

Population Censuses in Slovakia between 1919–1940 *

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the population census which took place in the territory of present-day Slovakia between 1919 and 1940, focusing on the organizational and logistical aspects. The paper also examines the publication of the results and discusses the current location of the primary documents and the degree to which they have been made available to the public.

Keywords: census; population; archives; Slovakia; 1919 to 1940.

Introduction. Population censuses have traditionally ranked among the most complex tasks undertaken by any government apparatus. First actual censuses in countries which administered the current territory of Slovakia were conducted relatively early, starting with censuses organized for military and taxation purposes at the end of the 18th century during the reign of Joseph II. First census of modern nature took place in the second half of the 19th century and it aimed not only to gather data necessary for the efficient administration of the country, but also to study population development in a scientific manner.

Materials and Methods. During the period in question, five censuses took place: in 1919, 1921, 1930, 1938 and 1940. Each of them marks an important milestone in the development of the population of Slovakia and thus deserves scholarly attention. However, due to the organizational and logistic issues, only two of these lend themselves to be analyzed in a detailed manner.

Discussion. The first population census after the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic was conducted in 1919 [1]. This census was extraordinary not only in its schedule, but also in its practical aspects since it served as a stress test of sorts for the new system of public administration. Its purpose was an important political one: the data gathered during the census was to be used by the Czechoslovak delegation at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference where one of the chief aims of Czechoslovakia was to justify its existence and negotiate the most favorable settlement regarding its borders. This affected Slovakia especially with respect to its southern borders which at that time were defined as the demarcation line between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The census organizers wanted not only population figures, but they were also interested in finding out what the actual ethnic structure of contemporary Slovakia was. Reliability of data from the previous census of 1910 was put in question by the very nature of the census questions: a person's ethnicity was defined according to their native language and at the same time, one's native language could be the language one learned at school which was, in the case of non-Hungarian minorities, nearly always different than that spoken at home [2]. Slovak political leadership therefore felt it necessary to conduct a new census to address this lacuna in the contemporary knowledge of the number of people inhabiting the territory of Slovakia and their ethnicity [3].

The preliminary and extraordinary nature of this census is clearly visible in the choice of data gathered. The census only asked the most basic questions, primarily focusing on ethnicity and religion, but also literacy and the level of participation in the Great War.

As a negotiation tool, the census did not serve its purpose, since the results were not made available to the members of the peace conference delegation, nor for some time afterwards. The first set of preliminary results was published as late as the fall of 1921 under the title *Soznam miest na Slovensku dľa popisu ľudu* (*A survey of places in Slovakia based on a population census*) which only included the very basic characteristics [4] limited to the number of persons present, their gender, ethnicity and confession plus the total number of houses [5]. This survey was the only publication of the census data to ever see the light of day. The delay is all the more ironic since by that time, the results of the 1921 census had already been processed for more than six months and due to the nationwide nature of the census, they received much more attention in both professional circles and among the general public.

Those wishing to consult the data gathered in the 1919 census had to resort to studying the questionnaires themselves. These contain additional information on the age of respondents, languages spoken, literacy and the effect of the Great War on their households [6]. The full set of census documentation, however, was never gathered in one place. After the completion of data collection at the lowest level conducted by the processus district officials, the questionnaires themselves (the so-called 'house

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lists') were collated and sent to the provincial office. Archival material shows evidence of further processing of some partial data, especially township summaries, which were then used in compiling the lexical part of *Soznam miest*. These summaries were then collated by the Ministry Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia which was the primary institution in charge of the census. Very few of the original questionnaires have survived; one exception is the nearly complete set of questionnaires preserved in the records of the Nitra province.

The extraordinary census of 1919 did not seek to collect data in areas typically of interest to modern demography. One such notable omission is the data on employment. Originally, these types of questions were to be included in the questionnaires [7], but ultimately, practical considerations and time concerns won out. At the time of the preparation, it was not yet clear when would the data on ethnicity and population figures be needed [8]. These concerns ultimately proved to be needless as even in its truncated form, the census data could not be processed quickly enough and the Czechoslovak delegation at the Paris Peace Conference was forced to resort to using data from the 1910 census, appropriately corrected for the underlying ethnic bias [9].

Though the extraordinary census of 1919 failed to fulfill its primary purpose, it was far from a total failure. As material from the archives of the State Statistical Office in Prague shows, the logistical experience and the infrastructure established in the 1919 census proved to be indispensable during the next planned census which took place in 1921. From the point of view of preparation and overall logistics, the 1921 census could pick up where the 1919 census left off, especially when it comes to the primary collection of data by using lists compiled by census takers and by avoiding issues organizers were dealing during the extraordinary census in 1919 [10]. In addition to that, the 1919 census data were used to replace the 1921 data when a portion of the latter was lost by extrapolation [11].

One the major ways the 1919 census influenced the one in 1921 was the way in which data on ethnicity was gathered. The 1919 census broke with the tradition established by previous Hungarian censuses conducted since 1880 and instead of assigning ethnicity based on a person's first language, it opted for self-reported ethnicity. It was the first modern census to do so in reaction to the aforementioned political manipulation, i.e. counting – against all common sense and common usage – the language of schooling (i.e. Hungarian) as the children's native language. In an effort to avoid even the appearance of such a manipulation, the organizers of the 1919 census rejected this established practice and added the concept of self-reported ethnicity to the census questionnaires.

The 1921 schedule was the first of the scheduled censuses which continued the practice of ten-year census cycles established by the Austro-Hungarian government in the new republic. As a result, the 1921 census was much more extensive and detailed than the extraordinary 1919 census both in target (for example, it also gathered data on the economy) and scope: as a country-wide census, it was organized and administered by the State Statistical Office (*Státní úřad statistický Československé republiky*, established in 1919 [12]) which was also in charge of processing and publishing the data. The driving force behind the census was the renowned statistician and scholar of demography Antonín Boháč [13].

The final results of the first country-wide population census in Czechoslovakia conducted on February 15th 1921 were published between 1924 and 1927 in a dedicated edition of primary sources titled *Československá statistika* [14] published by the State Statistical Office. A separate volume containing the statistical lexicon of Slovak townships was published in 1927 [15] which summarized the results of the 1921 census. One year later, the State Statistical Office published an administrative lexicon of townships which concluded the analysis of the census data [16].

Turning now to the data gathered by the census, it is notable that while the 1921 was the first census to survey population's economic activity, it confined itself to broad categories. The questionnaire thus only asked about which industry the respondent worked in and not the specific employment or trade, nor did it ask about any secondary employment or trade, a practice considered standard starting with the next scheduled census in 1930. Ethnicity, however, was once again a major focus of the census, since this was the first country-wide census after the formation of Czechoslovakia and the data gathered was to serve as additional justification for the creation and continued existence of an independent Czechoslovakia. In practical terms, the census once again relied on self-reporting of ethnicity, but should a respondent prove unable to answer this question, the census taker would answer that question for the respondent based on the respondent's native language [17].

Even though by the 1920 Population Census Act, regularly scheduled censuses were to take place in five-year intervals, the next such census took place on December 1st, 1930 [18]. The frequency of population censuses thus adapted to the typical ten-year cycle and the legislative framework was updated accordingly [19]. This was largely due to the financial concerns as a five-year cycle ultimately proved untenable [20].

The figures from the 1930 census based on the data gathered in Slovakia were once again published in several volumes of *Československá statistika* [21] between 1934 and 1938. 1936 also saw the publication of a separate statistical lexicon of Slovak townships [22].

Having evaluated all aspects of the previous census, the State Statistical Office widened the scope of the census by including more data points. In addition to gathering data on the people physically present on the date of the census regardless of their relationship to the household, it also asked about those who permanently resided in the household in question (as is the current practice). However, only the former set of

data was actually published, in order to keep with the practice established by the previous censuses (which was also maintained in the next scheduled in 1940) and to facilitate comparison. The 1930 census also attempted – for the first time – to track the population movements by asking about the respondent's previous places of residence. The most important innovation introduced in 1930 was gathering data on fertility and related areas which aimed to gain insight into the population reproduction, but also provides a quite detailed picture of marital life. The 1930 census also added a number of combination data points in literacy and education and also asked about physical maladies and disfigurements and secondary employment. These innovations make the census as a unique population survey, not only due to the logistical challenges presented, but also due to the character of the data, especially that on fertility as this was the first modern census to gather the data of this type. The lead organizer of the 1930 census was again Antonín Boháč who ensured that the basic framework of the 1921 census was maintained, especially as far as the sensitive issue of ethnicity was concerned where the results were strongly influenced by improvements in the survey of household affiliation [23].

The nearly complete set of questionnaires and summaries from the 1930 census is fully available to researchers in the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava [24]. The questionnaires especially afford the scholars unique and invaluable data on respondents and the households they lived in, but also on the village, town and region they were a part of.

The remaining two censuses took place under atypical conditions and both surveyed only a part of what is now Slovakia. In late 1938, when a large part of present-day Slovakia was incorporated into the territory of neighboring countries (German, Hungary and Poland), the Ministry of Interior conducted a brief census which only aimed to count the number of people present and their nationality, religion, ethnicity and age. The results of this survey were published only as district-level summaries and included the number of households, nationality (i.e. affiliation with a particular country), religion, ethnicity and the total number of people physically present [25]. Having examined the surviving archival material related to this census, we can now confirm that it will not be possible to fully process and publish the results of this census. The questionnaires are now stored in district archives all over the country in a haphazard manner. Moreover, only parts of the original collections have survived in most archives as the rest often fell victim to mandatory disposal policies where only samples have been preserved [26] or the records were destroyed entirely [27]. Archives of the provincial administrations, currently stored in the collections of the state archives, only contain the township summaries which include population figures and their breakdown by ethnicity and religion. Same data, but on the local level, as well as age group data would be of immense value for modern demographic research, however, these have never been published and most likely haven't even been summarized, either.

When considering the nature and the outcome of this census, one must keep in mind the conditions under which it took place and its aims. On the one hand, territorial changes resulted in the need to reorganize public administration and thus updated statistical data would be needed, if only for the basic task of determining the location of the administrative centers. On the other hand, the speed with which the census was organized and a certain level of secrecy involved clearly show the political goals of the whole enterprise, especially with regard to ethnic minorities. The events of late 1938 significantly changed the ethnic landscape of Slovakia where by ceding the southern parts of the country (mostly inhabited by ethnic Hungarians), the relative number of persons with Slovak ethnicity increased and at the same time, the Hungarians ceased to be the largest ethnic minority. This role now fell to the Germans whose political leaders openly demanded a special legal status [28]. Paraphrasing the words of the prime minister at the time (and later the president of the wartime Slovak Republic) Jozef Tiso, the population census of December 31st 1938 took place so that the government would find out how many ethnic Germans there were and be ready for when their representatives demanded cultural autonomy [29]. Since the census was organized rather hastily, the government managed to catch political leaders of minorities by surprise, so that for example Franz Karmasin, the leader of the ethnic Germans, filed a protest criticizing the improper execution of the census and rejecting its results and not binding for the German minority [30]. In general, the organizers expected that a more impromptu census would avoid the usual political games and thus result in a more objective picture, but those hopes were quashed as soon as time came to publish the preliminary results. The political pressure the organizers were under is also the most likely reason why the data for individual townships never appeared in print and thus the original idea of creating an ethnic land registry of sorts never came to fruition. As a consequence, this census was quickly all but forgotten, partly also due to the next census, which took place under the auspices of the government of the new independent Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945).

The 1940 census organized by the State Statistical Office in Bratislava was to be the next schedule population survey and as such, it aimed to continue the ten-year cycle of censuses of the interbellum Czechoslovakia. Its organization, nature and the final analysis of the data by comparison to the previous censuses of 1921 and 1930 [31] also clearly speak to the intention of maintaining the practice established by the Czechoslovak State Statistical Office. However, the legal framework governing this census refused to recognize any link to the past – indeed the law itself under which the census took place insisted this was “*the first population census*”, meaning of course in independent Slovakia or rather its wartime incarnation (1939 – 1945) [32].

The statisticians of the period recognized the shortcomings of its 1938 predecessor, especially in the lack of any data which could be used in shaping the new country's economic, population and social policy. As in 1919, the lack of comprehensive data on the economic activity of the population was considered a major flaw which the 1940 census sought to remedy [33].

The 1940 census introduced and new and hitherto unseen feature best described as mandatory segregation of certain population groups. This affected the Jewish and the Roma (or, in contemporary parlance, Gypsy) communities members of which were originally obligated to report "their own ethnicity truthfully", i.e. prohibited from self-reporting as anything other than Jews or Roma, respectively. At the last minute, however, this requirement was dropped, but only for the Roma population. This approach to surveying ethnicity not only violated the practice established by the Czechoslovak State Statistical Office, but also extended state-sanctioned persecution of certain population groups into the preparation and final execution of the census. At the same time, the definition of ethnicity was narrowed and more closely tied to a person's native language [34]. In scope, this census could not reach beyond the post-Vienna Awards territory of Slovakia [35], but for a detailed analysis and comparison with previous censuses, this data can be supplemented by that gathered in the Hungary-controlled parts of Slovakia during similar censuses in 1938 and 1941 [36].

Original census materials including questionnaires and summaries officially dated December 15th, 1940 is currently preserved at the Slovak National Archives as a dedicated fonds [37]. As in the case of its 1938 predecessor, the data from the 1940 census has never been fully analyzed or published. First preliminary data was published in March 1941 [38], but that did not include the data gathered during the supplemental census conducted in January 1941. This preliminary data only contained population figures, total number of households for townships and a preliminary population figures for the Jewish community. Further, more detailed data was not published until after World War II and the restoration of Czechoslovakia. One likely explanation is that the government of the wartime Slovak Republic feared the reaction of the German community and so the publication of the data from the 1940 census followed the same scenario as in the case of its predecessor in 1938 [39]. Population and household figures for individual townships were published in a topographic lexicon of townships in 1942 [40]. The 1940 census data on age structure, of the entire population as well as district summaries of data on economic activity, ethnicity and religion only saw the light of day after the end of World War II [41].

Conclusion. Census years 1919 - 1940 provide an interesting source of information on the development of the Slovak population. They help us understand the current status of particular populations that directly proceeded.

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Переписи населения Словакии в 1919-1940 годах

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена переписи населения Словакии в 1919-1940 гг. Рассматривает методику и систем реализацией конкретных переписи. Анализируются архивные документы и опубликований материал регулярных и чрезвычайных переписи населения.

Ключевые слова: перепись населения; 1919–1940; Словакия.