

Extended abstract for a Poster session

Role of the ethnicity in the marriages: case of Latvia

Latvia's multicultural and multi-ethnic society has historically played an important role in population statistics, sociological and demographical studies. After the restoration of independence in the Baltic States, when political, economic and sociological reforms took place, studies on ethnicity in the socio-demographic processes quickly developed in these countries.

Ethnic background of individuals in Latvia has been declared in all ten population censuses since 1920 and has been registered in vital statistics for almost a hundred years. That tradition continues in 21st century by keeping ethnicity as a variable in the population register, databases and surveys. Ethnic origin of individuals together with citizenship and nationality are among the key variables used in socio-demographic statistics (Ponomarjova, Kruminis, 2016).

In many European countries, the term "nationality" actually means "ethnicity", while Latvian citizens at the same time could have a different ethnicity. There are several procedures on how a person's ethnicity is recorded: it is entered into the population register based off the civil status documents (i.e. birth certificate and marriage certificates) and passport (in this relation Latvia is the only country of EU which provides option to enter ethnicity information in this document). These factors make Latvia's case interesting to study.

The first official statistical records of the ethnically mixed marriages appeared in 1930s, when 13,3% of all marriages were registered between spouses of different ethnicity (Skujenieks, 1938). During the Soviet period, hardly any statistics on mixed marriages were available. Some researchers calculated that e.g. number of intermarriages between two largest minorities Latvians and Russians was about 17% of the total marriages annually (Monden, Smits, 2005); around 30% of marriages involving Latvians were of mixed nationality in 1988 (although only 17 % of all marrying Latvians in 1988 entered into mixed marriages) (International Business Publication, 2013). Awareness of ethnicity appeared when Latvia regained its independence, the number of mixed marriages increased at that time, especially between Latvian-Russian ethnicities.

At the end of 1990s several studies explored tendencies of the ethnically mixed marriages (Zvidriņš, Monden & Smits, Gorenburg) and behaviour (socio-economic determinants) of spouses and descendants in this marriages (Åsland) in Latvia. However, relatively little literature analysed the process of ethnicity formation in the multiethnic families in Latvia, tendencies of mixed marriages and its interaction of ethnicity of a newborn children in these families at the beginning of the 21st century

Individuals, and particularly children who grew up in multiethnic families, may perceive themselves to have multiple or hierarchical ethnic identities. Similarly, marriages that appear to include partners of two different nationalities according to legal document entries

may be more complicated if one or both of the partners are themselves the children of interethnic marriages (Gorenburg, 2014).

Aim: to summarize the changes the tendencies of ethnically mixed marriages in Latvia since the collapse Soviet Union and to answer the question - are the ethnically mixed marriages in Latvia disappearing?

Questions to be answered within the study:

- How ethnicity is allocated for to a new-born child in the mixed marriages?
- How dynamics of mixed marriages have changed since the end of 1990s?
- Is ethnicity diminishing as the result of mixed marriages?
- How the selection of descendants ethnicity in the mixed families affects future development of ethnical structure of population? How this selection influences statistical figures and facts of the other demographic processes (population dynamics, family dynamics)?

Data and tasks: first of all, the difference of ethnic structure in the marriages in Latvia at the end of 20th century and current period of time within the titular nationality (Latvians) and numerically largest minorities (Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, Jews, Gypsies) will be provided.

The study will be based on the data from statistical offices and registries. The main trends of the mixed marriages at the beginning of 21st century will be determined and compared with the situation at the end of previous century. Comparative analysis using the marriage tables from Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia will be done – the tables contain information on ethnicity of brides and grooms for marriages registered in 1970-2014.

The procedure on how ethnicity is allocated to children (descendants) in ethnically mixed families will be explored through the use of Latvian legislation and legal documents.

Preliminary results:

Mixed marriages affect future composition of ethnic groups in Latvia - the smaller ethnic groups are diminishing as the result of assimilation with Russian minorities. In the future the proportion of Latvians will increase regularly, at the same time the proportion of the larger minorities will decrease.

Statistic on the mixed marriages shows that during the last five years around 20% of Latvian brides and grooms choose partner with the other ethnicity (Central Statistical Bureau).

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*This presented information is a part of my on-going research project on Ethnic differentiation of demographic processes in Latvia.