

Cultural and Language Heritage of Czech Expat Communities in Contemporary Bosnia and Croatia

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the perception of the origin and evaluation of the importance of cultural heritage among the youngest generations in the traditional expat communities in two rural areas of the former Yugoslavian countries. Based on semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, documents (archives, periodicals) and personal experience from living and teaching in the Balkans, it also analyses the practical involvement of children and young people in organizations, participation at traditional Czech events, the role of minority institutions in their everyday life, contacts with the country of origin etc. The East Croatian region around Daruvar (Slavonia) is home to approximately 8,000 Czech expats. Their presence dates back to the second half of the 18th century. Current children are between 4th and 7th generation expats living outside of the Czech lands. A few hundreds of people with Czech origins, still living in villages in North Bosnia, belong largely to one of the last religiously motivated waves of migration. These Catholics, having colonized less cultivated parts of Russia refused to be forcefully converted, and instead followed the call to populate the new protectorate of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy (the former Ottoman Empire region). All these Czech language islands, having survived several cruel wars and re-emigrations, still preserve (in a though slightly varied way) the culture and language of the country of their origin, while at the same time critically facing assimilation. Mgr. et Mgr. Bc. Marie Štěpánová is a PhD student at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic).