions suitable for sheep and goat grazing. Their settlement was more distinct in the territory of eastern Slovakia and although they were exposed to the long-term assimilation of the Slovak and Hungarian language environment, they preserved their language and culture. This paper analyzes the topography of the Ruthenian population, problems related to the understanding of Ruthenian ethnicity and their development especially in the course of the 18th up to the 20th century in Slovakia.

Keywords: Ruthenians, Russians, Greek Catholics, Slovakia, 18th – 20th century.

1. Introduction

The appearance of the Ruthenian population on the territory of Slovakia is related to the early and developmental stages of the *Wallachian colonization* in the 14th to the 16th centuries, but also the Greek Catholic Church and later the Orthodox Church (Janto, 2016: 95). The Ruthenian population represented one of the most stable ethnic groups in the country with approximately 3% of the population. They mainly settled in northeast Slovakia, but in the older periods and up to the middle of the 19th century there were larger settlements in the southeast. The Ruthenian population was subject to long-term assimilation in this space. However, they preserved the elements of their own culture and their language.

The connection of the Ruthenian population with Greek Catholicism, as well as the Russians, especially in course of the second half of the 19th century and in the early 20th century and later also with the Orthodox Church, caused significant problems for the ethnic map of Slovakia and Hungary. These problems were more distinctively reflected in the statistical enhancement of the Ruthenian population especially in the 19th century.

In this paper we will focus on the topography of the Ruthenian population from the late 18th century up to the middle of the 20th century with the aim to determine not only the language prevailing in the Ruthenian communities, but also to show the aforementioned identification of this ethnic group with Greek Catholicism.

2. Materials and Methods

In terms of methodology, we combine traditional historical research and historical-demographical analysis and the cartographic designing of maps. The historical research, which is mainly based on the heuristics of archive sources, tends towards a wider interpretation of data acquired from a historical-demographic analysis of the data of a statistical nature. The cartographic section of this paper depicts

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statistical data in space and time in the form of statistical cartograms. The *MapInfo professional* software was used to design maps. The basic foundation map layer was comprised by the map: “*Katastrálne územie Slovenskej republiky*” (Cadastral Territory of the Slovak Republic) in its original 1: 400,000 scale, which depicts the status of the technical cadastral territories in Slovakia in 2011. The cadastral territories of which today’s towns in Slovakia are comprised, are from a territorial extent the closest to the original residential centres and outlying areas from the period of the 18th century to the first half of the 20th century. For map designing we created a database comprised of over 3,500 present-day cadastral territories. The data section for individual towns is represented by the outcomes from the censuses from the period of 1787 to 1950, as well as the selected data of *topographical lexicons* of an official and private nature (Tišliar, 2015: 51-62).

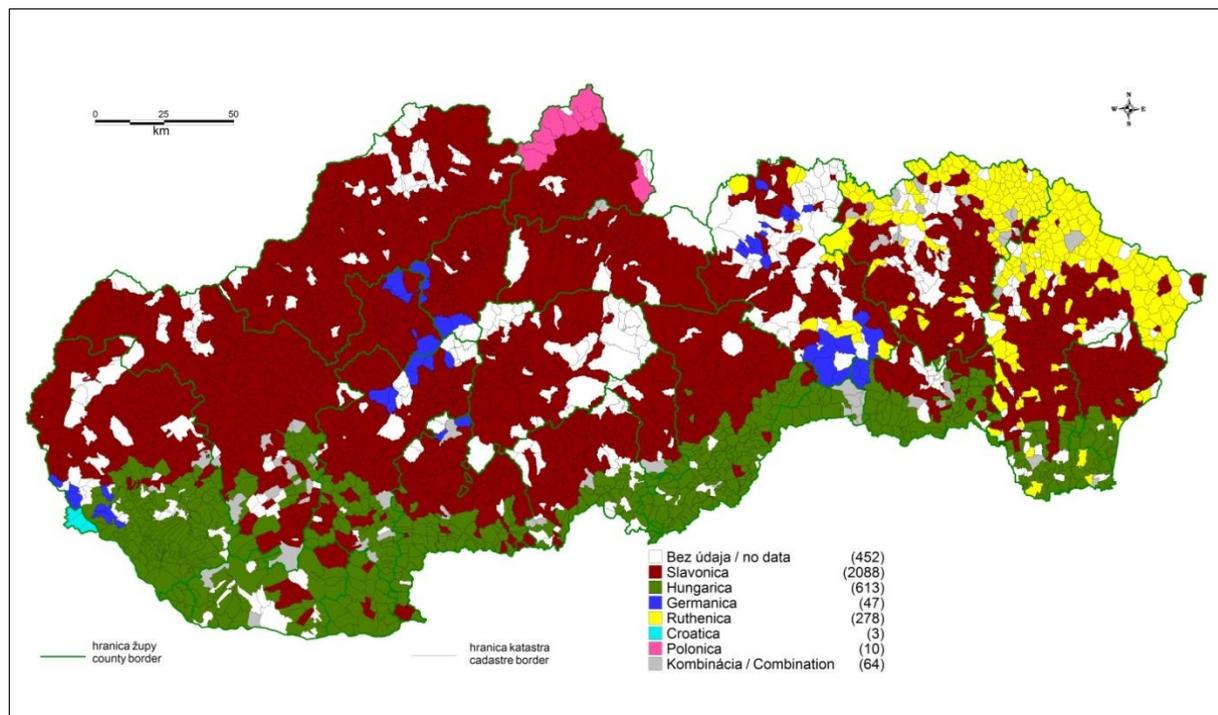
3. Discussion and Results

The Ruthenian (Wallachian) population arrived in the territory of Slovakia in the 1330s (Šprocha et al., 2017: 213-231). At the beginning, their origin was in the region of present-day Romania (Wallachia), but gradually also from the territory of present-day Ukraine and Poland. In terms of ethnicity, it was the Ruthenian and Ukrainian speaking population which typically settled in the mountain and foothill regions of Slovakia. As herders, they sought out suitable pastures for this sheep and goats. They also made their living from the production and sale of milk and dairy products, cheese in particular; however later they also worked as farmers (Janto, 2017: 51-59). They settled in northern and north eastern Slovakia.

Wallachian colonization was free and moved westward. At first, they settled in the *Zemplín*, *Šariš*, *Spiš* regions in the northeast; then in the 15th century the colonization moved south to the region of the *Slovenské rudohorie* mountain range in the *Gemer* and *Zvolen* regions and from there again to the northern Slovakian regions of *Liptov*, *Orava*, *Turieč*, *Trenčín* and then further to the territory of *Moravské Valašsko* (*Moravian Wallachia*). In Slovakia, this colonization culminated in the 16th century and slowly faded out in the course of the 17th century, when an exclusively domestic element dominated the shepherd community (Žudel, 2010: 124-127; Macůrek, 1959). In the first phase of the Wallachian colonization, settlements with Ruthenian elements were founded and the largest number of these settlements was founded in the 14th and 15th centuries in northeast Slovakia. In the 15th century, the domestic (non-Ruthenian) population also participated in the Wallachian movement, and therefore the settlements created in the 2nd half of the 15th century and in the 16th century, especially in central and western Slovakia, were of a Slovak character in terms of ethnicity.

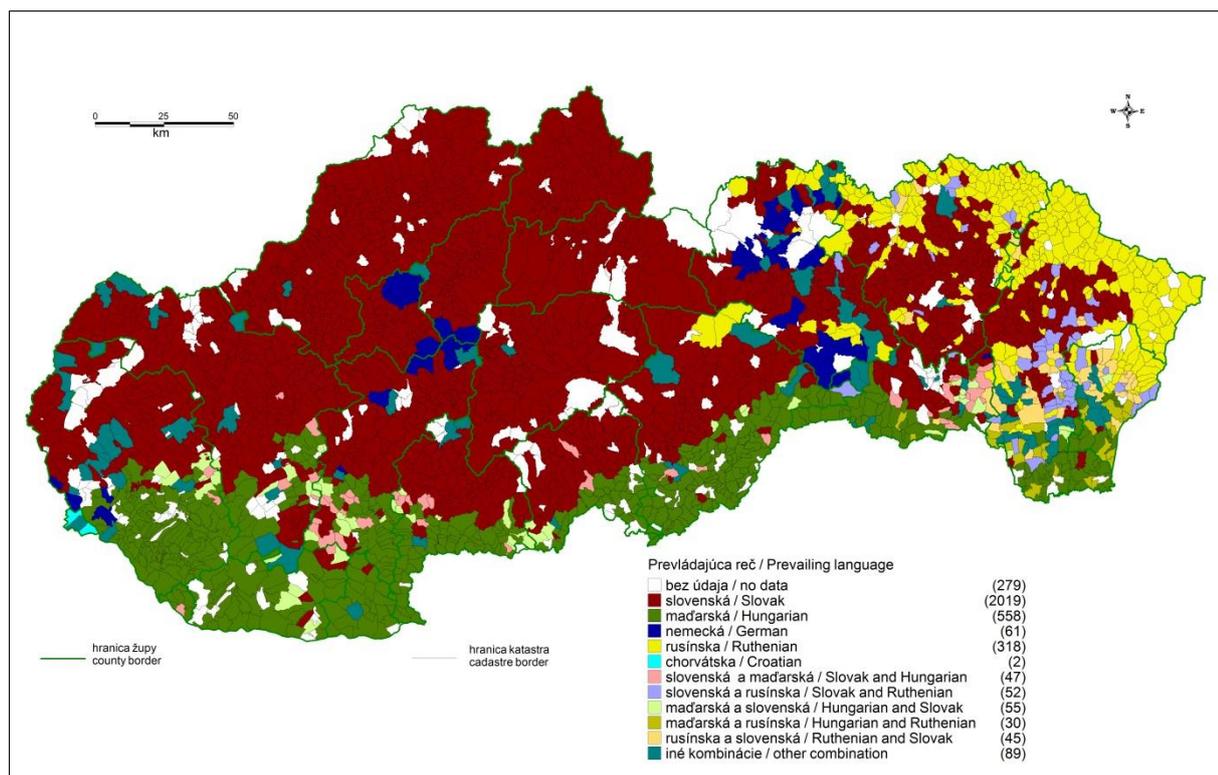
The oldest summary source, based on which the settlement of Slovakia can be defined in greater detail in terms of ethnicity at the level of settlements, is the lexicon of settlements of 1773 (Map No. 1) (Lexicon..., 1920). This official lexicon is called the “*Theresian Lexicon of Settlements*” in local Slovak historiography, since it was compiled during the reign of Maria Theresa. In addition to other characteristics, it also recorded the prevailing language of the population of individual settlements. The Ruthenian language (*Ruthenica* in Latin) prevailed in this period in 278 communities concentrated in eastern Slovakia. In another approximately 30 settlements in Eastern Slovakia a balanced linguistic combination of Ruthenian and Slovak or Ruthenian and Hungarian was documented. The highest representation of the Ruthenian language was found in the northern parts of the *Zemplín*, *Šariš* and *Spiš* regions, where this population survives to this today (Šprocha, Tišliar, 2017: 964-977). However, in the late 18th century there were also smaller language spurs along the western border of the *Zemplín* region in the vicinity of the town of *Vranov nad Topľou* and further south. The Ruthenian settlement also sporadically survived in the area of the Eastern Slovakian Lowlands, especially in the region of *Medzibodrožie*, where several Ruthenian enclaves were situated. However, this oldest source only records the prevailing language. The Ruthenian population was a minority language in many other settlements which is not recorded in the Theresian Lexicon of Settlements.

Map 1. Prevailing language of the settlement population according to the Lexicon of 1773

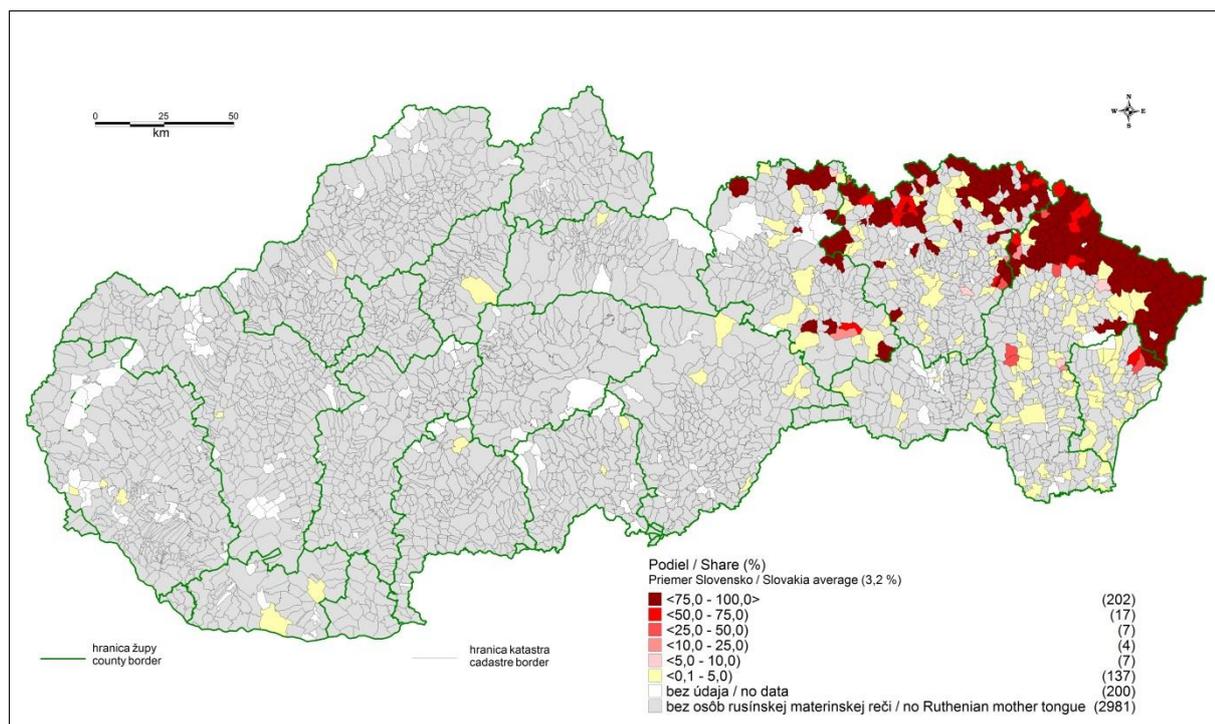


In broad terms, the ethnic picture of Slovakia in the late 18th century was also confirmed by a lexicon of private origin, compiled by Elek Fenyes. This source from 1851 also recorded the more compact Ruthenian settlements especially in eastern Slovakia. However, in comparison with the previous Theresian Lexicon of 1773, the Fenyes Lexicon features several differences (Map 2) (Fenyes, 1851). Certainly the most interesting is the difference of prevailing languages in the Eastern *Horehronie* region, i.e., central Slovakia, where according to Fenyes the Ruthenian language prevailed, as opposed to the older lexicon of 1773 which stated the prevalence of Slovak in those specific communities. This difference can be explained by the relatively frequent identification of the Ruthenian population with the Greek Catholic population, i.e., by mixing ethnicity and religion, which we will address later.

Map 2. Prevailing language of the settlement population according to the Fenyes Lexicon of 1851

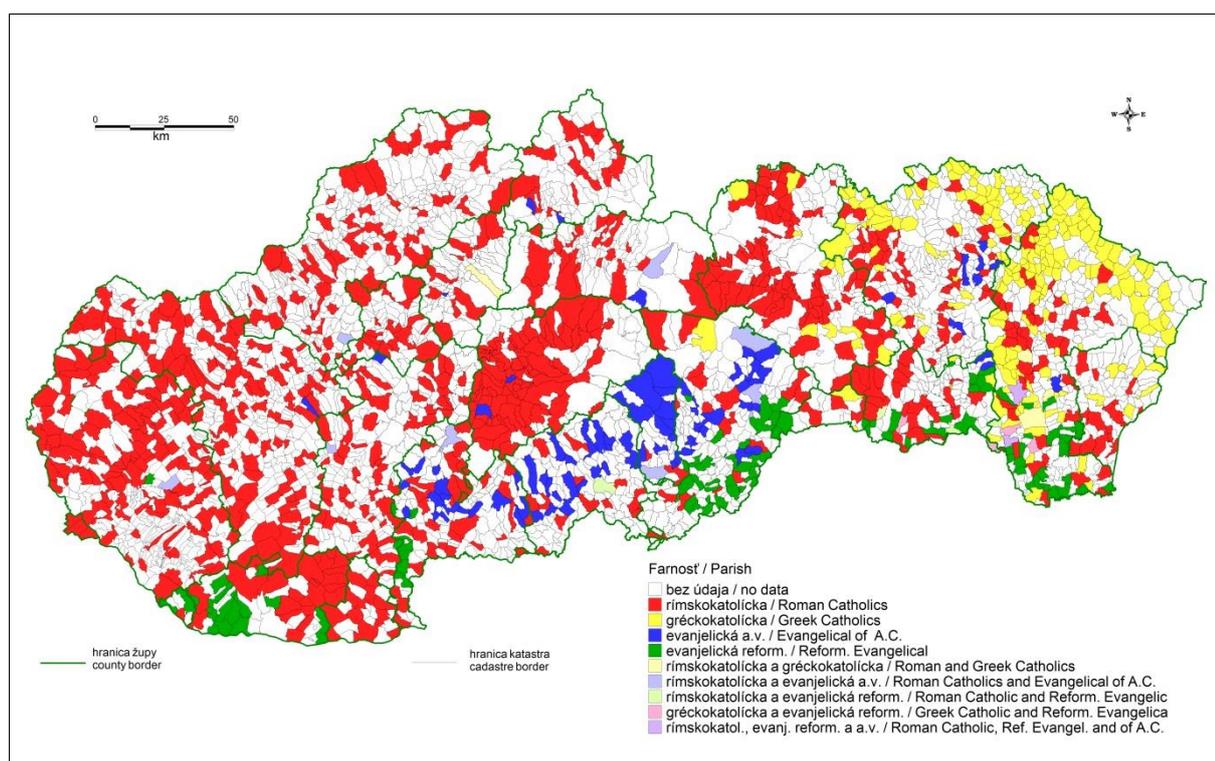


Map 3. Share of persons whose mother tongue was Ruthenian according to the census of 1880



The long-term assimilation which the Ruthenian speaking population had to face, especially due to the Hungarian and Slovak language environment, became visible in the 19th century by the drop in the number of Ruthenian communities and in their complete disappearance from southeast Slovakia. This is shown by the results of the census of (Map 3) (*Népszámlálás...*, 1882). The Ruthenians in southeast Slovakia were practically assimilated under the influence of the Hungarian language environment. But they kept their language in northeast Slovakia, mainly in the regions on the borders with present-day Poland and Ukraine. The higher share of this population in the *Horehronie* region in central Slovakia was not confirmed in 1880, however the existence of a Greek Catholic parish is documented (Map 4) (*Lexicon...*, 1920).

Map 4. Parishes in the territory of Slovakia recorded in the *Theresian Lexicon of Settlements* of 1773



The frequent identification of Ruthenians with Russians (Russian in Hungarian is *orosz*, Ruthenian is *ruthén*), and with Greek Catholicism was a methodological problem which influenced statistical results to a certain extent. This *effect* which in reality applied only partially, occurred more frequently in the 19th century. The self-determination of nations and nationalities across Europe which took place in the late 17th century and 18th century and culminated in the 19th century, only slightly affected the Ruthenian population. Throughout almost all of the 19th century, this population did not resolve the question of their identity. Some considered the Carpathian Ruthenians to be Russians, a branch of a Russian ethnic group and the great Russian nation. This pro-Russian orientation was strong especially in the 19th century and early 20th century. Proponents of this pro-Russian opinion designated Ruthenians directly as Russians or specifically as Carpathian Russians or Hungarian Russians. In terms of language, they used „*jazyčie*” which was comprised of local Ruthenian dialects and Russian (“Ruthenianized Russian language”) and was still used in the middle of the 20th century. Others classified the Ruthenian population as Ukrainians. This opinion did not have many supporters in the older period. In the middle of the 19th century another opinion was raised, namely direct Ruthenian national awareness. Ethnogenesis and the ethnic identification of this population was not resolved in many aspects even in the 20th century. (Botík, 2007: 120)

Map 5. Share of individuals whose mother tongue is Ruthenian according to the census of 1910

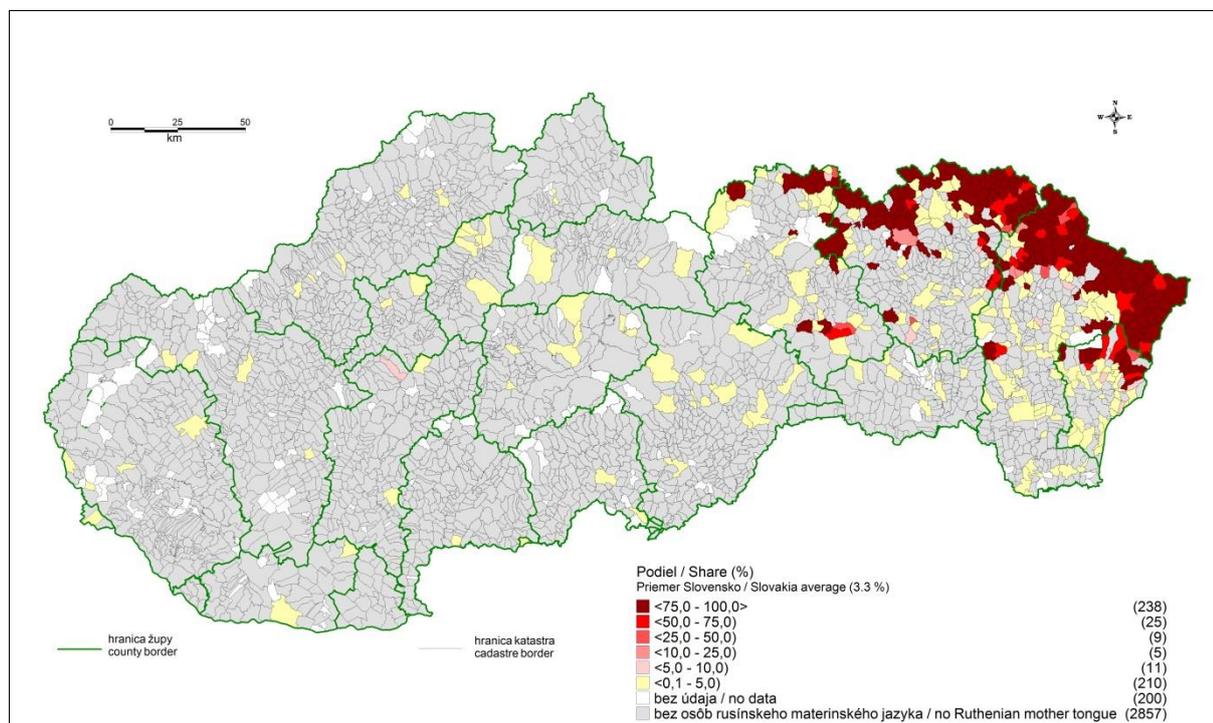


Table 1. Ruthenian population in Slovakia from 1880 to 1930 according to the official census

year	population in Slovakia*	Ruthenians**	share of Ruthenians (%)
1880	2 455 928	78 941	3,2
1890	2 587 485	87 787	3,4
1900	2 792 569	84 906	3,0
1910	2 926 833	97 014	3,3
1919	2 923 214	81 332	2,8
1921	2 955 998	85 628	2,9
1930	3 254 189	91 079	2,8

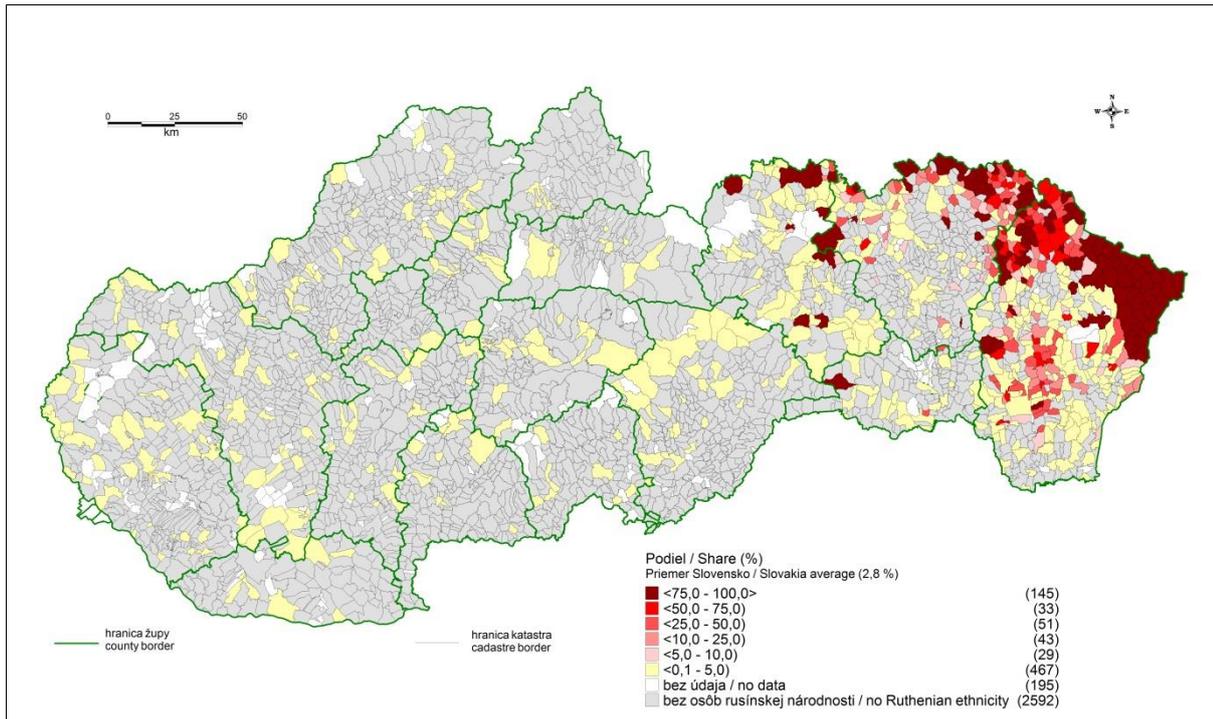
*in the period from 1880 to 1919 the number of people, 1921 and 1930 the number of Czechoslovak citizens

**in the period from 1880 to 1910 Ruthenian mother tongue, 1919 Ruthenian nationality, 1921–1930 Russian, Ukrainian and Carpathian Russian nationality together

Relating Ruthenians with Russians, as well as with Greek Catholics also marked the results of later censuses, especially the census of 1910 (Map 5) (Népszámlálás..., 1912), when the largest number of people claimed Ruthenian as their mother tongue (Table 1). This joint identification also became topical in the interwar period and again was related to religion and relating Ruthenians with Russians.

A larger Russian emigration wave arrived in Czechoslovakia after the Russian Revolution in 1917; this was complemented by wives of Czechoslovak legionnaires operating at the end of World War I and after the war in Russia. A more massive arrival of Russian emigrants took place in the mid-1920s when approximately 28,000 Russians came to Czechoslovakia. They mostly settled in Bohemia and Moravia, especially Prague and its vicinity. Their number in the interwar period in Slovakia is estimated to be 2,000 to 2,500 (Harbuľová, 2014: 131-134). The strengthening of the position of Russian emigration in Czechoslovakia thus created the precondition for a new definition of the Ruthenian nationality. Antonín Boháč, one of the founders of interwar Czechoslovak statistics, justified its change in the analytical section of the census of 1921. He stated that in the extraordinary census of the population in Slovakia in 1919, using the Ruthenian mother tongue as the basis for determining nationality was incorrectly borrowed from the Hungarian censuses (Boháč, 1924: 77). Thus, he practically supported or acknowledged the voices from the Russian emigration camp after the World War I in Czechoslovakia which did not recognize the Ruthenian nationality.

Map 6. Share of individuals with Ruthenian nationality according to the census of 1919



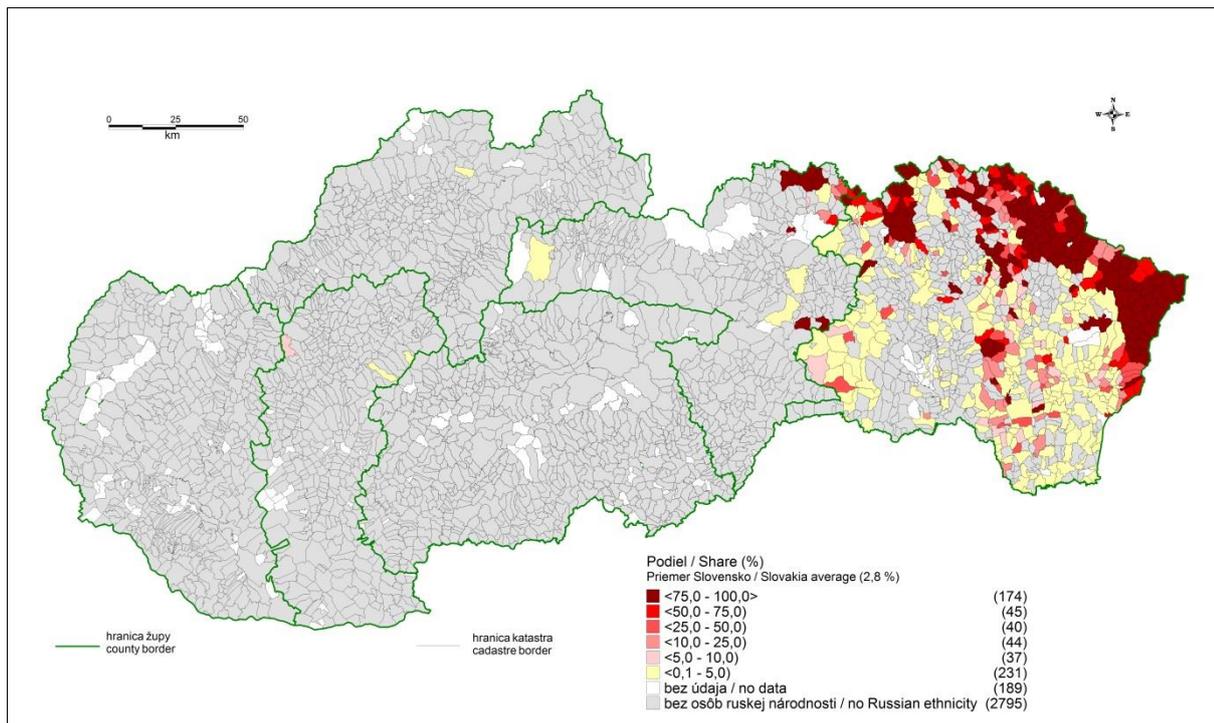
Alexei Petrov, an important Russian demographer who worked in interwar Czechoslovakia, stated that the Ruthenian nationality did not exist and in connection to the census of 1919 (Map 6) (Soznam..., 1920), he talked only about the Russian nationality (Petrov, 1923: 115-119). He tried to analyze the results acquired from the census of 1919 in eastern Slovakia and concluded that the number of individuals of Russian nationality was not correctly identified there. According to his claim, it was statistically undercounted. He based his claims on a comparison of the results from censuses of 1900 and 1910. According to his research of the previous 130 years, i.e., from the time of the compilation of the Theresian Official Lexicon of Settlements of 1773, the Slovak-Russian ethnic borders remained unchanged, and thus he clearly showed his disagreement with the results published in 1919. He was also convinced that the results of the regular census of 1921 in Czechoslovakia would be more accurate (Petrov, 1923: 240-243). However, we must add that a specific Russian nationality was stated separately in the 1919 census. But when the results were published, this nationality was included in the joint group designated as “other nationalities”. There are no doubts that he was monitoring the location of the Greek Catholic population which he considered to be Russian.

Thus, the issue of the ethnic identity of the Ruthenian population was addressed in the following interwar censuses by their inclusion in a larger and much wider group of nationalities, while their language was considered to be a dialect with small linguistic differences from the other Russian speaking population. In the 1921 census, the officially used Russian nationality represented the “*Carpathian branch of the Russian nation*”. The national group of Russians, Great Russians, Ukrainians and Carpathian-Russians was created which comprised. But if we compare the results of the Ruthenian population in the 1910 census, with an almost 3.5 % share of the Slovak population with the results from 1921 census, obviously a further reduction of the share of this population occurred. Understandably for the Ruthenian as well as Russian representatives, these results were a great disappointment. They declared the 1921 census as incorrectly organized and accused the Slovak party of disorientation and even duress (Švorc, 2003: 191-192).

The increasingly frequent identification of the Ruthenian population with Greek Catholics was the problem of the older censuses, which was frequently pointed out when Czechoslovakia was formed. For example, on February 4, 1921, Michal Slavík, the district administrator of Zemplín, published a flier in which he reacted to Ruthenian (Russian) propaganda advocating that all Greek Catholics should declare themselves to be Ruthenians. (SNA1) As he stated in his proclamation: “...it isn't true that every Greek Catholic is Russian, and even less Ruthenian, because an individual who does not speak Russian cannot be Russian, and if this individual speaks Slovak, just as his/her Roman Catholic, Calvinist or Protestant neighbour ...The truth is that their denomination is different, the Greek Catholic denomination, is also called the Russian denomination, but just because of that they would not become Russians and are not Russians, just as Roman Catholic Slovaks or Calvinists and Protestant Slovaks are not Hungarians or Germans. Each of us should stick with and declare their denomination, but all people of Zemplín who speak Slovak, let us declare ourselves bravely and proudly to be Slovaks.”

In practical terms, it meant that the Ruthenian propaganda considered almost all of eastern Slovakia to be Ruthenian (Russian) territory where people considered themselves to be Greek Catholics. (Letz, 2000: 104) However, Jan Húsek, the Czech ethnographer, who made a detailed study and marked the Slovak-Ruthenian borderline in northeast Slovakia, confirmed in his research that this identification did not apply in the 1920s. He confirmed that Greek Catholicism could not only be attributed to Ruthenians just as Roman Catholicism could not only be attributed to Slovaks in northeast Slovakia (Húsek, 1925: 87, 345). Practically speaking, the results of 1910 already showed that Greek Catholicism could not be considered as a sign of Ruthenian ethnicity. Only approximately a half of the total number of people declaring to be Orthodox listed Ruthenian as their mother tongue (see e.g. Konečný, 1999: 290). The results of interwar censuses were a great disappointment for the Ruthenian and Russian political representations, because the results of the 1930 census were similar when the nationality was changed into Russian and Little-Russian where the Ruthenian population living in eastern Slovakia was also included (Korčák, 1934: 46).

Map 7. Share of individuals with Russian, Great-Russian, Ukrainian and Carpathian-Russian nationality according to the 1921 census (Štatistický..., 1927).

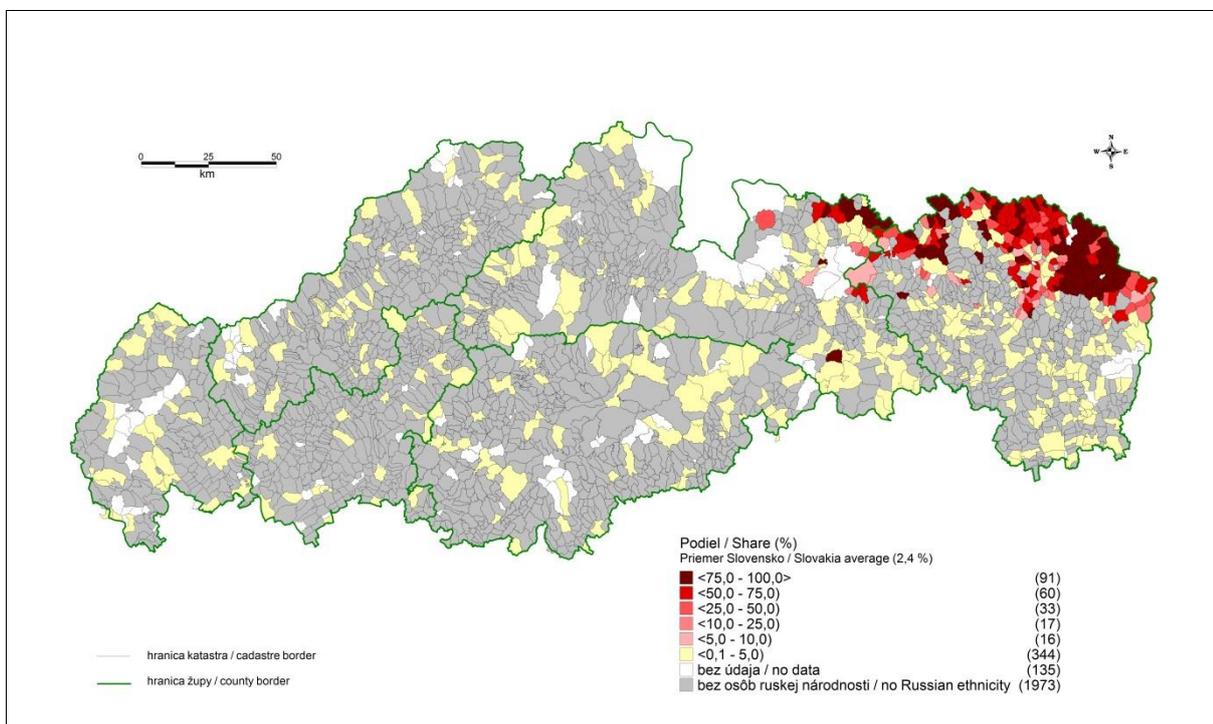


The Ruthenians were most concentrated in the districts of *Medzilaborce* and *Snina* (the northern part of the *Zemplín* region), where they represented a truly dominant nationality in the interwar period. In 1919, the share of Ruthenians in the district of *Snina* was reported to be up to 72 %, although their share there was slightly decreasing (Soznam..., 1920: 143-145).

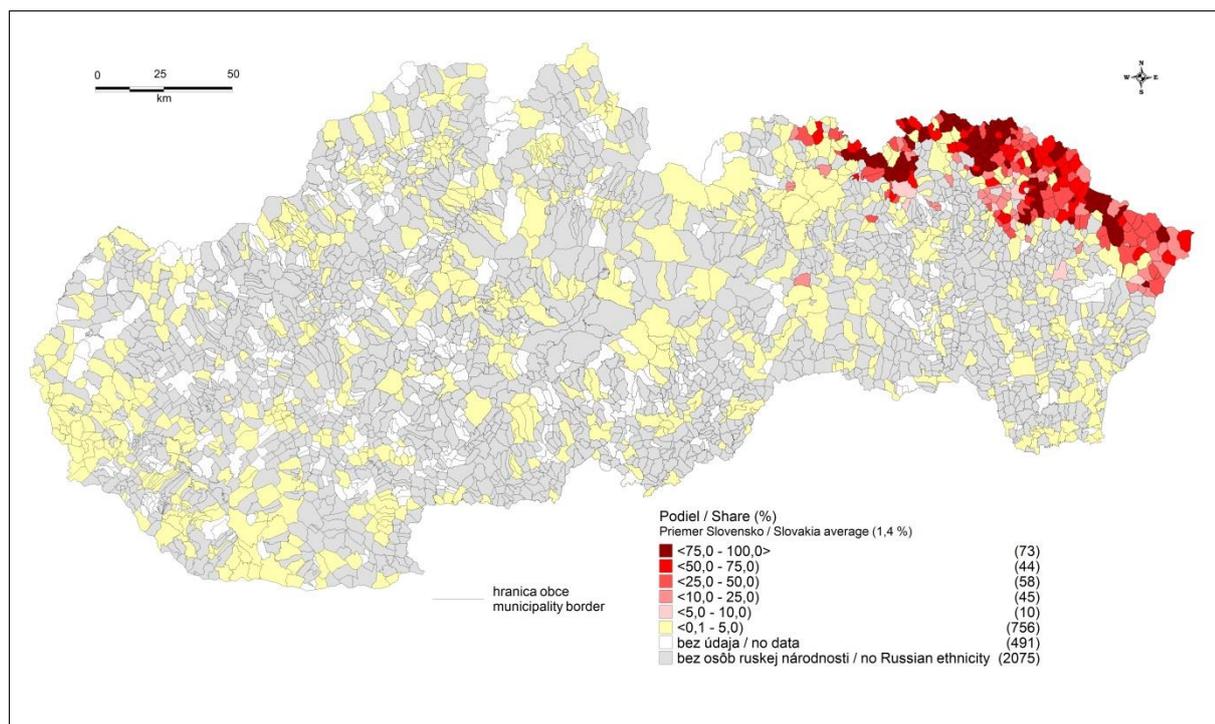
The return to the definition of Ruthenian nationality occurred in the 1938 census in Slovakia, and in the 1940 census this group was first designated as a Russian nationality, but after the census the statistical office again designated them as Ruthenians, which simply prevailed in this group (SNA2). This issue was additionally resolved during the revision of the 1940 census in 1941. The stimulus for this came from the request of the district administrator of *Šariš-Zemplín* region, where the largest group of Ruthenian population lived. Pavel Horváth, the chairman of the State Statistical Office in Bratislava, did not try to definitively resolve the nationality concept of this ethnic group in which its members designated themselves

in a local dialect as Ruthenians, but also Russians, Rusnaks, Hutsuls, Ukrainians and Little-Russians. He stated that the practice of the Czechoslovak statistics was to not directly empower any of three existing political orientations (pro-Russian, Ukrainian, Ruthenian) which the Ruthenian community was divided into at that time. *“This standpoint of the government policy of the then Czechoslovak state was also certainly affected by the fact that the eastern autonomous part of the former Czechoslovak Republic was called Subcarpathian Rus (Russia) and not Subcarpathian Ruthenia”* (SNA2). The Regional Authority in Prešov recommended addressing this problem by returning to the previous common understanding which was applied in the times of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Then only individuals whose origin was directly from Russia were designated by the term *Rus* (Russian), and the local population was designated as Ruthenian. The Statistical Office had no reservations in this respect and the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic proposed that the Prime Minister resolve this issue by a special government decree. This occurred on October 30, 1941, when the Government decided that *“the members of the ethnic group which is designated as ... Ruthenians or Russians, Rusnaks, Hutsuls, Little-Russians, etc. and declared themselves in the last census to be members of these aforementioned nationalities and were marked in this census as members of the Ruthenian, etc. nationality, should be designated as Ruthenians in the publications of the State Statistical Office. Those individuals born in Ukraine or in Russia... can declare themselves to be Ukrainians or Russians”* (SNA2).

Map 8. Share of individuals with Russian (Ruthenian) nationality according to the 1940 census (Tišliar, 2011)



The end of the war and the renovation of the post-war Czechoslovak Republic also markedly affected the Ruthenian population. Based on the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaties of 1945 and 1946, Czechoslovakia ceded the area known as Subcarpathian Rus to the Soviet Union. In the connection, the Russian, Ukrainian and White-Russian population had the opportunity to gain Soviet citizenship (Šmigel, Kuško, 2011: 15). Almost 12,500 Czechoslovak citizens in total participated in this resettlement (Šmigel, Kruško, 2011: 156). More than 12 000 individuals were from the resettlement regions of Bardejov, Humenné, Medzilaborce and Prešov in northeastern Slovakia (Šmigel, 2014: 506). This was also why the share of individuals of Ruthenian, Russian and Ukrainian nationality dropped in Slovakia to 1.2 % (i.e., 48,231 individuals) according to the 1950 census. Just for comparison, in 1930 over 95 000 individuals in Slovakia declared themselves to be of these nationalities (Benža et al., 2015: 41).

Map 9. Share of individuals with Russian nationality according to the 1950 census (Sčítání..., 1950)

4. Conclusion

The original homogenous Ruthenian population in Slovakia is currently divided into two groups, Ruthenians and Ukrainians, who continue to spread their culture, language and have their own cultural institutions. Their minority museums, which are part of the Slovak National Museum, the Museum of Ruthenian Culture and the Museum of Ukrainian Culture, are good examples (Kucharík, 2016: 109-116). The pro-Russian orientation in connection with the option to gain Soviet citizenship and the departure of a larger group of the population with a pro-Russian orientation after the World War II practically ceased to exist.

This relatively compact territory populated with original Ruthenian and Ukrainian populations has been preserved geographically in northeast Slovakia. Despite the fact that in the interwar period the Orthodox religion began to spread gradually among the Ruthenian population thus replacing the Greek Catholic religion in this community, this became much more obvious only after the World War II in connection with the new state ideology. In spite of this, the position of the Greek Catholic church has remained unchanged, even with the Slovak national population.

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