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# Post-WWII migration flows in micro-perspective: The case of the east Slovak small town Medzev

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**Abstract** | Background: During World War II and in its aftermath, Central Europe was exposed to huge migration waves. People of different religions and various mother tongues had to leave their homes and newcomers settled in the abandoned places. This paper focuses on a small town, Medzev, located on the southern edge of Spiš (eastern Slovakia), which was until the end of World War II inhabited mainly by a German-speaking population. Although the region faced emigration waves in the 19th century, it was during and after World War II when local people experienced forced migration on the order of the authorities. Local German-speaking inhabitants were "evacuated" to northern Moravia because of the approaching Red Army in autumn 1944. During the next year they tried to come back home, only to be interned in local concentration camps. Those, who remained in town faced in the first months of 1945 removal to the Soviet Union (USSR). During 1946 and 1947, the inhabitants of Medzev tried to escape from the state-ordered expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia. However, the most important migration flow which changed the linguistic character of the town came only during the 1960s, when the larger metalworking plant Strojsmalt was established in Medzev. The factory offered a wide range of job opportunities that stimulated flows of economic migration of Slovak-, Ruthenian- or Hungarian-speaking workers from neighboring villages. Objectives: While exploring local post-conflict and post-migration settings, this paper focuses on everyday life in the intimate small town community. How was the Medzev population influenced by post-war migration flows? What effects did the economic migration connected with socialist industrializationave on the prevalently German-speaking community? Conclusion: Drawing on archival sources and oral testimonies, this paper aims to show the micro-perspective of the post-war migration flows and interactions in an east Slovak small town. It claims that the dominance of German speakers in the remote town of Medzev was not ended by the postwar expulsion in late 1940s, but rather by economic migration flows connected with socialist industrialization in following decades. However, the relations between local German speakers with job-seeking Slovak "newcomers" were not conflictual and both groups adapted to each other. This paper argues that in the examined micro space, people were connected mainly through their working experience in the factory Strojsmalt and lived together without major conflicts. During the period of state socialism, it was mainly membership in the Communist Party that mattered, not the mother tongue.

**Keywords** | Migration, German Minority, Microhistory, Expulsion, Industrialization, Czechoslovakia, Medzev

## Background

The small town of Medzev is located on the southern edge of Spiš, a mountain region in eastern Slovakia.[1] The area had always been a multilingual space, inhabited by German, Slovak, Ruthenian and Hungarian speakers.[2] The town of Medzev itself was linguistically rather homogenous, with the dominance of the local dialect of German (*Mantakisch*).[3] The dialect remained the main language of communication in this remote town until the 20th century despite the strong influence of Magyarization, an attempt to implement the Hungarian language into all spheres of public life during the end of the 19th century when Medzev was part of the Hungarian Kingdom within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[4] The prevalence of the German language, however, slowly disappeared during the second half of the 20th century, mainly as a result of postwar migration flows. The local population was affected by the forced expulsion[5] of Germans after World War II as well as postwar industrialization that stimulated economic migration.

## Objectives

This contribution focuses on postwar migration flows from a micro-perspective and aims to show their impacts on everyday life in the intimate small town community. The town of Medzev in eastern Slovakia was chosen for the micro-historical study because of several local specifics. Firstly, the town was inhabited by a predominantly German-speaking population, which remained the majority even after the turbulent postwar years, an almost unique case in Czechoslovakia. Secondly, the mix of local languages, identities and loyalties that have been present in the town for centuries, and further reinforced by the economic migration associated with the industrialization of the region in the 1960s, provides an excellent example for studying changes in society after migration waves. In this paper, I ask the questions: How was the Medzev population affected by post-war migration flows? What effects did the economic migration connected with socialist industrialization have on the prevalently German-speaking community?

Previous scholarship on the situation of Germans in postwar Slovakia indicated that the internment and expulsion of Germans from some areas of Spiš was to a certain extent unsuccessful.[6] Therefore this paper builds on the hypothesis that the dominance of German speakers in the remote town of Medzev was not ended by postwar expulsion, but rather by migration flows connected with socialist industrialization in the following decades.[7]

This paper reacts to recent calls for micro-historical analyses of war and postwar situation of the German inhabitants of Slovakia.[8] Slovak as well as German scholars devoted their works mainly to the position of Germans from the state level,[9] but there is a lack of detailed insight into the post-war development of the German population in Slovakia from the micro-perspective.[10] The topic of population changes in the regions affected by the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia was explored especially in the context of the Czech lands.[11] Regarding postwar population transfers in Slovakia, historians focused rather on the question of population exchange between Slovakia and Hungary due to its greater impact on the social structure of Slovakia.[12] The postwar development of remote towns and villages in eastern Slovakia remains underexamined and this paper wishes to point out the importance of understanding the changes of population structure at the local level. It concentrates on the mechanisms that worked during periods of societal changes and explores strategies of local people to avoid waves of forced migrations or to cope with newcomers with a different mother tongue. By illustrating the local community's response to migration flows, this paper aims to contribute to the research on the processes taking place in local environments, which have been investigated, for example, by Max Bergholz or Omer Bartov.[13]

This contribution takes World War II as its point of departure. The events and migration flows during the war were crucial factors that determined the new postwar order as well as social relations in Medzev. The core part of this paper is postwar migration flows that significantly affected lives of the town's inhabitants and changed the linguistic character of the town. This paper focuses on two types of migration—forced and economic, as conceptualized by Dirk Hoerder, Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen.[14] Forced migration refers to the state organized transfer of people, who had no freedom of decision making in this process. In the case of postwar Medzev, it was mainly the expulsion of German speakers after World War II. On the other hand, the town's social structure was influenced also by economic migration caused by industrialization of the region during the 1960s.[15] The expansion of job opportunities, mainly in heavy industry, attracted Slovak speakers from neighboring villages. The economic migration, however, does not automatically mean that it was voluntary. The movement of people was not ordered by the state, and it involved decision making of individuals, but these individuals often had only limited possibilities to find work and earn a living in rural mountain areas of Spiš in eastern Slovakia.[16]

Bearing in mind the dangers of methodological nationalism of migration history, this contribution avoids analyzing the town's postwar development through the lens of ethnic or national categories.[17] I regard the "groupism" of people into the national categories as inconsistent with the reality of a town whose multilingual inhabitants identified diversely.[18] However, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of respective linguistic categories for local people, because, as Richard Jenkins puts it "groups are real if people think they are."[19] Inhabitants of Medzev identified themselves mainly on the basis of their mother tongue, which often did not correspond with the nationality they indicated in the censuses. Most inhabitants until the second half of the 20$^{th}$ century used the local dialect of German (*Mantakisch*) in the town's public space as well as in private conversations. They also actively used more languages in line with the current official language (Hungarian or Slovak). Inhabitants of Slovak mother tongue coming to Medzev in the postwar period only rarely mastered the *Mantakisch* dialect. Therefore, I use the terms German and Slovak speakers, which I find most suitable for addressing the respective groups of people.[20] The paper is based on the assumption that the groups of German and Slovak speakers were not homogeneous and the degrees of identification with these groups varied. However, the boundaries based on the mother tongue were to a certain extent important in the categorization of local inhabitants (almost impenetrable for the Slovak speakers) and often determined their postwar fates.[21]

This micro study is based on archival sources from the State Archive in Košice[22] combined with oral history research, which I conducted in Medzev. I used the archival sources to follow the top-down decision making process as well as institutional viewpoint of the respective events connected with the town of Medzev and its economic and social development. To gain the bottom-up perspective that I regard crucial when studying the impacts of migration flows on everyday life in a small community, this study relies on personal accounts. During 2016 and 2021, I collected 19 biographic interviews with Medzev inhabitants born between the years 1929 and 1962. The interviews were conducted in Slovak language, which is nowadays the most natural language for narrators in formal communication, regardless of whether the narrator's mother tongue was Slovak or the local dialect of German (*Mantakisch*). The narrators were chosen through the "snowballing" method and the majority of them were members of the German/*Mantakisch* speaking community. The interviews were recorded in line with the Statement on Ethics by the Oral History Association, including informed consent.[23] Quoted narrators also gave consent with the indication of names, but due to sensitivity of some of the topics in the town's microspace, I decided to mention the names of narrators with initials.

**Experience with migration during World War II**

In Czechoslovakia, the end of the 1930s was marked by political decisions and events that shook people's lives. The borders of the state changed, and Czechoslovakia disappeared from the map. After the Munich Agreement in September 1938, Nazi Germany annexed border areas of the Czech lands, which were incorporated to Germany as *Reichsgau Sudetenland.* Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia gained autonomy within the residual Czechoslovakia, but soon had lost their southern areas to Hungary according to the First Vienna Award. In March 1939, Nazi Germany occupied the remaining territory of the Czech lands and established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Consequently Slovakia, heavily subordinated to Nazi Germany, declared independence and the common state ceased to exist.

The turbulent 1930s and subsequent World War II brought to Central Europe unprecedent outbreaks of violence, be it persecution of Jews and political opponents or ethnic cleansing.[24] However in the southeastern part of the Slovak state, the small town of Medzev with its almost 4,500 inhabitants seemed to stand aside from the horrors of war.[25] On the one hand, the economic situation in the town worsened as a result of the border change after the First Vienna Award in 1938, which cut off Medzev from traditional trade and administrative ties.[26] On the other hand, during the first years of war the inhabitants' lives were not in danger. The battle lines were too far away and in Medzev there were no Jewish families, who would be endangered by the anti-Jewish measures and extermination.[27]

The breakpoint however came after 1943, when the Nazi Germany military campaign in the USSR failed. Medzev men, whose majority declared German nationality in the census of 1930, were to be enlisted to the *Waffen-SS* units to fight on the side of Nazi Germany.[28] In reaction to conscription, many men escaped to the surrounding forests and went into hiding. Some even founded resistance groups and joined communist partisan organizations, such as the partisan unit “Ernst Thälmann”.[29] This engagement in World War II either on the side of the army of Nazi Germany or on the side of partisans served as an important clue in the categorization of people later during the postwar period.

Escaping and hiding therefore became regular in the lives of Medzev inhabitants from 1944. As the Red Army approached the territory of the Slovak State, Nazi authorities ordered the evacuation of German population from Slovakia, which was to be carried out by military units of the leading authority of the Slovak Germans—*Deutsche Partei*.[30] Medzev inhabitants were subjected to the first wave of involuntary migration. During the autumn of 1944, whole families were transported to northern Moravia, then part of Nazi Germany as *Reichsgau Sudetenland*.

Those who remained in town experienced the passages of armies, be it soldiers of the Wehrmacht or soldiers of the Red Army. Despite fear and inconvenience with accommodation of soldiers of Nazi Germany in their own houses, Medzev inhabitants did not face widespread violence. The more or less secure living conditions in Medzev changed in January 1945, when the Red Army arrived. About 150 people were dragged off to coal mines in the USSR and the majority did not survive the harsh conditions.[31] Therefore, at the eve of World War II, Medzev faced several waves of forced migration. However, painful events and life on the move did not end with peace time. Persecution of German speakers was to continue in the postwar period.

## Post-World War II Migration Flows

*"So we got home, but our house was already occupied. So we went to grandpa's. Father started shaving and then they came with a machine gun* – [they wanted to take members of my family] *to Lager. It was Schmotzer, the communist, partisan, and one or two more.* […] *Here in Medzev in the Lager, they gave such a round ‚N'. My mother had two, one on her back, she was a big German."* J. S. (*1930)[32]

This excerpt from a biographic interview points us directly to the reality of post-war Medzev. In the summer of 1945, immediately after the war, people were on the move across the entirety of Central Europe, Medzev included.[33] Men came back from the war and also families of evacuated Germans from Slovakia tried to return home. The way from Moravia was dangerous, notoriously known is the case of Přerov, where more than 260 Germans from Slovakia were killed as they tried to come back home.[34] Evacuated families from Medzev succeeded in reaching their town during the summer and autumn of 1945. But as mentioned in the interview, the hardship of people did not end after their return. They were again forced to leave their homes and interned in concentration camps. These camps were set up in various parts of Slovakia and served to gather the Germans before their planned expulsion. In June 1945 one camp was also established in Medzev, where local returnees were interned.[35] But who in the Medzev community, which was in majority German speaking, decided about the internment of people? How did the exclusion of German speakers work in the local environment? During spring and early summer 1945, Local Administrative Committees (*Miestna správna komisia*, MSK) issued the decisions of internment of returnees to the camps. During June 1945 the responsibility lay with District Administrative Committees (*Okresná správna komisia*, OSK). The decisions were later executed by local police departments – National Security (*Národná Bezpečnosť*, NB). Despite the attempts to unify the process of internment, the selection of German speakers was often based on independent decisions of the local authorities and the process was in many cases unrestrained. As Soňa Gabzdilová and Milan Olejník indicated in their research about postwar concentration camps in northern Spiš, local authorities were in many cases reluctant to persecute the German speakers and helped them to escape and hide.[36] The rightness of appointment of the members of MSK by the authorities of OSK was also a frequently raised question. In Medzev, an anonymous author writing on behalf of the entire Medzev community accused the chairman of the MSK of "hosting Germans during Christmas 1944" and criticized that "his wife is one of the greatest Germans." He added that "the people detained in the camps are less culprits than those appointed to the highest positions" and called for "proper community leadership that would represent power in the spirit of today's state-building."[37]

In these statements as well as in the excerpt from the interview above, it is possible to notice discrepancies between the importance of national categories and the relevance of political connections that repeatedly appeared in Medzev postwar history. The narrator above talks about a German-speaking partisan perpetrator (based on his name Schmotzer), who was in charge of executing orders of the new postwar authorities against the German population. The narrator stressed that those who came to intern their family were communists, partisans and locals. Therefore, the interview points to the postwar division of local society and persecution not according to linguistic or national criteria, but rather according to political affiliation and supposed involvement in the war.

Political affiliation was also important during the execution of the decrees of the Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš regarding the German and Hungarian minority in the state. According to the decrees No. 33/1945 and 108/1945 Coll. issued in August and October 1945, people of German

nationality who did not fight for the liberation of Czechoslovakia or did not suffer under Nazi terror were to be deprived of the Czechoslovak citizenship and their property was to be confiscated. The irreversible collective punishment of the Germans was to be expulsion, which as an act of mass forced migration ended the centuries-long presence of German speakers in East-Central Europe.[38] The expulsion was approved by the representatives of the Allied Powers in November 1945 according to the principles agreed to at the Potsdam Conference. From the legal point of view, all persons who lost their Czechoslovak citizenship according to the decree No. 33/1945 Coll. were subjected to expulsion.[39] Affected people had the possibility to ask OSK for a provisional certificate of their Czechoslovak citizenship, which would protect them from the transport. The request for a certificate was complemented by a certificate of preservation (*Vysvedčenie o zachovalosti*) issued by the MSK, whose decisions were often influenced by commissions of partisan organizations and the Communist Party.[40]

The actual deportation of Germans from Czechoslovakia was enshrined in regulations issued by the Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior, for the case of Slovakia in cooperation with the Slovak Commission for the Interior.[41] On the local level, the decisions about who would be expelled were issued by commissioners of the Settlement Office for Slovakia. During the spring of 1946 they together with members of the OSK and MSK and with the help of local National Security (NB) officers compiled lists of all persons of German nationality. On the basis of property data, the language spoken in the family, and the nationality that the person designated as the head of the family cited in the census in certain years, whole families were proposed to be removed.

During the main phases of expulsion in 1946 together with additional transfers of 1947, the majority of Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia. In the case of Medzev, more than 150 families were according to archival sources identified as being subject to deportation, but most German speakers remained.[42] The expulsion of Germans from Medzev was often not based on their once declared nationality, language, or wrongdoing during the war, but rather on their political affiliation. That was also commented on during the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská národná rada*, SNR) session. During the 9$^{th}$ session of the SNR on 27 June 1947, a member of the SNR, Michal Géci, said: *"Medzev, Moldava district. The Commission, acting on expulsion, did not act objectively, but party-wise, regardless of national and state interest."*[43]

According to the census of 1950, Medzev had 3611 inhabitants, around 750 fewer than in 1930.[44] Despite war losses, abduction to the USSR and expulsion, the majority of German speakers stayed in Medzev. In 1947, in an audit report about a confiscated factory in Medzev, the audit commission wrote: "*The company's employees are recruited almost exclusively from German and partly Hungarian nationalities, as only a small percentage of Slovaks live in this region."*[45] Therefore, the German speakers in Medzev by and large managed to avoid the biggest flow of postwar forced migration in East-Central Europe. They stayed in their hometown, but many of them were deprived of their citizenship and property on the basis of the Beneš decrees. Two bigger factories, *Bodenlos* and *Pöhm*, were confiscated in 1946; a year later it was 33 private hammer mills, the traditional livelihood of the locals.[46] People in Medzev faced harsh economic conditions connected to general postwar economic crisis as well as the confiscation of their property. They feared to speak German in public and were anxious about their future.

**Migration Flows during the Industrialization of Eastern Slovakia**

During 1947 and 1948, Medzev Communists in connection with the nationwide Communist coup in February 1948 gained power. The Communist Party on the state level introduced the system of central planning, and society was to be transformed according to Communist ideology. Although the Germans continued to be perceived negatively by the new regime, the Communist Party

revised its stance on the German minority and in April 1948 expanded the circle of potential candidates for restoration of citizenship. The basic condition for regaining citizenship was a sufficient knowledge of the Slovak (or Czech) language, which meant that members of the German minority who did not know the state language had to take so-called reslovakization courses.[47] During the 1950s, the ban on the use of the German language in public was lifted and Germans could apply for citizenship without proving knowledge of the state language.[48] After 1953, when by law all persons of German nationality residing in the territory of Czechoslovakia acquired citizenship, German speakers had become politically equal to their compatriots. However, their confiscated property was not given back and the property conditions in the town changed again due to the further nationalization of private property, liquidation of private business and collectivization.

At the central level, the Communist authorities prioritized the industrialization of Slovakia, whose territory should have served as a base of heavy industrial production in case of a conflict with the West.[49] But the construction of new factories was often chaotic and without thorough analysis of local capacities. The financial collapse of the metallurgic plant (*Hutný Kombinát*, HUKO) in Veľká Ida near Košice, the center of eastern Slovakia, provides an infamous example of this.[50] Generally, there was enough manpower in Slovakia, but it overwhelmingly lacked skills and raw materials such as iron ore or coal.[51] The opposite was true in Medzev, where metalworking had a centuries-long tradition and local blacksmiths enjoyed a high reputation for their skills. However, the now state-owned factories were not modernized, and they were not able to fulfill centrally set plans.[52] Local hammer mills lacked blacksmiths, their former owners. In 1947, after the confiscation of the mills, local authorities appointed provisional national administrators who should have cared for the mills, but who instead often misused their power and plundered the property.[53] In Medzev, the national administrators of confiscated hammer mills often changed and that created chaos in the local ownership structure. As stated in the "Final statement of the hammer mills in Medzev" from 1949: *"National administrators Mr. J.H. and Mr. J.M. never took over the national administration, because the passing national administrator L.K. did not hand over the confiscated hammers to his successors, and we have the impression that he did not perform this function himself. The hammer mills are usually in very poor condition and out of service."*[54]

The economic situation of the town's industry in the early 1950s further deteriorated. The worsening conditions in the old factory as well as grief over the decline of local blacksmithing was described in the diary of Ján Gedeon, one of the workers of that time:

*"In 1958, as a simple blacksmith, I decided to write a letter to the authorities in Prague, describing the working conditions in this factory.* […] *The gentlemen from Prague did not negotiate.* […] *Steelworks will be built in Košice in two years, they said.* […] *The production of Medzev will be relocated to a country where there is little industry. As I heard that, my heart grew heavy."*[55]

A fundamental change to the Medzev society and economy was brought by industrial growth during the Second Five-Year Plan (1956–1960). In this period, 38 new factories were built and 43 reconstructed on the territory of Slovakia.[56] This included also the famous East Slovak Ironworks (*Východoslovenské železiarne*, VSŽ) in Košice, as described in the excerpt from the interview above.[57] In 1955, authorities in Prague also decided about the construction of a new metalworking factory in Medzev, what Ján Gedeon described in his diary in a very emotional way:

*"At that time a young man stepped into the room.* […] *He came from the district committee of the Communist Party in Košice. With one sentence he solved the whole situation. He said: 'In Medzev there will be built this year!' A stone fell from my heart."*[58]

The decision to build a new factory in Medzev in the second half of 1950s was already based on the knowledge of local conditions and the blacksmithing tradition. In the project of the construction of a new factory *Tatrasmalt Nižný Medzev* (later *Strojsmalt*), the authors wrote:

"*Blacksmithing is a long-standing tradition in the region of Medzev, so the expertise of cadres for the projected scope of production is ensured both in terms of quality and quantity. The plant is the only source of livelihood for the local population and therefore the construction of the plant is of great social importance outside of economic importance.*"[59]

The project investors therefore acknowledged the importance of local skilled workers, in fact in majority German speakers, who stayed behind the success of the factory.[60] *Strojsmalt* was in operation from 1962 and its opening significantly changed the social situation in the town for the next decades. In the first years, the skilled workers employed in the factory were mainly German speakers, blacksmiths and former owners of the confiscated hammer mills. During the 1950s, the nationality question was sidelined and German speakers with communist affiliation were able to establish themselves even in local administration and business. The leading example is Ján Gedeon, the author of the above-quoted diary, who became the future director of the newly built factory *Strojsmalt* and stayed in this position for 20 years (1965 – 1985).

*Strojsmalt* offered a wide range of job opportunities that stimulated waves of labor migration from neighboring villages. These were inhabited mainly by Slovak, Hungarian and Ruthenian speakers, who now settled in Medzev. This flow of people could be characterized as inner migration from rural areas to industrialized towns and cities which was during the 1960s an important source of manpower across all of Czechoslovakia.[61] For coming workers the factory offered education in local vocational school and accommodation in newly built panel buildings, which solved a years-long housing crisis.[62] The factory soon became the biggest employer in the region with more than 700 employees in the 1980s.[63] This labor migration flow supported the population growth in Medzev and influenced the local linguistic situation. As narrators recalled, the local dialect of German (*Mantakisch*) slowly disappeared from the streets of Medzev. There were many reasons for the broadening of the Slovak language—closure of German classes in the local elementary school after 1945, education in Slovak language, a reslovakization campaign, antipathies towards usage of German language in public, and the availability of media in Slovak language. But it was also the influx of Slovak-speaking workers. The establishment of *Strojsmalt* was considered to be the cause of immigration of Slovak speakers also by members of the German-speaking community, as noted for example in the interview with E.G. (*1962).

*"Then a large* Strojsmalt *plant was built here in the 1960s, even though there were not as many employees here, a new housing estate was built, there were a lot of immigrants, that is, I mean by immigrants that Slovaks came here."* E.G. (*1962)[64]

However, Slovak newcomers were not mistreated on the basis of their language by their German-speaking colleagues in *Strojsmalt*. Long-term friendships also emerged among colleagues across language groups, as stated by M.B. (*1931).

*"Here we were all from Medzev, so* [we spoke] *Mantakisch.* […] *Later I got one colleague, he was Slovak.*[…] *We were very good friends. And at that moment I was already able to talk with them* [in Slovak]*."*[65] M.B. (*1931)

Among newcomers to Medzev were also German speakers from more distant German communities, which often resulted in humorous situations. The dialects of German (*Mantakisch*) were very similar and German speakers from Medzev as well as from other parts of Spiš used to called themselves "Mantaks" as appeared in the interview with narrator Š.M. (*1952) who came to

work in *Strojsmalt* from Mníšek and Hnilcom.

*"I came* [to Strojsmalt] *and at the gatehouse the women said in Mantakisch that one Slovak had come again, he would probably work for us. I understood them, they said I was immigrant. And then I greeted one of them in Mantakisch and said thank you for the welcome. Thus, they knew that we were coming here, but that a Mantak came from Mníšek, who knows the language."* ***[66]***

Thus, the relations among German-speaking workers in the factory were warmer, because of the linguistic closeness. However, in the working environment in *Strojsmalt* Medzev, multilinguality was not a source of conflict. Local German speakers, who after the war still represented the majority in town as well as in the factory, adapted to the Slovak-speaking newcomers. The factory and its labor opportunities served as a place to bring people of different language groups closer together. Neither group was persecuted on the basis of language and in work, they adapted to each other.

Postwar industrialization of eastern Slovakia, directed by central Communist authorities, had an important influence on the economic development of the region. Thanks to the investment to the new building of the factory *Strojsmalt* in Medzev, local skilled workers and experienced blacksmiths, mainly German speakers, continued in the centuries-long tradition of metalworking. The factory also attracted job seekers from neighboring villages, who spoke mainly Slovak. Because of this flow of economic migration, the German language slowly disappeared from the public, and in Medzev Slovak language started to dominate.

**Conclusion**

Since the last months of World War II, German-speaking inhabitants of the east Slovak town of Medzev have been on the move. The people experienced waves of forced migration, be it evacuation to northern Moravia, abduction to the USSR, removal to concentration camps or expulsion. The aim of this article was to show the impacts of postwar migration flows in a micro-perspective and point to the unrestrained decision making in local settings. The paper has shown that the expulsion of Germans during 1946 and 1947 did not hit the local population as definitively as was the usual case in Czechoslovakia. Although the majority of Germans were expelled from the state and never returned, in Medzev most of German-speaking inhabitants remained. Local political authorities decided about the persecution of people often on the basis of political orientation or personal relations, rather than actual wrongdoing of a person during World War II. German speakers in Medzev mainly managed to escape from expulsion, and, despite the postwar persecution such as citizenship revocation or confiscation of property, they stayed in their hometown.

The significant change to the life of German speakers in Medzev was brought by the industrialization of the region. During the 1960s the new factory *Strojsmalt* was opened in Medzev and stimulated the economic migration from neighboring villages. The job-seeking newcomers were mainly Slovak speakers, and their arrival slowly changed the linguistic situation in town where Slovak started to dominate. Therefore, this paper confirmed the hypothesis that the dominance of German speakers in the remote town of Medzev was not ended by the postwar expulsion in late 1940s, but rather by economic migration flows connected with socialist industrialization in the following decades.

However, the relations between local German speakers with job-seeking Slovak "newcomers" were not conflictual and both groups adapted to each other. Although the causes and consequences of postwar migration flows are often interpreted in national terms and presented as conflicts between national groups, this paper provided a different perspective. It argued that in the examined micro space, people were connected mainly through their working experience in the factory *Strojsmalt*

and lived together without major conflicts. During the period of state socialism, it was mainly membership in the Communist Party that mattered, not the mother tongue.

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[2] See ŠOLTÉS, Peter. *Tri jazyky, štyri konfesie: etnická a konfesionálna pluralita na Zemplíne, Spiši a v Šariši.* Bratislava : Pro Historia, 2009.

[3] See MEIER, Jörg. Die deutschen Dialekte in der Zips/Spiš Anmerkungen zur Sprachinsel- und Sprachkontaktforschung. In STELLMACHER, Dieter (Ed.). *Dialektologie zwischen Tradition und Neuansätzen*. Stuttgart : Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000, pp. 362-386.

[4] Generally, the German minority did not regard Magyarization as problematic and commonly used Hungarian in adapting to the new conditions, which primarily meant the increase of economic and political opportunities. KOKORÁK, Ján. *Die deutsche Minderheit in der Slowakei 1918 – 1945*. Hamburg : Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2013, pp. 33-35. See also KMEŤ, Miroslav. Assimilation, Migration Processes, Mobility, and Modernization in Historic Hungary. In ŠUTAJ, Štefan et al. (Eds.). *Key Issues of Slovak and Hungarian History. (A View of Slovak Historians)*. Prešov : Universum, 2011, pp. 168-183; HENSCHEL, Frank. *'Das Fluidum der Stadt...' Urbane Lebenswelten in Kassa/Košice/Kaschau zwischen Sprachenvielfalt und Magyarisierung 1867 – 1918*. München : Collegium Carolinum, 2017; PUTTKAMER, Joachim von. *Schulalltag und nationale Integration in Ungarn. Slowaken, Rumänen und Siebenbürger Sachsen in Auseinandersetzung mit der ungarischen Staatsidee, 1867 – 1914.* München : Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, 2003.

[5] For the forced transfer of Germans from Czechoslovakia, I use the term "expulsion" in line with contemporary publications on this topic in English language. For example AHONEN, Pertti et al. *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath*. Oxford : Routledge, 2008.

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