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Transnational lifestyles among Hungarian minority commuters from Serbia to Hungary

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Presentation Outline

- Vojvodina
- Migration flaws in Vojvodina
- TransMig Project 2009-2012
- Research segment: family dimension of transnational lifestyle
  - Objective
  - Data
  - Results

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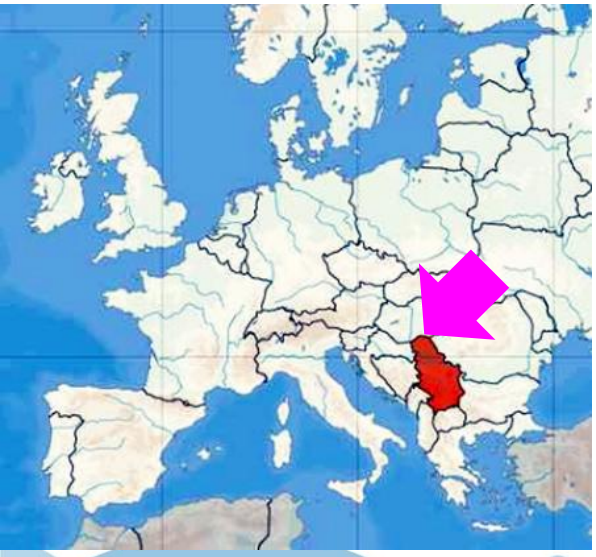
Vojvodina



- north province of Serbia
- territory: 21,500km^2
- total population: 2,031,992 (Census 2002)
- traditionally multicultural and multinational region ----- more than 20 ethnic groups
- Hungarian population: 290,207 (15%)

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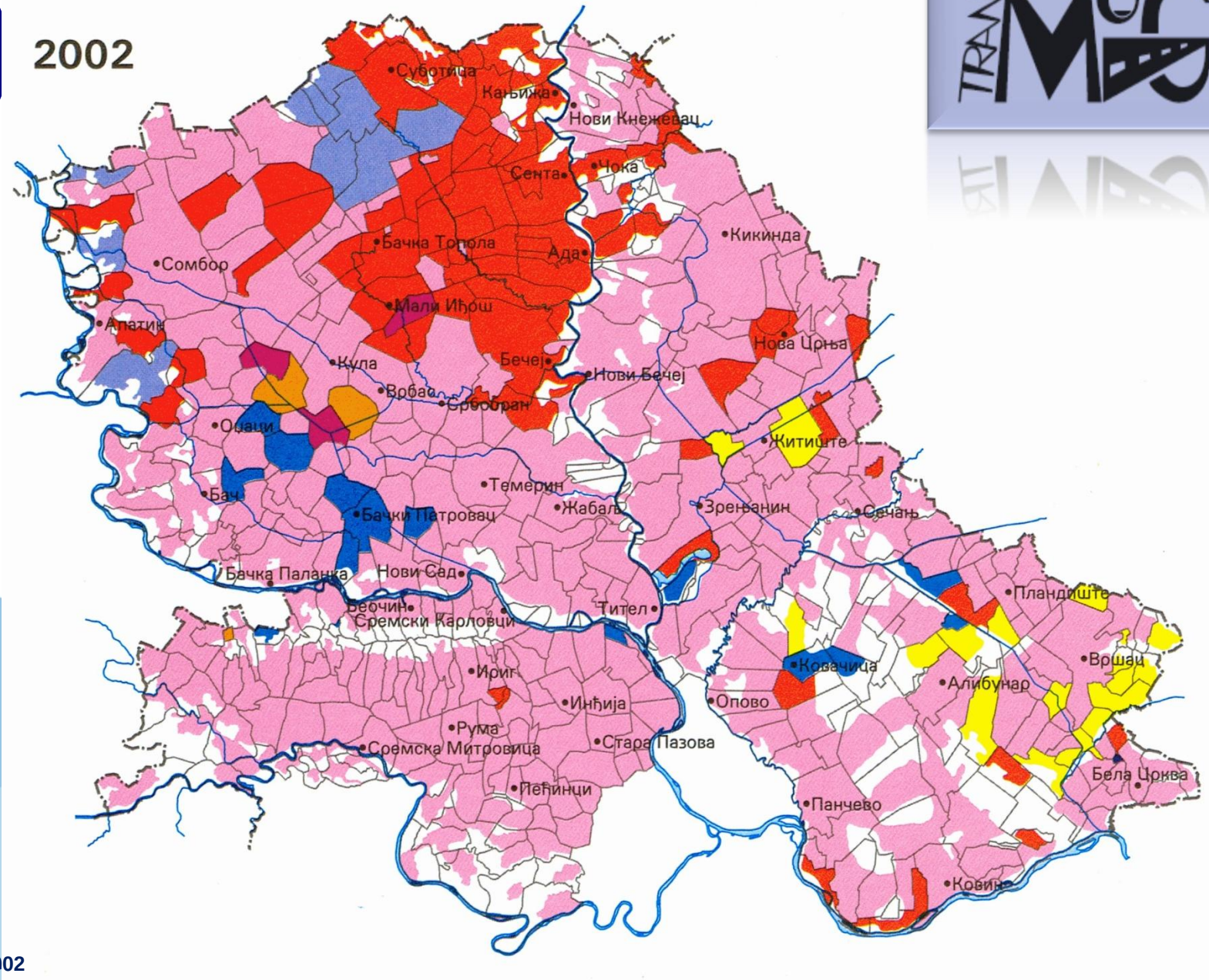

Kocsis-Kicosev, 2002

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The multinational Vojvodina

- The territory has been ethnically diverse for centuries
- Inhabited majorly by Hungarians since the 9th century
- Disputes over the territory with Serbs, Ottoman Empire (from 1526), Habsburg Monarch (from 1699)
- WW I (1918 Trianon Treaty) – Kingdom of Serbia
- WW II – re-annexed to Hungary
- Since 1944 – part of Serbia
- Today around 20 ethnic (autochtonos) minorities inhabit Vojvodina

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Hungarian migration flows in Vojvodina

- after WW I
- 1944-45: WW II – political reasons
- After 1965: economic reasons
  - Guest workers (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden)
- 1990's: political reasons
  - Civil war
- Today – still migration
  - But!! – new form of labor migration towards Hungary

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„Integrating (trans)national migrants in transition states (IMIG)” 2009-2012

- joint research project in the framework of the co-operation program SCOPES

Partners:

- *Department of Geography, University of **Bern**, Switzerland,*
- *Geographical Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, **Budapest**,*
- *Hungary, Centre for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, **Pécs**, Hungary,*
- *Department of Geography, Tourism & Hotel Management, University of **Novi Sad**, Serbia,*
- *Scientific Association for Hungarology Research, **Subotica**, Serbia*

Coordinated by Prof. Dr. Doris Wastl-Walter

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The focus of Scientific Association for Hungarology Research

Serbian-Hungarian cross-boundary mobilities:

1. Hungarian minority migrants, commuters with educational and labor purposes (towards Hungary)
   - transnationalism, networking, language issues, integration
2. Refugees arriving at Vojvodina (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia)
3. Cross-border institution relationships

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Migrants and/or commuters

1. Permanent-type migration
2. Commuting-type migration – New
   - Hungarian minority towards Hungary (towards north)
   - purposes: labor and education
   - forms: seasonal migration
     shopping tourism
     pendulum migration

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Data

-**Subjects**: 13

- 10 males and 3 females
- occupation: engineer, factory worker, PhD student, IT manager, businessman, dentist, unemployed
- age: 24-49

-**Method**: in-depth interviews

-semi-prepared interview

-snowball method

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Dimensions of transnational lifestyle

- **Transnationalism**:

  a social process, in which transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familiar, economic, social, organizational, religious, etc. across two or more societies (Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szaton 1992)

- **What features of transnational lifestyle are present?**

  Split families

  Fluid attachment to countries

  Dual-citizenship

  Regular and frequent contact with the sending country

  Multiple residents, jobs, properties, social ties and identities (!!)

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Research focus: family

- How does transnational lifestyle affect the nuclear family?
- How do they cope with transnationalism within the family?
- What factors contribute to the making of transnational family identities?

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A dimension of transnational lifestyle: family

Rationalization /1

- **Multi-local / multi-sited families** → remarkable changes in family and household organizations (residential arrangements, budget management, etc)
  - Conflict of the traditional image of family
  - Construct their own notion of family
  - Not taking family for granted
  - In the absence of daily physical proximity, it requires conscious effort and rationalization

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A dimension of transnational lifestyle: family

Rationalization /2

- Why to leave? → for better opportunities or the sheer possibility of having a workplace
- Improve the possibility of their children's future

„I couldn't find a job as a maternity nurse, because that's my occupation, you know, so I went to Szeged (Hungary) and asked at the clinic if they need any maternity nurses. And they did. So I applied." *(Katalin, 38)*

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A dimension of transnational lifestyle: family

„*Well, I didn't have a job and… and I saw a newspaper advertisement that they require factory workers in Biatorbágy (Hungary), and I thought I should try it. Then my family sad I shouldn't because that might be a fraud. But after 2 months when I still didn't have a job I applied and they employed me." (Judit, 52)*

„…here is my job, there is my home… because you just need to go after the job. It's that simple. It will rarely find you."

(Laszlo, 52)

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A dimension of transnational lifestyle: family

Effect on daily family life /1

- **The nature of parenting** → long-distance parenthood
  - linking fractured families
  - juggling responsibilities of parenting
  - emotional distress
  - sacrifice
  - creating their own notion of family

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A dimension of transnational lifestyle: family

„I was so afraid I would lose my child. He was only three years old and my husband and I had to look for jobs in another country. My mother took care of Balazs when we were... when we were abroad. I knew he was angry with us because we never left him alone for such a long time. I talked to him every day on the phone, though it was very expensive and my husband was angry with me. But, but I had to do it, you get it, right? I'm a mother. That's my first priority."

(Zsuzsa, 50)

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A dimension of transnational lifestyle: family

„I never thought it would be that hard. At the beginning at least, now it's okay, I got used to it, we got used to it. When you have nobody to share your day with. Okay, there are some friends, but they are not family, they wouldn't do anything for you, you know, anything. Family is very important in our culture, and I decided to work abroad for them. It's still hard, but I … now we learnt to cope with it, to manage..."

(Viktor, 50)

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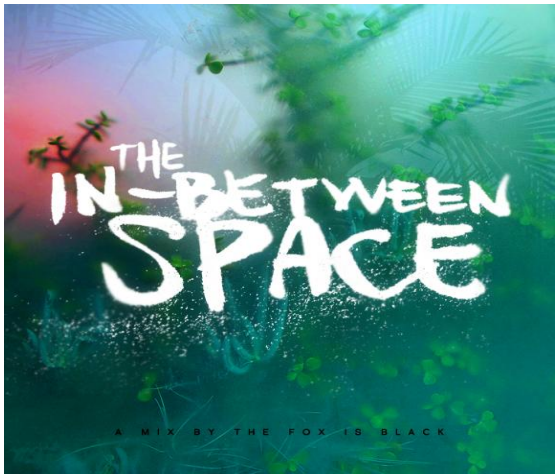
A dimension of transnational lifestyle: family

Effect on daily family life /2

- **IN-BETWEEN-SPACE**→ negotiating between the adopted and inherited ties, trying to develop social networks and identities that transcend the totalizing concept of nation in order to avoid taking sides between the two countries
  - » Frequent travels home
  - » Contacts with relatives and friends
  - » Maintaining and mixing linguistic and cultural practices



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The in-between-space

„My life completely changed. The fact that I have to live abroad, that my workplace is there. So, it turns out now that I don't feel at home neither here nor there. If I'm there I miss this, if I'm here I miss that. I'm never home." (Judit, 52)

„There is something you call homesickness. And I feel it, I feel it every day … I never want to alienate from my home. (Laszlo, 57)

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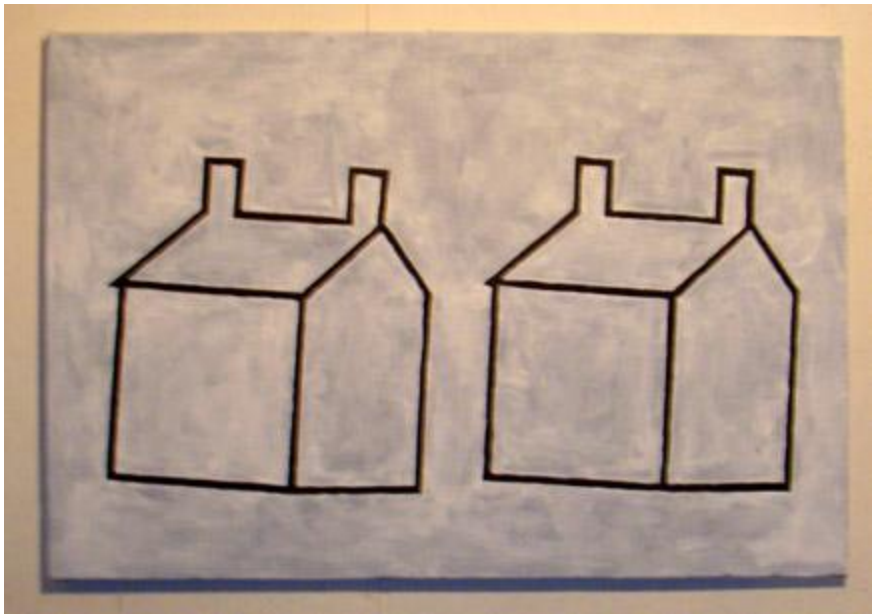
The in-between-space

„ *Well, what can I say, it costs a lot of money, a lot.. and a lot of time and effort, but, well, what I can say is that I have a certain attachment to things, to that house too, to that environment, it is very difficult to give it up. That is also mine. ” (Robert, 59)*



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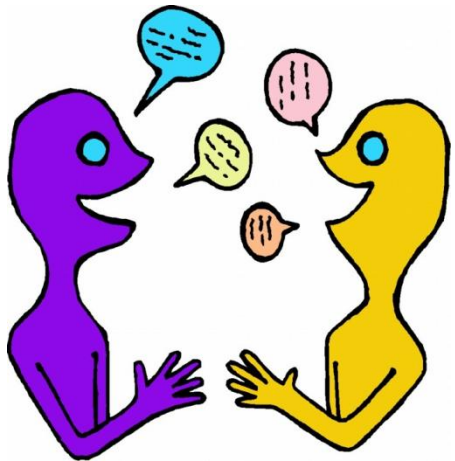
Creating and in-between-space: language

- The establishment and maintenance of social identities underlie sociolinguistic difference *(Chambers 2003)*
- Signaling membership by the choice of the appropriate linguistic features in opposition to others
- Speakers construct their identities by careful choice of the appropriate linguistic features that will convey the specific social information that identifies them as part of a particular speech community



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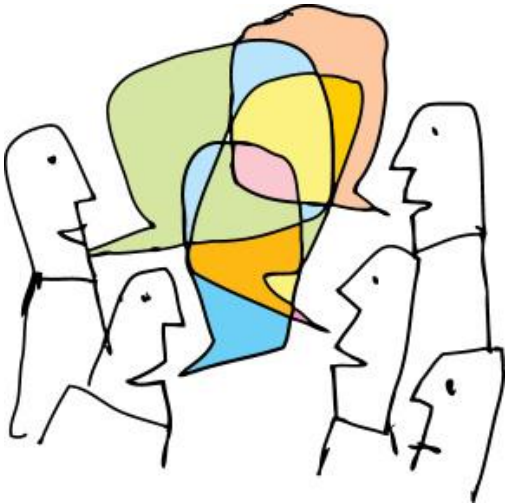
Creating and in-between-space: language

- **How did family members of commuting families use language to construct the in-between-space?**
  - „we invent new words”
  - „ traditionally, we are all multilinguals, so we practice that within the family too”
  - Mixing Serbian, standard Hungarian spoken in Hungary and Hungarian spoken in Vojvodina, code-mixing



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Conclusion

- Transnational families are split between countries of origin and destination, yet strong emotional ties are maintained
- Multi-sited families living transnational lifestyles develop specific social practices and identities that enable the creation of an in-between-space in order to maintain and re-establish their own family relations

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Thank you for your attention!