

Vietnamese Community in Slovakia¹

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Vietnamese Community in Slovakia. This paper analyses migration trajectories and cohabitation patterns of Vietnamese population in Slovakia. It starts with brief introduction on origin of Vietnamese in Slovakia and distinguishes two different waves of migrants. After analysis of the 2001 Census data it turns to authors' own survey on Vietnamese traders in Slovakia. The concluding part of the paper explores likely future of Vietnamese in Slovakia after its accession to the EU.

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Introduction: Vietnamese population in Slovakia

Vietnamese have been living in Slovakia over 30 years. Vietnamese traders became a common feature of Slovak town and city markets and Vietnamese stalls were popular stops for broad masses. Despite of this long cohabitation, life of Vietnamese community remained unknown for most Slovaks. Branded with a stereotype image of "market traders" and/or "smugglers" Vietnamese community remained closed and there was little interest by majority population in exploring their neighbours coming from the Far East.

Literature on Vietnamese in the countries of Central Eastern Europe (CEE) has been sparse. Studies on Vietnamese in Poland by Halik (2000) and Grzymala-Kazłowska (2002) focused on issues of multiculturalism and formation of ethnic representations in Poland, with little attention paid to migration trajectories and life experience of Vietnamese migrants. Nyíri's (2002) study on Chinese migrants in Hungary provided interesting insights into the lives of Chinese traders. This community, however, is significantly different from that of Vietnamese. In Slovakia, the extensive literature on national minorities dealt with ethnic groups long established in the country (Hungarian, Roma and Ruthenian populations). No attempt has been made to analyse "new minorities", whose establishment was facilitated via processes of globalisation.

This paper tries to close a knowledge gap on the Vietnamese minority in Slovakia. It examines migration trajectories and cohabitation patterns of Vietnamese community with the majority population. It starts with brief introduction on origin of Vietnamese migration to Slovakia and distinguishes two different waves of migrants. Here the paper relies mostly on secondary data sources (the 2001 Slovak Census), press reports and information provided by three key informants. Migration motives, as defined by various socio-economic approaches to migration, is the main research question in this part of the paper. The second part of paper focuses on selected aspects of social inclusion, namely access to social services and attitudes by majority population and media to Vietnamese immigrants. As there were no reliable data on life experience by Vietnamese population in Slovakia, the analysis draws on in-depth interviews with 87 Vietnamese traders and several key informants. Accumulation and exploitation of human and social capitals by different groups of Vietnamese immigrants in Slovakia is main research question in this part of the paper. Image of Vietnamese population by majority population is examined via reference to some sociological surveys and analysis of information on Vietnam and Vietnamese provided by Slovak broadsheets. The concluding part of the paper draws on the surveys' results and analyses likely future of Vietnamese in Slovakia after its accession to the EU.

Origin of Vietnamese in Slovakia

Origin of Vietnamese in CEE was related to the existence of Soviet block. Rise and fall of the Soviet empire had profound impact on shaping two waves of Vietnamese migration to CEE. The first wave of Vietnamese arrived to CEE in early 1950s for training. Vietnamese relations with CEE deepened after the

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Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s. These ties extended to close co-operation within the Warsaw Pact and CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance). Vietnam's integration into the Soviet block was completed in June 1978, when the country joined the CMEA. Vietnamese economy, devastated by decades of wars, had little to offer and was perceived as burden by the CEE countries in particular. After 1975 Vietnam started to send its labour to the CEE, as to repay at least part of the assistance provided in the wartime (CEE, 2003). Most these people were selected to be apprentices in industrial enterprises throughout CEE. Work and study in Czechoslovakia, Hungary or the former DDR was a reward frequently reserved for children of the privileged Communist Party officers. First-generation Vietnamese in the former Czechoslovakia worked and studied in the technical middle schools and on Universities. Most of these Vietnamese were young males and there were no elderly people and few children. This explains high imbalances between shares of men (70.8%) and women (29.2%) and slightly higher share of people with completed middle (41.3%) and University education (10.3%) in the sample of Vietnamese than in total Slovak population (33.5% and 7.9% respectively) in early 2000s. Demographic composition of the Vietnamese population in Slovakia was similar to that in the Czech Republic, which accounted for some 17,5 thousands members (SOSR, 2002; CSO, 2002).

Late stages of central planning were typical with shortages of selected consumer goods, e.g. fashionable clothing, shoes, cosmetics and electronics. Vietnamese workers and students in CEE turned those shortages to an opportunity. Some of them purchased materials in local stores and started domestic production of demanded goods, while some directly imported the goods from abroad, relying on extensive networks of their friends and relatives in Vietnam. These economic activities initially provided them with some extra money. After 1989 this petty trade became a major source of income for most Vietnamese in CEE. In early 1990s the CEE countries underwent a painful economic transition, typical with deep declines in production, rising unemployment rates and decreasing living standards. Vietnamese workers in CEE countries were the firsts to loose their jobs. They faced danger of poverty and/or return to Vietnam. Slovak-Vietnamese agreements on guest workers were terminated and most Vietnamese had to leave Slovakia after 1993. Vietnamese continuing life in Slovakia either asked for residence permits or stayed illegally. Switch to petty trading as main occupation was a semi-forced survival strategy, which proved successful. Rise in petty trading (mostly on open-air markets) was helped by several factors. These included: (i) increasing demand on cheap consumer goods (of mostly Asian origin) by impoverished classes in transition countries, (ii) collapse and subsequent privatisation of the state retail system and (iii) transformation of informal networks of Vietnamese community into business networks. These developments created a market niche for those Vietnamese, who accounted for certain business skills and did not consider return to Vietnam. They also generated the second wave of Vietnamese immigrants. They arrived to Slovakia in early 1990s, either directly from Vietnam (on invitations of their compatriots) or from other CEE countries. The second-wave Vietnamese were essentially male traders, some of whom brought their families later. The second-wave of Vietnamese immigrants accounted for some distinctive features, e.g. lower education levels and higher interest in trade activities.

The 2001 Slovak Census

The 2001 Slovak Census reported some 993 Vietnamese, who were Slovak citizens. The actual size of Vietnamese community, however, was much higher. In 2002 the Slovak National Labour Office registered some 1100 Vietnamese entrepreneurs who stayed on residence permits (NÚP, 2003). This was well related to the total 1716 Vietnamese permit holders in 2003. Except for some 2700 Vietnamese dwelling in Slovakia as Slovak citizens and residence permit holders, there were large numbers of Vietnamese staying illegally. Several key informants in authors' survey estimated that one legal immigrant was matched by two illegal ones. If this was realistic, the total size of Vietnamese population in Slovakia could have been 7500-8000. In early 2000s there was great and increasing interest in acquisition of the Slovak citizenship by Vietnamese in Slovakia, which was not matched by the acceptance of Slovak authorities. Some other CEE countries accounted for much higher numbers of Vietnamese population. Wilková (2001), for example, estimated that there were some 24 thousands of Vietnamese in the Czech Republic, 10 thousands in Poland and 70 thousands in Russia by 2001. This was only a fraction of original community, as most Vietnamese had to left CEE after 1989.

The 2001 Slovak Census also provided some interesting insights into the basic features of Vietnamese population in Slovakia. It indicated great differences between Slovak and Vietnamese populations in terms of economic activity performed and sector of business. While some 51.1 percent of the total Slovak population were economically active, the respective share for the Vietnamese community was much higher - some 69.9 percent. There were no old-age Vietnamese in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. There were almost no

Vietnamese employed in public sector and few were employed in private sector. An overwhelming majority (67.4 percent) of Vietnamese community in Slovakia were entrepreneurs. This contrasted with respective share of entrepreneurs in the total Slovak population (7.7 percent). Some 27.8 percent of Vietnamese in the 2001 Census claimed occupation in “wholesale and retail trade, repair of vehicles and consumer goods”, which effectively meant retail sale in small shops and open-air markets. Some 63.1 percent of the Vietnamese, however, refused to disclose any information on their business. These people were very likely to operate in the same sector, with varying shares of legal and illegal activities. Very high numbers of Vietnamese refused to say anything about their education and/or economic activities. It indicated closeness of the community and potential difficulties with primary data collection.

Author's survey

The 2001 Census data provide no information on migration trajectories, life experience, cohabitation patterns with majority community and future life plans of Vietnamese community in Slovakia. These issues were central in the authors' survey on Vietnamese traders in summer 2004. Some 87 semi-structured in-depth interviews were taken, one half of which in Bratislava and the rest in other Slovak municipalities. Some 62 of the survey participants were men (71.3 percent) and 25 women (28.7 percent). Average age of survey participants was 24.4 years when coming to Slovakia and 37.1 years in time of survey, which indicated average length of stay 12.7 years. The gender and age structures of the survey participants fitted demographic patterns established by the 2001 Census. The 87 interviews were completed by consultations with 3 key informants (2 in Bratislava and one in Žilina, northern Slovakia), who were considered leaders of Vietnamese community in Slovakia.

The interviews included both the legal and illegal migrants. Except for open questions, the respondents were asked to rank a set of closed questions on the standard Likert scale. Selected answers to open questions are stated in the text of this paper. Ranks on the Likert scale were processed via the SPSS software as to find relevant relationships between selected variables. The most statistically significant findings are reported in Tables 1 – 4. Interestingly, there were few differences in term of gender, but an overwhelming majority of differences was related to length of stay and/or education of respondents.

1. Migration trajectories

Most migration theories are founded on the neoclassical approaches. They suppose that migration decisions by particular individuals follow benefit maximisation strategies. The human capital theory, which can be seen as a modification of the neo-classical concept, assumes that individuals analyse their skills and try to compute their “net present values” with regard to the future, both in their home regions and the potential regions of emigration (Sjaastad, L. A., 1962). Potential gains are compared with potential losses (migration costs). These costs are expressed not only in monetary terms (expenses for travel, accommodation), but also include the psychological burdens (separation from family, loss of previous social networks, etc.). The theory assumes that younger individuals with higher education can expect higher potential gains, due to their higher flexibility and lower migration costs, since they do not have such extensive social networks as people in middle or old age. The history of the Vietnamese migration into the CEE indicates limits of the neo-classical concepts, which are based on assumptions of perfect markets and free flows of production factors. In fact, at least the first wave of Vietnamese migration to CEE was semi-forced and heavily influenced by external factors, namely geopolitical decisions taken in the former Soviet bloc. This wave of migration fits to the Zollberg's (1989) regulatory approach, according to which at least the international migration is not a matter of personal decision by individual migrants, but interaction between States. It involves a transfer of jurisdiction, when particular migrant ceases to be a member of one society and becomes a member of another one. It exactly describes highly

Table 1: Migration trajectories by Vietnamese in Slovakia, distribution of answers in %

A. Education	<i>Length of stay in Slovakia</i>		
(contingency coefficient 0.213)***	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Basic & middle	6.9	24.1	31.0
University graduate	37.9	31.0	69.0
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
B. Reasons for coming to Slovakia	<i>Length of stay in Slovakia</i>		
Job (contingency coefficient 0.292)***	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	6.9	24.1	31.0
Others	37.9	31.0	69.0
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
Family (contingency coefficient 0.189)*	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	26.4	21.8	48.3
Others	18.4	33.3	51.7
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
I wanted to leave Vietnam (contingency coefficient 0.357)****	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	12.6	36.8	49.4
Others	32.2	18.4	50.6
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
C. How important were following people for starting business	<i>Length of stay in Slovakia</i>		
Family (contingency coefficient 0.385)****	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	37.9	28.7	66.7
Others	6.9	26.4	33.3
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
Vietnamese friends in Slovakia (contingency coefficient 0.202)*	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	41.4	42.5	83.9
Others	3.4	12.6	16.1
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
Slovak friends (contingency coefficient 0.268)***	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	5.7	20.7	26.4
Others	39.1	34.5	73.6
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
Business friends abroad (contingency coefficient 0.431)****	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	4.6	31.0	35.6
Others	40.2	24.1	64.4
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0

Source: Author's own survey. Notes: **** significant on the 0.001 level *** significant on the 0.01 level. ** significant on the 0.05 level. * significant on the 0.1 level. Total count 87.

regulated nature of travel in the former CMEA. Labour migration was not intended to fit personal aspirations of migrants but division of labour among the CMEA members. Concept of the World Systems (Storper, M. – Walker, R., 1983) recognises existence of core capitalist economies and peripheral or semi-peripheral economies within a global world economy. The World Systems account for long-ago established flows of sophisticated products from developed economies to peripheral ones and opposite flows of cheap labour. Ironically, this Marxist concept describes well relations between core and peripheral economies of the former CMEA.

First wave of Vietnamese migration to Slovakia in 1980s and early 1990s (11+ years ago) was directed via the official channels (Table 1). Vietnamese were coming for job and studies. Liu (46) belonged to the first wave of immigrants.

“I came to Czechoslovakia, while some friends of mine were sent to Hungary in 1982. Our work was based on the intergovernmental agreements by communist countries. We were employed in machinery and metallurgy industries. This was a hard work, as the workplaces were cold, noisy and dark. We, however, were happy to work in Eastern Europe. Life in Vietnam was difficult – there was poverty and dirt. It was a privilege to be nominated and many of us were children of communist bosses.”

Changing patterns of travel motives and migration trajectories over 1980s and 1990s were confirmed by the authors' survey. Vietnamese in the survey were asked to rank on the Likert scale importance of their reasons for coming to Slovakia. The ranks ranged from 5, definitely yes to 1, definitely not (percentages of ranks 5 and 4 are stated in parenthesis). Business (3.7) (67.8 percent) accounted for the highest score followed by wish to leave Vietnam (3.2) (49.4 percent), re-uniting with family and friends (3.1) (48.3 percent) and job and study in Slovakia (both 2.4) (31.0 and 28.7 respective percents). There were well-

visible and statistically significant differences between “old” and “fresh” immigrants in terms of education, migration motives and ways of setting business (Table 1). Those, staying up to 10 years in Slovakia stated more frequently re-unification with their families and friends. Both groups stated business as main migration motive, but this motive was more pronounced for “fresh” immigrants, who wanted to improve their living standards. Luen Van Pao (34), for example, came in 1995:

“I am an open-air market trader and sell shoes and socks. I followed my brother. People in Vietnam still think that everything is better and easier in Europe. A rich Vietnamese, however, would not come to Europe and sell goods on an open-air market.”

Diverse migration trajectories of two waves of Vietnamese immigrants were reflected in different ways of setting business in Slovakia after 1989. Vietnamese staying in Slovakia for longer time were able to develop more dense business contacts with Slovak friends, banks and firms. The first-wave Vietnamese also established extensive business networks abroad (mainly in Vietnam and other countries of South East Asia, but also in Central Eastern Europe). They tended to be more educated, as one third of them were University graduates. Education proved to be an important competition advantage for the first-wave migrants. Their second-wave compatriots had shorter immigration history, were less educated and did not create sophisticated business networks. Nguyen (31) has been living 12 years in Žilina (northern Slovakia), and established a textile and shoe shop there. He described history of his business:

“I have a shop in the city centre. I established it all by myself and nobody helped me with that. I took a loan in bank and am paying it back. I employ two white women in the shop.”

Vietnamese staying in Slovakia for ten and less years had to significantly more rely on informal networks of their families and friends. Kuang (32) confirms:

“I followed my brother and came to city of Žilina in 1995. I sell shoes in a stall on the open-air market. We Vietnamese use to help each other within our families”.

The second wave of Vietnamese migrants is better to be analysed via the network and the institutional approaches. They indicate importance of social networks between immigrants in the destination countries and their families and friends in home countries (Massey et al, 1993, Bauer 1995). It usually is the family, which follows the original migrant into the destination country. Personal knowledge of original migrants turns to a social capital for the potential migrants. Social capital is highly important for job seeking and establishing life in a potential country of migration. Decision-making process on migration accounts for high levels of uncertainty. After the first migrant moves, the monetary and psychological costs of migration decrease for members of his/her social network. The network and the institutional approaches suggest that correlation between factor price differentiation (mainly income differences) and migration decision may be less than assumed by the neo-classical models, because the migrant social networks help to reduce costs and risks of migration.

2. Experience by Vietnamese in Slovakia

Long-term emigration is a very complex experience. It includes changes in the migrant’s human and social capital, adaptation to and cohabitation with the majority society and coping with various problems stemming from clash of cultures.

International migration sometimes generates non-linear changes over time in the economic behaviour of individual migrants, (e.g., from employment to entrepreneurship), and also in acquiring the skills and networks, which facilitate the broadening of careers. In the long run, flexible migrants profit from interaction with different communities.

Migration theories based on human capital approaches used to identify this capital with formal education. The latter was reduced to measures such as the numbers of years of schooling, or the qualifications obtained. These however can only hint at ‘total human capital’ (Li, F. N. L., et al, 1996), and the diverse forms of knowledge that constitutes human capital. Emigration and life abroad also brings added value in terms of the ‘structural’, or transferable, aspects of some of the other competencies identified by Evans (2002), such as flexibility and openness to new ideas. These are more effectively learnt abroad; in other words, these forms of learning are place specific. Networking can also be extended during stays abroad, especially because

sustained face-to-face contact may be essential in building trust and ease of co-operation (Paldam, M., 2000, p. 630). Chiswick (1978), for example, argued that personal success of a particular migrant depends on transferability of human capital between regions of origin and destination, and ability of that migrant to develop his/her social capital in the destination region. Successful migration generates self-confidence emanating from a personal sense of achievement, especially where this is combined with greater social recognition.

The respondents in the survey were asked to rank their experience in Slovakia in terms of personal development (the ranks ranged from 5, definitely important to 1, definitely not, percentages of ranks 5 and 4 are stated in parenthesis). Overwhelmingly they stated importance of learning new languages (4.2) (82.8 percent), learning new skills (3.9) (75.9 percent), acquiring new ideas (3.8) (71.3 percent), increasing ability to deal with new challenges (3.7) (66.7 percent) and improving living standards (3.6) (63.2 percent). Acquiring new qualifications scored below (2.9) the others. This is understandable, as some Vietnamese accounted for significant deskilling. Some 20 out of total 87 survey participants were University graduates, but few of them had skilled jobs. Duy (41), for example, came to the former Czechoslovakia to study nuclear physics. Now he and his wife Kiu live in city of Zvolen (central Slovakia). They have a stall in local indoor market, where they sell textile and shoes. Difficulties related to finding proper job were major reason for deskilling. Nguyen (40), for example stated:

“I was 20 years old and studied economics on University in Vietnam in 1983. I was offered to continue my studies in Slovakia, within an international student exchange programme by the socialist countries. I was glad to do so. I graduated in economics at the Banská Bystrica University. I wanted to work as a professional economist. Slovak authorities and legislative, however, did not allow it. I had to earn money and became a market trader. Some of my Slovak friends helped me, but it mostly was my own initiative to establish this business. I have two stalls in open-air market in Banská Bystrica now.”

Deskilling was not identical with loss of human capital, as it went with increasing skills in other areas of total human capital, namely self-confidence, language competence and innovative thinking. Nguyen (36), for example stated:

“We (traders) cope with various hurdles and risks, but do not surrender. If one business fails, we switch to another one. We are very flexible and able to adapt on new situations and circumstances. ...I can say, I became independent. Before coming here, I had studied economics in Hanoi and parents subsisted me. I also learned foreign languages, Czech and Slovak.”

Increasing ability to deal with challenges was positively correlated with education. University graduates were far more likely to state this experience as “definitely” and “very important” than rest of the Vietnamese. Switch from high- to low-skill occupation probably was more challenging than continuation in low-skill jobs.

Problems of cohabitation with majority community

Every émigré has to cope with a set of problems in his/her country of destination, let it be different culture, language or acceptance by local people. Many distinctive ethnic minorities are subject to racial discrimination and/or segregation. The more a community differs from majority population, the higher risk of segregation or social exclusion.

Vietnamese in authors' survey were asked to rank major problems encountered by in Slovakia on the abovementioned Likert scale (percentages of ranks 5 and 4 are stated in parenthesis). The largest difficulties were related to mastering Slovak language (3.4) (62.1 percent), problems when dealing with Slovak authorities (3.3) (47.1 percent), racist attitudes by majority population (2.7) (26.4 percent) and different climate and culture (2.4) (23.0 percent). Interestingly, there were no cleavages in terms of gender. Most differences were associated with education and length of stay. Educated Vietnamese, who significantly overlapped with long-term dwellers, were far more sensitive to racist attitudes by majority population than less educated ones. Over one half of University graduates reported negative experience with racism, while only some 18 percent of Vietnamese with basic and middle stated this problem (Table 2).

Table 2: Major problems encountered by Vietnamese in Slovakia, distribution of answers in %

Type of problem	Education of respondent		
	Basic & middle	University graduate	Total
Racism (contingency coefficient 0.334)****			
Definitely important & very important	13.8	12.6	26.4
Others	63.2	10.3	73.6
Total	77.0	23.0	100.0
Slovak authorities (contingency coefficient 0.243)**			
Definitely important & very important	31.0	16.1	47.1
Others	46.0	6.9	52.9
Total	77.0	23.0	100.0
Slovak language (contingency coefficient 0.385)****			
Definitely important & very important	56.3	5.7	62.1
Others	20.7	17.2	37.9
Total	77.0	23.0	100.0

Source: Author's own survey. Notes: **** significant on the 0.001 level. ** significant on the 0.05 level. Total count 87.

Slovak language was generally considered very difficult and quite different from Vietnamese. Some Vietnamese had problems with mastering basics of Slovak language. Level of fluency in Slovak varied and increased with education. University graduates were less likely to state language difficulties.

In general, problems with racism, however, did not seem severe. Many Vietnamese stated that they never had to cope with racist attitudes. One key informant remarked that he did not think there was a "classical" mass and/or official racism in Slovakia aimed at Vietnamese. He, nevertheless, thought there were evident mass discrimination and a latent xenophobia in Slovak society. Nguyen Luc (42) living in Zvolen, for example, said:

"I sometimes have to cope with racism and my children in school as well. Some teachers, elderly in particular, consider us subhuman."

Lo (37), trader on open-air market in Martin commented:

"As for the racism, I little cope with that. Maybe sometimes, when I trade."

One key informant noted on clash of different cultural patterns:

"Here in Slovakia we frequently cope with impoliteness. Some people show scorn and disdain. Many of us have University education, but we are modest people, as we are coming from a low environment of a poor country"

Educated Vietnamese also were more likely to report problems with Slovak authorities. These were related to issuance of visas, residence permits and business licences, police raids and trade inspection. Vietnamese traders thought, Slovak traders considered Vietnamese traders competitors and encouraged this harassment. Nguyen Luc noted:

"Slovak authorities make a lot of problems. They want to expel us. But I have Slovak friends – businessmen – who are very helpful and enduring. They know how to cope with authorities."

Meo Nin (42) living with his wife in Žilina agreed:

"Slovak traders dislike us. Some of them report us to Police and the State Trade Inspection. Some of our Asian friends already left Slovakia after 1989 or returned to Vietnam.

One key informant remarked:

"I think some 30 percent of Vietnamese in Slovakia have Slovak citizenship, long-term or permanent stay or asylum. Most of us came here for a trip, on holiday, family visit, University studies or so and we simply stayed here without registering with the authorities. Those, who registered with authorities, had problems after 1989. Many of them were expelled from the country. For this reason many people did not want to take a risk."

Vietnamese community was particularly dissatisfied by attitude of Slovak authorities towards selected Vietnamese applicants for Slovak citizenship, work permit, business permit, etc. They had strong feelings that they had been discriminated and overburdened with formal requirements. A key informant noted:

“Vietnamese, who were awarded with the legal stay, had to arrange for that for several months and years. It came very costly in terms of efforts employed and money. The application process is very long and we are often humiliated.”

Vietnamese seldom complained with Slovak authorities. Complaints were said not to be a feature of the Vietnamese mentality. The other reason for this patience was nature of business by some Vietnamese.

Vietnamese in authors' survey were surprisingly frank and did not try to hide that part of their business activities took part in the shadow economy. They reported to have friends among the custom officers, bribe them and smuggle significant part of their cargo. As to avoid problems with competing Slovak traders and authorities, some Vietnamese traders developed interesting system of protection. Phang (38) living with her husband in Košice, for example, said:

“Slovak authorities impose much more requirements for our business and accuse us from tax and custom evasion. We are always afraid of Police raids. We are accused that we rob Slovak state. This is not true, because we are ‘small fish’ only. The Slovak state loses much more money in other ways, via poor direction of economy in particular. Slovak people envy and make troubles to each other. They are malevolent and hurt both their and our people. We do not want other people to see us on the market. We employ white women in our stall, who work for us. We call them ‘tai’.”

Avoidance of custom regulation by selected Vietnamese traders was evident and promoted simplistic images of Vietnamese community in Slovakia (see next chapter). Majority population, however, did not mind low prices at Vietnamese stalls.

Cohabitation patterns of Vietnamese with majority population were more typical with separation rather than segregation. Vietnamese were flexible, adaptable and able to avoid racist attacks. In Western Europe, most acts of intolerance were directed on African and Asian immigrants. In Slovakia, domestic Roma community accounted for overwhelming majority of racist attacks. Vietnamese in Slovakia lacked some features, which used to ignite intolerance acts. They were self-employed, hardworking and never applied for social benefits. Vietnamese also did not start ethnic and/or religious disputes. They were Buddhist and considered their beliefs private affairs. They made no claims for separate places of worships and religious education. Vietnamese concentrated on their business and family lives, with no ambitions for political representation. Vietnamese community did not account for sufficient numbers as to create separate enclaves in city quarters. Unlike some ethnic minorities in the Western Europe, Vietnamese did not create ethnic enterprise oriented on their own community. Vietnamese businesses were serving local customers in local markets. This way of business, of course, included a lot of communication with majority population. These contacts, however, were limited to trading and promoted images of a closed community.

Vietnamese community was ethnically more homogenous than other ethnic and national minorities in Slovakia. Interethnic marriages were infrequent, but existed. Opinions on success of these relationships differed. One key informant, for example, stated that there were some mixed marriages by Vietnamese males and Slovak females (never in the other way). He thought, these marriages had no prospects and mostly ended in divorce, because of cultural differences. The next wife used to be from Vietnam. The authors' survey, however, found several marriages or similar relationships between Vietnamese males and Slovak (in one case Chinese) females. Most of these relationships endured over 10 years and brought children. There did not seem to be any significant differences between the Vietnamese and Slovak family patterns.

Access to social services

Long-term immigration usually results in deeper integration into the formal structures of the majority community. The more an individual integrates, the more he/she is likely to use networks of social services. Level of integration increases with education and length of stay. This assumption was confirmed in the author's survey. Two questions of the survey were related to issues of health care and pensions.

The first question was aimed at access to health care: “If you need to see a doctor you go to state hospital or a private doctor?” One of key informants said that Vietnamese were almost never ill. If there was a light health problem, they simply worked as nothing happened. It had to be an absolute problem, which prompted them to visit doctor. Liu (46) who runs with her husband a textile shop in Žilina (northern Slovakia) stated:

“We almost exclusively use private doctors and do not have problems with paying for treatment. Sometimes we order medicines from abroad and import them with other wares, if it is not available in Slovak pharmacies. There are Vietnamese doctors in several Slovak cities. They help us with diagnosis and treatment. They have diplomas from medical faculties, but most of them are working as market traders or running Asian restaurants.”

In fact, some 75.9 percent Vietnamese preferred public health care system. This probably was given via costs of private doctors. Vietnamese living in Slovakia for longer time could have been expected to access public health care facilities more frequently, as all of them were either Slovak citizens or permanent residents. Vietnamese staying for shorter time were sometimes coming illegally and, in theory, would be less likely to go to state hospital. The real behaviour was rather different. Individuals staying in Slovakia for longer time periods and having higher education degrees were far more likely to use private health services than their less educated compatriots, with shorter immigration history. Contingency coefficients for education and length of stay were highly significant (Table 3). Educated individuals were more likely to be well off and afforded to pay for private doctors. In this way, Vietnamese population mirrored patterns of majority community.

Table 3: Access to social services, distribution of answers in %

	<i>Preferred health care</i>		
Education (contingency coefficient 0.367)****	Public doctor	Private doctor	Total
Basic & middle	65.5	11.5	77.0
University graduate	10.3	12.6	23.0
Total	75.9	24.1	100.0
Length of stay (contingency coefficient 0.281)***	Public doctor	Private doctor	
Up to 10 years	40.2	4.6	44.8
11+ years	35.6	19.5	55.2
Total	75.9	24.1	100.0
	<i>“When retired. I will rely mainly on my savings”</i>		
(Contingency coefficient 0.217)**	Definitely & very likely yes	other	Total
Men	55.2	16.1	71.3
Women	27.6	1.1	28.7
Total	82.8	17.2	100.0

Source: Author’s own survey. Notes: **** significant on the 0.001 level. *** significant on the 0.01 level. ** significant on the 0.05 level. Total count 87.

The second question on social inclusion was related to pension arrangements. Respondents were asked to rank importance of various sources of income for their old age on Likert scale (the ranks ranged from 5, definitely yes to 1, definitely not, percentages of ranks 5 and 4 are stated in parenthesis). Vietnamese had low opinions about a good pension awarded them in Slovakia (2.5) (16.1 percent) and Vietnam (2.1) (9.2 percent). Interestingly, there were no differences in terms of education or length of stay in Slovakia. Reliance on own savings (4.3) (82.8 percent) and support of family (3.5) (54.0 percent) ranked much higher. Women in particular had to rely on their own savings (Table 3). They had no alternative sources of old age income in case of divorce or death of their husbands.

One key informant thought, very few Vietnamese would stay in Slovakia after retirement. They wanted to return to Vietnam and intensively saved money, bought property, etc. Assumption on return to Vietnam in pension age was impossible to test, as the oldest survey participant had just 52 years. It, however, cannot be excluded. An overwhelming majority of Vietnamese were self-employed and tried to pay minimal pension insurance required by the Slovak laws. Very few of them held private insurance policies. After retirement, their financial position in Slovakia would be rather difficult, unless they are supported by their own savings or families.

Image of Vietnamese in Slovak media and society

In the communist period, Slovaks had limited opportunities to travel abroad and meet representatives of non-European nations and cultures. Immigration from these regions to Slovakia also was heavily regulated. Vietnamese (and by some extent Cuban and Mongolian nationals) working in Slovak factories was the only non-European nation to be met in most Slovak towns and cities. After 1989 Vietnamese staying in Slovakia switched to trading in open-air markets. Trading as main type of occupation created stereotype images of Vietnamese.

As to analyse image of Vietnamese by media and majority population, authors carried out a survey in three major Slovak broadsheets: the Sme daily (centre-right), Pravda daily (centre-left) and Národná Obroda daily (centre-liberal). Tabloids were omitted, as they frequently portrayed immigrants in negative and simplistic ways.

The survey found some 110 references to Vietnam and Vietnamese in period January – December 2003. While relatively numerous, the references contributed little to knowledge on Vietnamese and their home country. The most frequent category was “Economy, society, politics, culture and sports in Vietnam” (30.0 percent) and consisted mainly of short agency news on foreign relations and economic development in the South-east Asia. References to Vietnam War and other news (most of which related to SARS virus and travel conditions in the region) accounted both for 21.8 percent of news. In total, some 74.6 percent references had only indirect relation to Vietnamese in Slovakia and/or their country.

When mentioned in Slovak broadsheets, Vietnamese were most frequently portrayed as refugees and asylum seekers (9.1 percent). Typical news related to intercepted migrants and traffickers:

“Slovak Police accused 2 traffickers, who tried to smuggle a group of 18 Vietnamese illegal migrants via the Czech-Slovak border. One of migrants, 54 old female, died exhausted in a difficult forest terrain.” (Pravda daily 15.07.2003)

Some Slovak media presented Vietnamese as smugglers and criminals (4.5 percent of all news). This image was reinforced via widely published press releases by Slovak authorities:

“The Slovak Custom Authority intercepted a letter from Vietnam containing 12 grams of dried cannabis” (Pravda daily 31.01.2003)

“Numbers of shops with cheap Asian goods rise quickly in most Slovak cities. Most traders originate in China and Vietnam. They pay no custom duties and taxes, and sell their goods for dumping prices. Slovak producers are unable to compete with them. The money earned in this business does not stay in Slovakia. Vietnamese traders transferred some USD 600 million via various banks from Slovakia to Vietnam in 1999.” (Press release by the Slovak Custom Authority: Národná Obroda daily 16.10.2003)

The few news related to life by Vietnamese in Slovakia were not able to go beyond traditional picture of Vietnamese as traders, who wanted to profit from Slovak (and EU) citizenship:

“Some 3484 foreigners became Slovak citizens in 2002. ‘Various nations have different reasons for asking for Slovak citizenship. As for the Arabs studying at Slovak Universities, some 90 percent of them want to stay and work in Slovakia. Chinese and Albanians have security and economic reasons. Vietnamese staying in Slovakia since the communist period are all entrepreneurs and their reasons are purely economical’”. (Sme daily 07.09.2003)

The direct references to Vietnamese traders (3.6 percent) made it clear that Vietnamese were tricky traders selling low-costs, low-quality goods:

“City of Košice has the largest open-air ‘flea’ market in Slovakia. A Vietnamese trader offers us the Adidas men bathing panties for Sk 600 (15 euro). Neither quality nor price of the good, however, are convincing. We ask for guarantee period, but the Vietnamese denies any.” (Sme daily 06.06.2003).

News related to international trade and culture exchange between Slovakia and Vietnam were sparse (4.5 percent of total) and did not reflect business potential of Vietnamese community established in Slovakia. The upcoming accession of Slovakia to the EU was considered as a good opportunity for combating imports from Vietnam:

“The EU restricts imports of cheap, but low-quality goods, which sometimes endanger health of consumers. There will be higher custom duties and quotas imposed on textile goods imported from Asia, when Slovakia’s access the EU in May 2004. We asked Asian traders on Bratislava’s markets, whether they had known about these regulations. They had not, but also did not seem to bother. No wonder: many of them were selling smuggled goods. (Národná Obroda 03.11.2003)”

Opinions of Slovak public on Vietnamese did not differ significantly from those presented by media. Vietnamese were identified with market traders selling low-cost, low quality goods. There was little interest in life of Vietnamese community. On the other hand, this disinterest was also reflected in much higher toleration of Vietnamese compare other ethnic minorities. The 1999 FOCUS survey on the racial tolerance (Vašečka, M., 2001, p. 236), for example, found that 90 percent of majority population had negative opinions on Roma population, 56 percent on Ukrainians, 53 on Hungarians, but only 28 percent on Vietnamese. Higher tolerance for Vietnamese was shown also in the Slovak Helsinki Committee survey (2000). Only some 11.0 percent of basic and middle school students in Bratislava would have minded a Vietnamese classmate, while some 38.0 percent would have minded a Roma and 14.6 percent a Hungarian one.

Slovak government put little efforts in integration of Vietnamese community into the majority society. The Government Council for National and Ethnic Groups was established as an advisory and coordination body in field of state ethnic policies. The Council members spoke for 10 ethnic minorities. There, however, was no non-European minority group. On 3rd May 2000 the Slovak Government passed the "Government Resolution No 283/2000 on Action Plan for Preventing all Forms of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance". Measures applied under this Plan and its extensions concentrated on "traditional" minorities: Roma, Hungarian and Ruthenian populations. Problems with the Roma population in particular were considered severe and acute, and accounted for overwhelming majority of resources spent within the Action Plan. Again, no measure was aimed at Asian ethnic groups living in Slovakia.

3. Future of Vietnamese Community in Slovakia

The 1990s were the heydays of Vietnamese petty traders. Their situation changed in late stages of economic transition in second half of 1990s. With Slovak economy booming, living standards of domestic population increased, there demand on cheap consumer goods offered by Vietnamese traders waned. Increasing integration of Slovakia into the global production and trade networks was associated with arrival of hypermarkets to the country. Global retail chains like TESCO, Carrefour, Billa, etc., were able to supply Slovak customers with great assortment of reasonably priced goods. In early 2000s another competitors emerged – Chinese traders. With higher financial resources and supply chains better organised, they were able to beat prices in Vietnamese shops and crowd Vietnamese out of the market. Market success of Chinese traders was rapid and astonishing. By 2004, Chinese population in Slovakia outnumbered Vietnamese one.

Increasing competition by international retail chains and Chinese traders undermined Vietnamese businesses, as few of them had adequate financial and logistic resources. As market trading was main source of income for most Vietnamese in Slovakia, future of this community became rather less clear. This was confirmed by the author's survey.

Vietnamese were asked to rank their likely places of living in next 10 years (the ranks ranged from 5, definitely yes to 1, definitely not, percentages of ranks 5 and 4 are stated in parenthesis). Answer "I stay in Slovakia and continue this business" was the most frequent one (3.6) (56.3 percent), followed by statement "I stay in Slovakia, doing other business (2.9) (26.4 percent). A potential switch to other kind of business was more likely for those immigrants, who lived in Slovakia 10 and less years (Table 4). Vu (34) came to Slovakia to study on the forestry middle school. After 19 years of life in Slovakia he felt fully integrated into the Slovak society:

"I married a white woman. We have a 2-years old daughter. I want her to be a doctor. Most of friends I have and media I watch are Slovak. I want to stay in this country and my daughter is likely to stay here as well."

Some traders thought about move to another EU country (2.5) (13.8 percent) or a non-EU country (2.3) (10.3 percent). Return to Vietnam was by far the least attractive option (2.2) (11.5 percent) and if considered, then by "fresh" immigrants. Phan (32), for example had spent in Slovakia just 5 years and was less certain on his future plans:

"My cousin has a shop here. I import goods for him, mostly textile, shoes, cosmetics and toys. I think I stay in this country and will continue in importing goods for my cousin and other Vietnamese traders. But I am also considering move to France, Germany or the UK."

Very similar pattern emerged, when Vietnamese ranked options for future lives of their children. Most Vietnamese wanted their children to live in Slovakia as Slovak citizens (3.4) (47.1 percent) or to be both

Vietnamese and Slovak citizens (3.2) (44.8 percent). Some wished their children to move to another EU country (3.0) (33.3 percent) or a non-EU country (2.6) (25.3 percent). Again, return to Vietnam was seen as the least appealing opportunity (2.4) (16.1 percent) and considered mainly by few “fresh” immigrants. My (31) came with her husband to Slovakia 13 years ago. They established a shop specialised in traditional Asian medicine and planned to stay in Slovakia:

“We have two children. We want them to become a doctor and an engineer. They should maintain Slovak citizenship and stay here, but they also may move to the USA.”

One of key informants expressed her opinion:

“Vietnamese, who opted for staying in Slovakia had been mostly well-off before this period of competition (with Chinese and hypermarkets) and/or had children in school age. They are going to leave when their children graduate. Some Vietnamese, who have good employment may also stay in Slovakia. Some of them also have Slovak wives and families and they stay here as well.”

Nguyen (42) came 21 years ago to work in an armament factory. He definitely wants to stay in Slovakia:

“My children are Slovak citizens and I want them to become teachers. They should teach Vietnamese children in Slovakia”

Which profession was most desired for their children? While all Vietnamese under survey were traders, trading was considered the least desired occupation for their children (2.4) (14.9 percent) and there was no difference in terms of immigration history. ‘Businessman in other sector’ also ranked low (2.8) (26.4 percent), and was considered only by some “fresh” immigrants (Table 4). A career of a technician or an engineer (3.9) (75.9 percent), or a doctor, a lawyer or an economist (4.2) (77.0 percent) was preferred by an overwhelming majority of Vietnamese. The latter careers, however, were much stronger desired by “old” immigrants. This was no surprise, as one third of them were University graduates and understood advantages of higher education in a modern society. Nguyen (40), for example, graduated from University of Economics and owned a textile business. He expressed career pattern desired by this group of immigrants:

“I have two daughters, 2 and 12 years old. I want, they become doctors or economists and have both Slovak and Vietnamese citizenship, but also want them to move to the USA. I am not certain yet, where I would live in the future, but I certainly do not want to return to Vietnam”.

Table 4: **Future life plans by Vietnamese in Slovakia, distribution of answers in %**

A. Where do you want live in 10 years?	Length of stay in Slovakia		
Stay in Slovakia, doing other business (cont. coeff. 0.190)*	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	16.1	10.3	26.4
Others	28.7	44.8	73.6
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
Return to Vietnam (contingency coefficient 0.179)*	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	8.0	3.4	11.5
Others	36.8	51.7	88.5
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
B. Which future do you plan for your children?	Length of stay in Slovakia		
I want them return to Vietnam (contingency coefficient 0.285)***	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	12.6	3.4	16.1
Others	32.2	51.7	83.9
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
C. Which profession you wish your children have?	Length of stay in Slovakia		
Businessman in other sector (contingency coefficient 0.286)***	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	18.4	8.0	26.4
Others	26.4	47.1	73.6
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
Engineer, technician (contingency coefficient 0.289)***	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	27.6	48.3	73.6
Others	17.2	6.9	24.1
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0
Doctor, lawyer, economist (contingency coefficient 0.315)***	Up to 10 years	11+ years	Total
Definitely yes & very likely yes	27.6	49.4	77.0
Others	17.2	5.7	23.0
Total	44.8	55.2	100.0

Source: Author's own survey. Notes: *** significant on the 0.01 level. * significant on the 0.1 level. Total count 87.

Survey findings fitted opinions by key informants. They thought, there were significant differences related to age of the children. The teenagers, or children coming with Vietnamese parents to Slovakia (in second wave of immigrants), were mostly (but not exclusively) expected to continue in trading. Some of these children accounted for some social pathology features, like avoiding compulsory education. As for the younger children, or those born in Slovakia to well-off parents, the situation was different. Their parents wanted to improve their future life and change their profession.

Countries of Western Europe opted for policies of multicultural society. Immigrants were supposed to help combating demographic problems in general and population ageing in particular. The Slovak Republic signed all relevant international agreements and documents on human rights and treatment of national minorities and asylum seekers. The Concept of Immigration Policy in Slovakia (MVSР 2004), for example, declared pursuance of non-discriminatory immigration policies. Real situation was somewhat different. Immigrants from Slavonic countries (Russia, Ukraine, former Yugoslavia) accounted for major shares in total numbers of citizenships and asylum/refugees certificates:

- In period 1994-2003 some 26 973 citizenships were granted to immigrants to Slovakia. While there were some 21 851 citizenships granted to immigrants of European origin, there were some 1721 citizenships granted to Asian immigrants. Vietnamese were granted some 493 citizenships, of which 321 in 2002 and 2003 (SOSR 1994-2005). Slovak law ruled that citizenship could be granted applicants, who stayed at least 5 years in Slovakia, spoke Slovak and had no criminal record. Most Vietnamese living in Slovakia easily matched these conditions. They, however, had difficulties with getting the citizenship, as there was no legal claim for that.
- Slovakia accounted for a most difficult country of asylum in Europe. In period 1992-2004 some 44 107 refugees sought asylum in Slovakia, of which only 555 were successful. Number of successful applications decreased over time and there were just some 7 asylum permits granted in 2004. Some 159 refugees got Slovak citizenship, of which 7 Vietnamese in the same period (UNHCR Slovakia 2005).
- Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on one hand, declared interest in “supporting economic co-operation and exploiting potential of Vietnamese, who studied in Slovakia”. ON the other hand, it cancelled Slovak embassy in Hanoi and replaced it with an honorary consulate (MZV SR 2004, p. 30). Priorities of the Slovak foreign affairs policy laid in Europe, NATO and Slavonic countries of Balkan and Eastern Europe. Vietnamese applying for Slovak visa had increasingly more difficulties related to application process.

Numbers of visa granted by the Slovak consulate in Vietnam dropped from 194 in 2000 to 21 in 2003 (ÚHCP 2004). The latter development was confirmed also by one of key informants in author's survey.

Experience, which Slovakia made with Vietnamese, was not negative. Skilled and hardworking immigrants from Vietnam could contribute to the country's future development. This would have to require Slovak authorities rethink their immigration policies.

Conclusions

This paper has sought to contribute to the limited research on Asian minorities in Central Eastern Europe. Its main aim was to explore migration trajectories and cohabitation patterns and likely future of Vietnamese community in Slovakia.

This research confirmed a common view that more developed economies attract labour migrants from less developed ones. They establish trans-national communities that contribute to the circulation of capital and information in the World's economy. However, two waves of Vietnamese migration happened under diverse regulation environments and they should be analysed via different migration approaches. The structuralist approaches (regulationist and World Systems concepts in particular) work better when describing first wave of semi-forced migration in 1980s. They direct attention to broader structures and institutions (including the role of state intervention) rather than to individual decision-making. More than an aggregate move of individuals exercising rational choice, migration was a 'result of geopolitical considerations and socio-spatial inequalities systematically reproduced within global and national economies' (Goss, J., et al 1995, p. 318). The new household economics, and network and the institutional approaches explained migration motives and behaviour patterns of the second wave of the Vietnamese migrants in 1990s.

Economic and social changes in Slovakia during the 1990s had profound impacts on life of Vietnamese community. There was a shift from permanent employment to temporary and casual jobs. This can be conceptualised in terms of dual labour market theory, which assumes existence of two parallel employment sectors in the economy. Employees in the primary sector (usually capital-intensive) tend to be better educated, better paid and have more stable jobs with career progression. The secondary sector (usually labour-intensive), on the other hand, is typified by unstable jobs, low wages, difficult working conditions and limited skills (Piore, M., 1979). Secondary sector jobs typically include construction, informal manufacturing, domestic service, petty trade and tourism. The particular significance of the dual labour market theory for migration lies in the disproportionate recruitment of the secondary sector from ethnic minorities, women and immigrants. The Vietnamese fit the classic model of the labour market segmentation of migrants, mostly being in the secondary sector. They also were employed in jobs, which made little use of their human capital, so that it became brain waste. An important argument of this paper has been the need to adopt a 'total human capital' approach to the study of cohabitation of Asian minorities with majority population. While Vietnamese accounted for significant deskilling after 1989, most of them were able to adapt to new environments and continue their life in an unfriendly environment as traders. There is a need to look at a range of competences, rather than narrower measures of qualifications and formal courses of original studies. The high level of social skills (although predominantly in their own community) reinforced Vietnamese' chances on the market. Family and cultural ties facilitated chain migration, reducing its costs and risks of migration. Vietnamese succeeded in transforming their family and social networks to business networks and, in this way, increased returns to migration.

After 1989, Vietnamese proved a great degree of flexibility. They identified a niche generated via market imperfection in first phase of economic transition and established an innovative system of trans-border petty trade. They also were able to develop non-conflicting patterns of cohabitation with majority community, without losing their own identity.

Slovakia's integration into the World's production and trade systems in second half of 1990s posed new challenges for Vietnamese community. It was unclear, how far and for how long could Vietnamese traders compete with international retail chains and Chinese traders. Particular sub-groups of Vietnamese traders were likely to generate different responses to these challenges. The first-wave immigrants with well-established positions within majority community were likely to continue in trading and/or look for new opportunities in the services sector. The second-wave immigrants were more likely to seek business opportunities in other countries of the World, relying on support of their extensive ethnic networks.

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