

Pika Horvat Mithans in Neža Ferlinc z Gimnazije Slovenj Gradec sta raziskovali slovenske migracije v Južno Ameriko, kjer živi okrog 30.000 prebivalcev slovenskega izvora, ki ohranjajo svojo nacionalno identiteto v okviru številnih slovenskih društev.

SLOVENES IN SOUTH AMERICA

by **Pika Horvat Mithans and Neža Ferlinc**

There are approximately 30 thousand people of Slovenian origin living in South America. They migrated there in three big waves – before the first world war, between both world wars and in the period after the second world war. The country with the most Slovenian descendants is Argentina.



PHOTO 1, Slovenes in South America

ARGENTINA

Migrant groups

The Slovenes in Argentina are descendants of three main groups of migrants that arrived from Slovenia. The first Slovenes moved to Argentina in the 19th century, more precisely in the late 1860s, when an agreement was reached between Austria-

Hungary and Argentina. Based on the latter Slovenian farmers settled in the province of Entre Rios.

A smaller group of Slovenians emigrated in the early 20th century, but the most Slovene migrants moved to Argentina in the period between both wars. A big portion of them comes from Primorska and from Prekmurje regions. Their estimated number is 25.000. The reasons for their migration were either economic or political due to Italian fascism in the Primorska region. They mostly moved to Buenos Aires and its suburbs, but some also moved to Rosario, Cordoba, and Chaco.

The group of post war migrants that moved to Argentina between the years 1947-1949 and 1954-1955 was smaller (around 6000 people), but very well organised. Many of them were former members of the Slovenian Home Guard which was a German-led anti-partisan military organisation. They mostly settled in Buenos Aires, Mendoza and Bariloche. They migrated in a condensed group, with a high number of intellectuals and priests. They quickly recovered and built homes for their community with their own money. They established their own schools, choirs, theatre groups, churches, etc. Most of their descendants still fluently speak the Slovenian language.

Social clubs

Slovenian Argentines built social clubs where they regularly meet. They act as cultural, sport and religious centres. Each of these centres usually has a Saturday primary school of Slovene language for children of ages from 5 to 12 years. Three centres also have a Saturday secondary school for teenagers from 13 to 18 years of age. When they finish these courses, students usually travel to Slovenia, where they attend a two-week Slovenian language course and explore their ancestors' land.

They also have many cultural, social, and religious organizations. Almost all of them are associated in the *Zedinjena Slovenija* association. This organization has a weekly newspaper in Slovene language called *Svobodna Slovenija*. They also have their own radio show. There is a youth organisation, called SDO-SFZ. They hold sport tournaments, cultural events, leisure activities and religious and intellectual meetings in the Slovene language.

Argentina gave Slovenian migrants many opportunities to develop the Slovenian community in such a large scale. The community is so active because of self-confidence and the love for their roots. Today the activities in schools are very strong, culture and sports are encouraged, mainly due to the sense of belonging to the nation. Spiritual and religious activities are also very strong, for example the home of San Justa has had a Slovenian Mass in the cathedral for almost 60 years. Argentina was one of the few countries that opened its door to Slovenian refugees and accepted them into a new home. People were given jobs and a chance to survive and progress.

Notable Slovene Argentines

The most well-known Slovenian Argentine is probably the Nobel prize nominee Pedro Opeka, who is a catholic priest working as a missionary in Madagascar. His parents both originate from Slovenia – his father was from Begunje pri Laščici and his mother from Velike Lašče. He took part in the construction of a hospital in Vangaindran and has been building the so-called city of hope in Antananrivo since the year 1989. Due to its success, this has attracted the interest of many charities. Many more athletes (Andres Kogovšek, Cristian Poglajen, Lucas Mario Horvat and Luciano Počrnjič), musicians (Alojz Geržinič, Bernarda Fink, Juan Vasle, Marcos Fink, Brenda Asničar) and intellectuals (Emilio Komar, Anton Novačar, Ivan Ahčin, Tine Debeljak, Viktor Sulčič) are/were part of the Slovenian community in Argentina.



PHOTO 2, Pedro Opeka

CHILE

There are around 300 Slovenians living in Chile. The majority moved there after the second world war, mostly from the Primorska region. Today individuals from Slovenia and Argentina move there because of economic reasons. The first migrants were almost assimilated and did not have any clubs or organisations. In the year 2009, however, the organisation *Društvo Slovencev v Čilu* was established in the capital.

VENEZUELA

After the second world war 650 Slovenes moved to Venezuela. They would regularly meet with Janez Grilc, who was the founder of the Slovenian club *Slovensko društvo sv. Cirila in Metoda* in Caracas. These meetings still take place but not as often. In the second largest city in the north, Valencia, another Slovenian club was established in the year 2017.

URUGUAY

It is presumed there are around two thousand Slovenians and their descendants living in Uruguay. They migrated there in 19th century and between both wars, mostly because of economic and political reasons. Most of them settled in Montevideo. In 1935 a social club called *Slovensko prekmursko društvo* was established and it exists to this day. It has a choir, an orchestra, and a radio show. There were also two other clubs *Ivan Cankar* and *Slavček*, which united into a bigger club called *Slovenski krožek*. As it still had very few members, they later joined the Yugoslavian club *Bratstvo*.

COLOMBIA

There are around 150 Slovenians in Colombia. They mostly live on the Atlantic coast in Cartagena, Barranquilla, and Santa Marta, as well as in bigger cities such as Medellin and Cali. *Asociacion Eslovene de Colombia*, which is a Slovenian social club, was established in 2018.

BRAZIL

First Slovenians emigrated to Brazil in the 19th century, the second group arrived in the period between both world wars and the third group in the 1960's. A smaller group migrated to Brazil after Slovenia gained its independence. The estimated number of Slovenians in Brazil ranges from 1000 to 5000. They live in Sao Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, and other cities. There is one club called *Zveza*

Slovenecv Brazilije. The members meet twice a year, at Christmas and on the Day on independence. They offer Slovenian lessons and have a choir.



PHOTO 3, Slovene

Argentines

Countries in South America were more welcoming towards foreign residents, that is why more Slovenians migrated there in comparison to Canada or the USA. The Slovenes adapted to the culture of the country they moved to while keeping their own culture alive. By establishing Slovenian organisations and being proud of their heritage they brought a piece of their homeland to South America. Many Slovenian organizations still operate in South America till this day, connecting people of Slovenian heritage to each other.

Sources

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