
* [\[dora.belan@savba.sk\]](mailto:dora.belan@savba.sk) (Institute for Research in Social Communication, Slovak Academy of Sciences)

** [\[miroslav.popper@savba.sk\]](mailto:miroslav.popper@savba.sk) (Institute for Research in Social Communication, Slovak Academy of Sciences)

Abstract

The article concerns relations between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The aim of this study is to determine current Slovak attitudes towards the Slovak Hungarians and to analyse differences in attitudes held by Slovaks in regular direct contact with the Hungarian minority and those with almost no contact. Another aim is to map current attitudes among the Hungarian minority towards the Slovak majority, and to find out how Slovak attitudes are perceived by the minority. The data collection methods were a survey ($N = 107$) and focus group interviews ($N = 36$). The results show that Slovaks in regular contact with Slovak Hungarians have significantly more positive general feelings, are less socially distant, and feel less anxious about the Hungarian minority than Slovaks with almost no contact. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of trust and behavioural intention. Group interviews with Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians showed that the biggest obstacle in relations between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority is first language use and the language barrier.

Keywords: intergroup attitudes; Slovakia; Slovak majority; Hungarian minority; contact hypotheses

1 Introduction

To prevent extreme forms of negative behaviour towards outgroups, it is crucial to understand how we can reduce negative attitudes between various groups. In Slovakia, Hungarians constitute the biggest national minority group. Although Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians¹ appear to co-exist in Slovakia without major problems, Slovaks still have negative attitudes towards this minority (e.g., Šoucová, 1994; Benkovičová, 1995; Krivý, 2004; Gallová-Kriglerová, 2006; Gallová Kriglerová & Kadlečíková, 2009) and the relationship be-

¹ Slovak Hungarians (also referred to here as the Hungarian minority with no change in meaning) have Slovak citizenship and Hungarian ethnic identity.

tween Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians has never been conflict-free. This can be seen from the conflict in 2019 over the adoption of a law prohibiting the playing or singing of another state's national anthem at public events in Slovakia unless an official state delegation is present. This law on state symbols was proposed because the Hungarian anthem is played and sung at home games of the football club DAC Dunajská Streda in Slovakia and forms an important part of the club's Hungarian identity. Research by Gallová Kriglerová and Kadlečíková (2009) shows that Slovaks' negative attitudes towards Slovak Hungarians relate mainly to the expression of their identity, especially Hungarian language use and Hungarian ethnicity (i.e. characteristics, signs, and symbols reflecting a common origin and culture). Historical traumatization and different perceptions of history are also sources of mutual tension and negative attitudes between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority (Chmel, 2004).

In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of attitudes and relations between the two groups, we used a mixed-methods approach. We first examined Slovak attitudes towards the Hungarian minority through a questionnaire and then explored the reasons behind these attitudes in more detail using the focus-group method. The aim of Study 1 was to explore the current attitudes of Slovaks towards the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia and whether they differ depending on the direct contact with this minority. Although some studies have confirmed the positive effect of contact on the perception of Slovak Hungarians by Slovaks, no studies have directly examined the effects of contact focusing on different variables of attitudes, such as social distance, anxiety, trust, or behavioural intentions, which we focus on in Study 1. In Study 2, we mapped the attitudes of Slovaks towards Slovak Hungarians in more depth and scrutinized minority attitudes towards the majority using focus groups. We additionally focus on how Slovak attitudes are perceived by the minority itself to obtain a more complex picture, since minority perceptions tend to be overlooked in mainstream research. As there is little qualitative research on Slovaks' attitudes towards the Hungarian minority and vice versa, our research offers a new perspective on the attitudes and relations between the two groups and the relations between majority and minority groups in general.

2 The Hungarian minority in Slovakia

Members of the Hungarian minority are citizens of the Slovak Republic who identify as Hungarian and have a Hungarian ethnic identity (Lampl, 2013). Their roots go back to the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, when part of the Hungarian population found itself on the Slovakian side of the border (Šutaj et al., 2008). The Hungarian minority therefore inhabits a relatively cohesive area in southern Slovakia. Based on the findings from the Carpathian Panel, members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia actually speak two languages: their mother tongue, and Slovak, although they speak the Slovak language with minor errors (Lampl, 2007). Nevertheless, part of the population in the southern areas is still of Slovak ethnicity, therefore many public interactions are bilingual. Moreover, in cases of ethnically mixed-marriage families not only are both languages used to some extent, but we can even talk about a hybrid Slovak and Hungarian identity (Árendás, 2011), which is difficult to generalize as being Slovak or Hungarian. The last census in Slovakia gave citizens the opportunity to declare their identities, including having a dual ethnic identity, which could be useful especially for mixed families. According to

the most recent census from 2021, the Hungarian minority accounts for 7.75 per cent of Slovakia's population, another 0.6 per cent of the population chose Hungarian ethnicity alongside another ethnic identity, and Hungarian is the first language of 8.5 per cent of Slovak citizens (Štatistický úrad SR, 2022). The Hungarian minority in Slovakia is still the largest minority, even though the data show that the assimilation of Hungarians in Slovakia continues.

Empirical research has shown that the Hungarian minority has a strong ethnic identity and sense of belonging, and this is reflected in regional and national policy mechanisms (Šutaj et al., 2008). The Hungarian national minority receives institutional support in Slovakia: there are Hungarian-language newspapers, radio stations, television channels, cultural clubs, theatres, primary and secondary schools, and Hungarians can study in Hungarian at the tertiary level in some universities. They also receive cultural support from their kin state – Hungary (Stroschein, 2018). Minority members have a double sense of belonging: a formal one, to which they are linked by citizenship, and a cultural one, through which they are emotionally attached to another nation (Culic, 1999). Lampl (2013) examined the opinions of Slovak Hungarians concerning what determines whether someone is Hungarian. According to 93 per cent of respondents, the basis is that one considers oneself Hungarian (a sense of personal belonging) while the following criteria were Hungarian mother tongue and sympathy with Hungarian culture. When asked what they perceive as their homeland, 35 per cent of respondents stated their birthplace. However, the birthplace could mean a municipality, region, or Slovakia. Furthermore, 33 per cent of participants consider Slovakia to be their homeland, 21 per cent mentioned '*Felvidék*',² and 3–4 per cent perceive the entire Hungarian language territory or Hungary as their home. These data show that although Slovak Hungarians have a Hungarian identity, they consider Slovakia or the southern part of Slovakia to be their home rather than Hungary. The results of research conducted by Lampl (2013) therefore confirm the double sense of belonging described by Culic (1999). Based on the results of the Carpathian Panel, 85 per cent of the respondents have no or rarely a problem with living in Slovakia as part of the Hungarian minority and have weak migration intentions (Lampl, 2007). Veres (2013) found that members of the Hungarian minority from various countries (Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine) have the strongest sense of belonging with Hungarian minority members from other countries and perceive a greater social distance to the majority population of a particular country compared with Hungarians from Hungary. The sense of belonging to the Hungarian ethnic group and strong ethnic identity of the community are important to the survival of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, but reduce opportunities for contact with the majority population and for fostering close intergroup friendships. However, based on the findings of Csepeli et al. (2002), mixing of the Hungarian minority and the majority is typical in South Slovakia – e.g., the children of more than one-third of the ethnic Hungarians make friends with children from the Slovak majority; also, Slovak university attendance is frequent among Slovak Hungarians.

² A relatively cohesive area in southern Slovakia close to the Hungarian border where the majority of Slovak Hungarians live (together with the Slovak majority).

3 Intergroup attitudes

Contact theory (Allport, 1954) holds that intergroup contact can significantly contribute to reducing prejudice between groups, especially if the following conditions are met: equal status, institutional support, opportunity of personal contact, cooperation, and common goals. Intergroup contact works primarily through three mediators – knowledge, empathy, and anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). The strongest of these is intergroup anxiety (Barlow et al., 2012), which increases prejudice, while empathy and being more knowledgeable about the outgroup reduce it (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). More contact can reduce anxiety and consequently prejudice. In a meta-analysis of over 500 studies, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found that intergroup contact significantly improved majority attitudes towards various minority groups. On the other hand, a lack of contact leads to other groups being perceived as alien and distinct and to an inability to understand and empathize with individuals in other groups (Stephan & Stephan, 2017). However, some researchers claim that while attitudes towards outgroups become more positive through contact, behaviour often remains unchanged (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Quillian et al., 2017), although in research conducted by Koball and Carels (2015) direct contact also contributed to approaching behavioural intentions beyond improving attitudes. Davies et al. (2011) document that prejudice reduction is particularly effective when the contact takes the form of close intergroup friendships.

Pettigrew et al. (2011) included growth in mutual trust among the positive outcomes of intergroup contact. Tam et al. (2009) found that via increased trust and more positive attitudes towards the outgroup positive contact with outgroup members predicted stronger behavioural tendencies to approach the outgroup. Work by Bastian et al. (2012) as well as research by Gyárfášová et al. (2000) has confirmed that direct contact contributes to reducing social distance between groups. In addition, contact effects appear to be universal – between nations, genders, and age groups (Pettigrew et al., 2011) – but Miles and Crisp (2014) point to contact having weaker effects on attitudes towards ethnic minorities. This may be due to the cultural roots of prejudice or the normative acceptance of prejudice by peers from the majority group or society (Forscher et al., 2015).

Relations between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority largely meet Allport's criteria for fruitful contact. Slovak Hungarians are institutionally supported and have similar status and the same standard of living in Slovakia as the majority population (Stroschein, 2018).³ The criteria of personal contact, cooperation, and common goals are met on the regional/community level, where Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians have the opportunity to meet, achieve common goals, and to build friendships (i.e. school and working environment, urban/neighbourly relations). Concerning cooperation and the achieving of common goals, the political activity of Slovak Hungarians can be perceived as conflicting with the interests of the Slovak majority and arousing mistrust. Mistrust is often present in intergroup relations (e.g., Kramer, 1991; Kramer & Messick, 1998) as the other group perceives a threat to its 'status legitimizing worldview' (Vorauer et al., 1998; Plant, 2004). Moreover, minority members that strongly identify with their ingroup experience greater distrust and prejudice from

³ However, some parts of the minority are disadvantaged, such as in education (lack of educational content in the language of the minority, i.e. translations of pedagogical documents and textbooks) (Burjan et al., 2017), or the lack of guarantees of Hungarian language use in official communication.

the majority than do weakly identifying individuals (Major et al., 2002; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). On the other hand, shared social identity can improve relations and facilitates the building of trust in the other group (Brewer & Kramer, 1986).

As no studies have explicitly measured the effects of direct contact between the Slovak majority and Slovak Hungarians on various intergroup outcomes, in our study we sought to verify contact theory in more depth and provide a qualitative analysis of the attitudes and relations between the two groups.

4 Research findings on Slovak–Hungarian relations

Research has repeatedly shown that the significant part of the Slovak majority exhibits negative attitudes towards the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. In 2003, 25.6 per cent of a representative sample of Slovaks had reservations about the Hungarian minority (Krivý, 2004). In research by Gallová Kriglerová and Kadlečíková (2009), young people (eighth and ninth grade) expressed negative attitudes towards the Roma, the Hungarian minority, immigrants, and LGBTI people. Related to the perception of this minority, up to 63.3 per cent of Slovak people agreed with the statement ‘Hungarians should speak Hungarian at home only, in public they should speak Slovak’ and this response was strongly correlated with responses agreeing with the second statement ‘Slovakia is the country of Slovaks, and so it should remain’ (Gallová Kriglerová & Kadlečíková, 2009). Similarly, members of the Hungarian minority stated that they had experienced discrimination based on speaking Hungarian as their first language and their Hungarian identity (Mészárosová-Lamplová, 2009). Lampl (2013) carried out several sociological studies on representative samples of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. According to her results, 84 per cent of Slovak Hungarians consider it important to declare their national identity. Of these, only 70 per cent of Slovak Hungarians admit to their Hungarian identity in all circumstances, 15 per cent declare it only if they do not feel threatened, and 15 per cent report that they do not deal with the issue of the declaration of personal identity (Lampl, 2013). These results indicate that some members of the Hungarian minority feel threatened or fear discrimination, preventing them from disclosing their identity in certain situations. Bordás et al. (1995) noted that conflict between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians arise mostly because of the Hungarian language use and the poor Slovak skills of minority members.

However, Slovak attitudes to ethnic Hungarians and relations between the two groups are perceived much more positively than those with either the Roma or immigrant community (Gallová Kriglerová, 2006; Bielíková et al., 2013; Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2019). Mutual cooperation is more prevalent as conflicts at the residence level of living (Lampl, 2007). Surveys and research conducted in Slovakia have repeatedly confirmed that direct contact has a positive effect on intergroup relations. Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority have more favourable attitudes towards the minority, and evaluate relations between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority more positively (Rosová & Bútorová, 1992; Šoucová, 1994; Gallová-Kriglerová, 2006). According to Šutaj et al. (2008), interethnic relations are best at the regional level where there is direct natural contact between people. Gallová-Kriglerová (2006) found that 60 per cent of the respondents who had direct contact with the minority evaluated relations between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority as very good on a four-point scale ranging from ‘very good’ to ‘very bad’. However, almost

60 per cent of participants with no direct contact with Slovak Hungarians rated mutual relations as very bad. According to Kambara (2015), most residents in the ethnically heterogeneous areas emphasize the peaceful everyday life between majority and minority members, in spite of some incidents of ethnic tension. Moreover, they maintain internal solidarity and respect by using narratives of a peaceful community (Kambara, 2017).

Although sociological research measuring attitudes between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority at a general level suggest that the attitudes of Slovaks are more favourable in the case of direct contact with the minority, most of the studies conducted so far do not offer a deeper examination of the constituents of intergroup attitudes. The aim of our research is to obtain a more complex and in-depth view of intergroup relations in Slovakia through the prism of general feelings, social distance, intergroup anxiety, intergroup trust, and behavioural intentions. Moreover, the perception of the minority itself and their view of majority prejudices have often been overlooked in previous literature. In this respect we provide a perspective that is still under researched.

5 Quantitative study

The main aim of the study was to identify whether direct contact with the Hungarian minority is associated with Slovak attitudes towards the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. We assume that Slovaks in close contact with the Hungarian minority have fewer negative attitudes towards the Hungarian minority than Slovaks who do not have direct contact with the Hungarian minority.

5.1 Methods

The research sample was drawn from the adult population of Slovakia, divided into two groups – Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians. The original research sample of 146 Slovaks was obtained by convenience sampling. The sample consisted mostly of students from across Slovakia studying at universities in western Slovakia and some working people. An adult sample was used, as adults are more likely to move from their birthplace to cities and thus have greater access to people from different ethnic groups. They may therefore have more nuanced opinions and attitudes towards different minorities.

Participants completed an adapted version of Intermin (Lášticová & Findor, 2016), a questionnaire designed to measure attitudes towards the Roma. Subsequently, we divided the sample into two groups based on direct contact, which was the independent variable. Direct contact was measured by averaging responses to two items: frequency of communication, and frequency of time spent with members of the Hungarian minority. Respondents answered both questions on a seven-point scale: 1 – never, 2 – several times a year, 3 – once a month, 4 – several times a month, 5 – once a week, 6 – several times a week, 7 – every day. We excluded all those who selected '4' ('several times a month') in relation to any two items and whose score after averaging the two items was 3.5 or 4.5 so there was a greater contrast between the groups. The remaining participants were then divided into two groups: those with minimal or no contact with the Hungarian minority ('3' or less) and those with relatively regular contact ('5' or more). This reduced the sample to 107 respondents (22 men,

85 women), of whom 67 Slovaks (17 men, 50 women) were in regular contact with the Hungarian minority and 40 Slovaks (5 men, 35 women) had almost no contact with Slovak Hungarians.⁴ Ages ranged from 19 to 40 years (*Mdn* = 22; *IQR* = 2).

The original validated Intermin questionnaire examines pupils' prejudices and attitudes towards Roma using five dependent variables: attitudes, social distance, intergroup anxiety, intergroup trust, and behavioural intentions. For the purposes of our research, we modified five items slightly for use with an adult population. Subsequently, we verified the comprehensibility and adequacy of the new items on a sample of 30 participants using cognitive interviews (Willis & Boeije, 2013). The target minority group was also changed. The original questionnaire measures prejudices and attitudes towards the Roma so we changed references from the Roma minority to the Hungarian minority in each item. Based on the cognitive interviews (*N* = 10), we concluded it was suitable for use with the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

General feelings were measured on a feeling thermometer on which respondents expressed cold to hot feelings towards the Hungarian minority on a scale of 0 to 100. Social distance was measured by three items on a scale similar to the Bogardus social distance scale: To what extent would the following situations be acceptable or unacceptable to you?: 'If a member of the Hungarian minority were your colleague at your workplace; 'If a member of the Hungarian minority would work with you in the office'; 'If a member of the Hungarian minority would go with your crew somewhere in the evening'. For each item, respondents could respond on a seven-point Likert scale from '1' (not acceptable at all) to '7' (entirely acceptable). Intergroup anxiety was measured by four items responding to the question 'How would you feel if a new employee who is a member of the Hungarian minority started at your workplace?'. The items were: 'I would feel fine'; 'I would feel weird'; 'It would make me nervous'; and 'It would bother me'. For each item respondents responded on a scale from '1' (does not describe my feelings at all) to '7' (completely describes my feelings). Trust was measured using three items measuring the general level of trust in Slovak Hungarians: 'Most Hungarians can be trusted'; 'I would trust an unknown Hungarian as much as any other unknown person'; 'In general, I trust Hungarians'. For each item, participants could respond from '1' (I disagree completely) to '7' (I totally agree). Behavioural intentions were measured by three responses to the question 'How would you react if a new employee who is a member of the Hungarian minority started at your work?'. The responses were: 'I'd like to learn more about him/her'; 'I'd like to talk to him/her'; and, 'I'd like to spend some time with him/her'. As in the previous case, participants could respond to each item selecting from '1' to '7'. Before data analysis, we re-coded all responses in reverse on the social distance scale so that higher numbers indicated greater social distance. For the anxiety scale, we reverse-coded only the values in one item ('I would feel fine'), so that higher values indicated greater anxiety. On the trust scale higher numbers point to higher levels of intergroup trust, and on the behavioural intentions scale higher values indicate approaching behavioural intentions (as opposed to distancing behavioural intentions). We took the average of the items in relevant variables to create a single number per variable.

⁴ The sample size is in concert with the opinions of Borg and Gall (1979) who suggest that a survey research should have no fewer than 100 cases in each major subgroup and twenty to fifty in each minor subgroup.

We processed and evaluated the data obtained from our questionnaire using IBM SPSS Statistics. The intrinsic variability of dependent variables was measured using Cronbach α^5 . We also tested whether the dependent variables are normally distributed.⁶ The results of the normality test are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Normality of dependent variables

Variable	Regular direct contact			No regular contact		
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
General feelings	0.217	67	0.000	0.936	40	0.025
Social distance	0.491	67	0.000	0.664	40	0.000
Intergroup anxiety	0.345	67	0.000	0.797	40	0.000
Trust	0.181	67	0.000	0.887	40	0.001
Behavioural intentions	0.138	67	0.003	0.932	40	0.019

The variables do not have a normal distribution ($Sig < 0.05$) in either group. Therefore, we treated all dependent variables as ordinal variables. In the data analysis, we used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test (M-WU) to determine the differences in the dependent variables between the two groups. We also explored the intercorrelations between the variables. Table 2 illustrates strong correlation between social distance and intergroup anxiety, moderate correlation between each variable with the feeling thermometer, and weak correlation between trust and social distance, trust and intergroup anxiety, trust and behavioural intentions, and social distance and behavioural intentions. As social distance and intergroup anxiety indicate negative attitudes, these variables negatively correlate with the other scales. All correlations were statistically significant, which indicates that the construction of the questionnaire meaningfully reflect various components of attitudes.

⁵ The intrinsic reliability test indicated a good level of variability for intergroup anxiety and trust ($\alpha > 0.7$) and an excellent level of variability in terms of social distance and behavioural intentions ($\alpha > 0.9$).

⁶ Given the size of the groups, we used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the group in direct contact with the minority ($n = 67$) and the Shapiro-Wilk test for the group not in direct contact with the minority ($n = 40$).

Table 2 Intercorrelations between the dependent variables

Variable	Spearman's rho			
	1	2	3	4
1. General feelings	–	–	–	–
2. Social distance	–0.471**	–	–	–
3. Intergroup anxiety	–0.451**	0.630**	–	–
4. Trust	0.497**	–0.329**	–0.244*	–
5. Behavioural intentions	0.449**	–0.319**	–0.319**	0.394**

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$, ** indicates $p < 0.01$; $N = 107$

5.2 Results

General feelings. We tested contact theory on feelings towards Slovak Hungarians using a feeling thermometer. Table 3 illustrates our data. The difference between Slovaks in direct contact with the Hungarian minority and Slovaks with almost no contact with the minority is statistically significant and small. In accordance with the hypothesis, feelings towards Slovak Hungarians are more positive among Slovaks who are in regular contact with the Hungarian minority than among Slovaks not in regular contact with the minority.

Table 3 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the general feelings variable

	Attitudes					
	Q1	Q2 (Mdn)	Q3	M-WU	Sig.	r_m
With contact ($n = 67$)	50	70	90	898.5	0.004	0.28
Without contact ($n = 40$)	50	50	70			

Intergroup distance. The difference in intergroup distance between the two groups is statistically significant and moderate (see Table 4). In line with our hypothesis, Slovaks in regular direct contact with Slovak Hungarians had a lower social distance from Slovak Hungarians than Slovaks with almost no contact with them.

Intergroup anxiety. We also tested contact theory in the case of intergroup anxiety. According to our data, the difference between Slovaks with and without contact with Slovak Hungarians regarding the intergroup anxiety variable is statistically significant and small (see Table 5). Slovaks in close contact with the Hungarian minority feel less anxious about ethnic Hungarians than Slovaks who have almost no contact with them.

Table 4 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the social distance variable

	Social distance					
	Q1	Q2 (Mdn)	Q3	M-WU	Sig.	r _m
With contact (n = 67)	1	1	1	982	0.002	0.3
Without contact (n = 40)	1	1	2			

Table 5 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the intergroup anxiety variable

	Intergroup anxiety					
	Q1	Q2 (Mdn)	Q3	M-WU	Sig.	r _m
With contact (n = 67)	1	1	1.5	988	0.013	0.24
Without contact (n = 40)	1	1.375	2.5			

Trust. The difference between the groups in terms of trust in the Hungarian minority is not statistically significant. The direct contact hypothesis regarding trust was therefore not confirmed. Table 6 illustrates this result.

Table 6 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the trust variable

	Trust				
	Q1	Q2 (Mdn)	Q3	M-WU	Sig.
With contact (n = 67)	5	5.67	7	1123.5	0.157
Without contact (n = 40)	4.67	5.67	6.33		

Behavioural intentions. The difference between the groups in terms of behavioural intentions is not statistically significant, indicating that Slovaks in contact with the Hungarian minority do not demonstrate more approaching behavioural intentions towards them than Slovaks with almost no contact with Slovak Hungarians (see Table 7). For that reason, the hypothesis regarding this variable was not confirmed.

Table 7 Descriptives and statistical significance between the groups according to the behavioural intentions variable

	Behavioural intentions				
	<i>Q1</i>	<i>Q2 (Mdn)</i>	<i>Q3</i>	<i>M-WU</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
With contact (<i>n</i> = 67)	4	5.33	6.33	1131	0.174
Without contact (<i>n</i> = 40)	4	5	5.918		

5.3 Discussion

The results show that, consistent with contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015), Slovaks who are in frequent direct contact with Slovak Hungarians have more positive feelings towards Slovak Hungarians than do Slovaks with almost no contact. Similarly to the results of research by Gyárfášová et al. (2000) and Bastian et al. (2012), majority members in regular contact with minority members exhibited significantly reduced social distance from this minority than did people with almost no contact with the minority. Furthermore, Slovaks in regular direct contact with the Hungarian minority felt less anxious about them than Slovaks who did not have this direct contact.

However, we did not find support for contact hypothesis in all variables that were examined. There was no significant difference in trust levels towards the Hungarian minority among Slovaks who had direct contact and those who did not. Researchers claim that it is difficult to develop trust across group boundaries because people perceive people from other groups as different and as having conflicting goals and beliefs (e.g., Kramer, 1991; Kramer & Messick, 1998). People therefore tend to perceive ingroup members as more trustworthy than members of other groups (Kramer & Messick, 1998). This may be why Slovaks in direct contact with members of the Hungarian minority have more positive feelings towards them but not higher trust levels than Slovaks without direct contact with Slovak Hungarians. Moreover, Slovak Hungarians are emotionally attached to their kin-state (Culic, 1999), and feel a greater sense of belonging with Hungarian minority members and Hungarians than with the Slovak majority population. This can reduce the opportunity to foster close friendships and intergroup trust despite the contact between them. According to Brewer and Kramer (1986), shared social identity could improve relations and build trust between the two social groups, which might not be the case in this context.

We found no significant difference in terms of behavioural intentions between Slovaks in regular direct contact with Slovak Hungarians and those not – in contrast to, for example, Koball and Carels (2015). Tam et al. (2009) discovered that via increased trust and more positive attitudes towards the outgroup, positive contact with outgroup students predicted stronger behavioural tendencies to approach the outgroup. In our research, Slovaks' contact levels did not affect trust towards the Hungarian minority. This may be one of the reasons why contact hypothesis was subsequently not confirmed for this variable. We should point out that, compared to attitudes, the impact of intergroup contact on intergroup behaviour has also been found to be less consistent in other studies. Some studies have found that while

attitudes towards outgroup members become more positive, behaviour towards outgroup members remains largely unchanged with contact (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Quillian et al., 2017).

6 Qualitative study

The aim of this study was (1) to map the current attitudes of the Slovak majority towards the Hungarian minority in more depth, (2) to explore the attitudes of the Hungarian minority towards the Slovak majority, and (3) to identify how Slovak Hungarians perceive the attitudes of Slovaks. We used qualitative methods to explore how Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians perceive each other, how they feel about each other, how they get along, and how members of the minority perceive Slovak attitudes towards them. With Study 2, we wanted to obtain a more comprehensive picture of attitudes and relations between the two groups.

6.1 Methods

Fifteen Slovak respondents from Study 1 (five men and ten women) voluntarily participated in focus group discussions. There were three focus groups, each containing five participants. One focus group consisted of individuals with almost no contact with the Hungarian minority, the second group consisted of people in regular direct contact with the Hungarian minority, and the third group contained a mixture of individuals in/not in direct contact. All participants identified as Slovak, while 12 of them were studying at university and 3 working in Bratislava – the capital of Slovakia (all between 20 and 30 years old). Each participant came from an urban area, but from different regions: participants with no regular contact with the Hungarian minority came from the north or eastern part of Slovakia (except for one participant from Bratislava) where almost no Hungarians live. Participants in regular contact with the minority come from southern or western Slovakia, while some of them grew up in city with around 20 per cent Hungarians, and others have experiences with Hungarians through the school or work environment.

The Hungarian group consisted of 21 participants (11 men, 10 women) divided into three focus groups, each with seven people. They were reached through acquaintances or social networks to obtain a more varied sample from different regions of Slovakia. The criteria for participation in the focus groups was Hungarian ethnicity and a minimum age of 18 years. Ages ranged from 18 to 38 years old (*Mdn* = 22; *IQR* = 3). All Slovak Hungarian participants identified as members of the Hungarian minority and come from an area where a minimum of 20 per cent Slovak Hungarians live.⁷ Some of them come from rural, and some from urban municipalities. Each participant had finished high school with Hungarian as the language of instruction, while 13 participants were continuing their studies at university in Slovakia, and 8 participants were already working. All participants but one had at least weekly contact with Slovaks (due to work, studies, or friends).

⁷ If the citizens of the Slovak Republic who belong to a national minority make up at least 20 per cent of the population in the municipality, they may use the language of the minority in official communication in this municipality.

The focus groups were asked basic questions about their perceptions and the characteristics of the other group, their attitudes, feelings, and relations with members of the other group. We also asked members of the minority how Slovaks treated them and whether they perceived any advantages and disadvantages related to their Hungarian ethnicity. The focus groups with Slovak Hungarians were conducted in the Hungarian language as Hungarian is their first language so they could engage in discussion without a language barrier. First, we transcribed the group interviews verbatim and then analysed them in accordance with the principles of thematic content analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). The categories thus created were then quantified according to the number of respondents whose statements belonged in that category, and/or using qualitative terms such as ‘majority’ (more than half the participants), ‘some’ (a third to half the participants), and ‘a few’ (less than a third of participants).

6.2 Results

Mutual perception. Some Slovak participants perceived Slovak Hungarians through the ethnic difference which is associated with symbols that are specific to Hungary or Hungarian ethnicity – e.g., the Hungarian language, Hungarian cuisine, thermal spas, and so on. The majority of participants viewed members of the Hungarian minority as ordinary people who speak Slovak with an accent or have to think more about Slovak words: ‘I know a few people from the Hungarian minority, but really the only difference is the accent, otherwise they are normal people’ (FG2SM4⁸). Slovaks in regular contact with members of the Hungarian minority also mentioned elements that distinguish Slovak Hungarians from Slovaks. These included greater national pride, or being proud of their identity, and being more direct and thinking about history differently.

Most members of the Hungarian minority perceived Slovaks as ordinary people that have some different characteristics to members of the minority. For instance, being less open, less prompt, less aware of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, and having different historical knowledge. A few participants mentioned that when they think of Slovaks, Slovak cultural symbols or country specifics appear to them, such as the Slovak language, mountains, Slovak folk costumes, or greater attachment to Slavic languages. Some participants claimed that Slovaks are same as the Slovak Hungarians and there is no need to categorize people: ‘In my opinion, [it is] just the language. Personally, I don’t think there is any difference. Just that they think in another language. When I talk to a Slovak, I sometimes imagine that if I was growing up in their environment, I would be the same person as I am now, I would just speak a different language’ (FG3HM1).

Mutual feelings. A few Slovak participants felt positive emotions towards the Slovak Hungarians. They said that meeting a Slovak Hungarian was interesting as it was new, a chance to learn something about another culture: ‘Positively, I learned a lot of Hungarian words at school, but I have forgotten them. In my opinion, it’s good to get to know a different culture,

⁸ We coded the participants based on the focus group they attended e.g. ‘FG1’ - focus group 1, followed by the ingroup they belonged to: i.e., ‘H’ - Hungarian or ‘S’ - Slovak, and their gender ‘M’ - man or ‘W’ - woman, and allocated a number to each participant in the focus group.

a different language, different customs, and I would like to work somewhere there is a multicultural mix' (FG2SW1). The majority of participants had neutral feelings towards Hungarians and did not single them out because of their nationality: 'I take it that they are our people [one of us], that's the way it is, I don't feel one way or the other about it' (FG1SM5). Some Slovaks in frequent contact with ethnic Hungarians said that when they are somewhere where there are more Slovak Hungarians than Slovaks, Slovak Hungarians speak Hungarian, and it makes them feel excluded: 'As I said, I'm the only Slovak in that group of friends, they are all Slovak Hungarians, so they tended to talk to each other in Hungarian and I couldn't understand a word' (FG3SW3). Some participants talked about having mixed feelings towards the Hungarian minority. Three respondents recalled having real concerns about what their family would think about them being in love with a Hungarian: 'It made me wonder what my family would think about it, I'm from the north and there is a slightly different mindset towards the Hungarians. From the beginning there were stereotypical views and prejudices that made my parents more cautious, but once they discovered he was exactly the same as the Slovaks and maybe even 100 times better, friendlier, then it was okay' (FG1SW1).

Hungarian feelings towards Slovaks fall into two major categories: neutral feelings, and a range of feelings related to the language differences. Some respondents had neutral feelings towards the majority, as they did in relation to the Hungarian minority. These participants did not perceive otherness on the basis of ethnicity or first language, and did not feel anxious or pressured in Slovak settings: 'I have no problem with the fact that I have to speak Slovak so I don't worry – sometimes being able to speak Hungarian was positive when we were supposed to translate a document from Hungarian to Slovak and they were glad. At work, they don't treat me differently because I am Hungarian' (FG2HW1). By contrast, some participants were anxious that the majority group would not accept them because of their identity or language skills. They used illustrative phrases such as 'how dare I speak Slovak?', 'what will he say when he finds out I'm Hungarian?', '[I don't know] whether he will accept me', and '[I don't know] how much he will accept me'. In addition, some participants felt unsure of themselves or stressed when communicating with Slovaks because they could not express themselves properly in Slovak.

Relationships. All the Slovak participants thought their relationships with members of the Hungarian minority were as good as their relationship with Slovaks. They stated that the person's personality was important in determining whether they formed a closer relationship, not whether the person was a Slovak Hungarian: 'Yes, I have Hungarian friends where I grew up, but I'm fine with that, I have no problem with it, and we don't disagree on things, have different opinions, we are friends and being Hungarian or Slovak makes no difference' (FG1SW3). A few respondents noted that Slovak Hungarians who have difficulty speaking Slovak have problems communicating with Slovaks, so do not interact closely with Slovaks because of the perceived language barrier: 'Personally, I have a colleague from somewhere in the south, and I have no negative or positive feelings when communicating with him. He is very uptight because his Slovak isn't very good and when we've had to deal with things he needed to understand, I could see he had a problem, that he didn't understand what I was saying, and so we had to give up' (FG3SW4). Three respondents recalled having negative experiences of some Slovak Hungarians – for example, they had shouted at Slovaks, or because they were unwilling to speak Slovak or worried about doing this.

Most members of the Hungarian minority claimed to be on just as friendly terms with Slovaks as they were with Hungarians. Respondents pointed out that this was in the context of friendly, day-to-day relationships: 'It also very much depends on how well the person knows you, because I have very good friends, those normally, I haven't noticed them treating me differently because of my ethnicity' (FG2HM2). Some participants said they had good relations with Slovaks but feel there is a barrier because of the differences in language, ethnicity, or history: 'I mean, I seem to be a very different person when I'm speaking my native language, I am much more [myself] than when I'm speaking Slovak or German. I feel that when we start a discussion that the other person can't truly understand me as a person because I'm not speaking in my native language' (FG1HM5). Three participants had encountered contempt or conflict for speaking Hungarian in the company of Slovaks or because of linguistic otherness (accent): 'I have a former classmate from Eastern Slovakia, and we are friends and seven of us go out almost every month, old college classmates and [it's] all right, but when I talk to her, it always ends in her saying "When will you learn Slovak?"' (FG1HW6).

Slovak Hungarians perceptions of Slovaks' attitudes towards them. Some participants mentioned that Slovaks had neutral attitudes towards them. They stated, for example, that 'they do not distinguish between us', 'they have no problem with it', 'I haven't noticed that they have prejudices', or that 'they understand me'. Some respondents thought some Slovaks had positive attitudes and said that some Slovaks had praised them for speaking good Slovak despite being Hungarian, or helped them out. On the other hand, some participants said they felt that some Slovaks kept their distance and were not interested in befriending members of the Hungarian minority. This type of attitude was particularly common at the getting acquainted stage, when some Slovaks preferred not to engage with Slovak Hungarians, and were not interested in getting to know them properly: 'they find out you're Hungarian, and "Aha!" and then they don't talk to you [except] when they have to... they welcomed me, and then when they had had a drink and learned that I was Hungarian, they didn't talk to me so much, they kept their distance' (FG2HW3). Some participants have already met with contempt for not being able to speak Slovak or for making mistakes. Such situations were experienced mainly by members of the Hungarian minority who do not speak Slovak well: 'Once I worked as a lifeguard in Štúrovo [in Slovakia] and Esztergom [across the border in Hungary]; there were lots of Slovak and Czech tourists, and in Štúrovo many tourists hated hearing me make mistakes when speaking Slovak and could hear my accent, while in Esztergom they were glad I could understand them and that they didn't have to speak English and could rely on me because I spoke Slovak' (FG2HW7). Some respondents had encountered negative statements and contempt because of their Hungarian identity; for example, when they were speaking Hungarian, for wearing a T-shirt with a Hungarian slogan, or for having a Hungarian name. These comments were made by strangers who seemed to have strong prejudices against the Hungarian minority: 'Well, once I was on a high school trip in Spišská Nová Ves [north Slovakia] and an elderly gentleman stopped us and said what were we thinking of, speaking in Hungarian, and then he spat at us, that is a really extreme case, but it happened' (FG1HW7).

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of having Hungarian ethnicity in Slovakia. All the focus group participants thought they were disadvantaged because of their Hungarian ethnicity, and this related to the language difference. These disadvantages can be divided into emo-

tional (symbolic) ones and real ones. The first category includes feeling stressed or anxious because they cannot find the right word, or use the wrong word ending; in other words, because of their Slovak language skills: 'I didn't notice the disadvantage, it was more a feeling that when I talk Slovak I am more frustrated and stressed, although when I hear myself making a mistake I correct myself right away, it's harder to find the right word when speaking' (FG2HW1). The second category consists of real disadvantages that are linked to the linguistic shortcomings of some ethnic Hungarians when studying at a Slovak university or in work situations: 'Yes, we have found ourselves at a disadvantage several times – for example, if you want to be a driver and are sent to Žilina for the psychological testing [for your driving test]. There are 500 questions in Slovak, and when you start reading and realize you don't understand some words ... and out of the 500 questions I often came across a word I didn't know' (FG1HM3). On the other hand, participants thought the greatest advantage of being a Hungarian in Slovakia was speaking two languages: Slovak and Hungarian. Individuals also perceived other personal benefits of their identity, such as having a wider horizon or more friends: 'I think the advantage of being bilingual is that we are not attached [solely] to Slovakia or to Hungary. So you can imagine your future anywhere in these countries because we were born here' (FG2HM6).

6.3 Discussion

The discussion in the focus groups revolved mostly around language. There are two issues associated with the language barrier in relations between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians. Participants from the Hungarian minority said they had good relations with Slovaks but felt there were some problems resulting from the different language, ethnicity, and history. They either felt the barrier was the result of their own language difficulties or their identity, which prevented them from revealing their 'true self', or they felt the barrier was constructed by Slovaks – some of whom do not fully accept the Slovak Hungarians because of their different identity or language differences (accent). A few Slovaks and Hungarians talked explicitly about the other group having different views of history. The common history of the Slovaks and Hungarians, or more precisely the differences in how that history is perceived, lead to negative attitudes and tensions between the two ethnicities (Bordás et al., 1995; Chmel, 2004).

One of the main reasons why Slovaks are so sensitive to and intolerant of Slovak Hungarians not speaking Slovak fluently may lie in their shared history in Austria-Hungary. At that time, the state language was Hungarian, and ethnic Slovaks were forced to declare themselves as Hungarian for existential reasons, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (a process known as 'Hungarianization') (Šutaj, 2012).

On the other hand, for the Hungarian minority it is important to declare their national identity (Lampl, 2012), but they cannot always admit it. We also examined how the Hungarian minority perceives Slovaks' attitudes towards ethnic Hungarians. Slovaks mainly have neutral attitudes towards the Hungarians, while some members of the Hungarian minority encountered contempt for not speaking Slovak fluently or because they expressed their Hungarian identity (speaking Hungarian, wearing T-shirts with Hungarian slogans, having a Hungarian name). This finding is in line with research by Mészárosová-Lamplová (2009) which found that members of the minority felt discriminated against mainly because they were Hungarian-speakers and of Hungarian ethnicity. Speaking Hungarian, wearing

Hungarian slogans, and having a Hungarian name are symbols of identification with the Hungarian ingroup, and Slovaks who identify strongly with the Slovak ingroup may perceive these phenomena as disapproval of their Slovak 'status-legitimizing worldviews' and feel threatened by them (Vorauer et al., 1998; Plant, 2004). This corresponds to the finding by Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) that negative attitudes tend to be expressed towards minority groups with strong identities.

Members of the Hungarian minority perceived the most serious disadvantages associated with ethnicity to be real problems related to the Slovak language skills of Slovak Hungarians, be they studying at a Slovak university or in work situations. Research by Lampl (2013) has shown that some members of the Hungarian minority still have negative feelings about getting a job on the Slovak labour market, although this sentiment declined in strength between 2001 and 2011. In contrast, participants perceived the Slovak Hungarians' greatest advantage to be the ability to speak both languages.

7 General discussion

The relations between the Hungarian minority and the majority population in Slovakia is under researched. Previous literature suggests (e.g., Šoucová, 1994; Gallová Kriglerová & Kadlečíková, 2009) that Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority have more favourable attitudes to the minority than Slovaks with no contact with the minority, but the mechanisms behind this phenomenon have not been explored in depth so far. Therefore, our research was designed to obtain a more complex overview of the attitudes of Slovaks towards Slovak Hungarians, testing contact hypothesis by explicitly examining various components of attitudes: feeling thermometer, social distance, anxiety, trust, and behavioural intentions. Moreover, using focus group discussions we offer a more in-depth view of the relations of Slovak Hungarians and Slovaks, and we identify that the main obstacle to the better coexistence of the two groups is language. Further discussion is based on mixed-methods research.

Our result shows that consistent with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015), Slovaks who are in frequent direct contact with Slovak Hungarians have more positive feelings and exhibit less prejudice against Slovak Hungarians than do Slovaks with almost no contact. Previous research carried out in Slovakia has also confirmed the effectiveness of direct contact between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority (e.g., Gallová-Kriglerová, 2006; Rosová & Bútorová, 1992). A more fine-grained picture shows that Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority exhibited a significantly reduced social distance and lower anxiety from the Hungarian minority than did Slovaks with almost no contact with the minority. The results of the focus groups also show that there are no serious barriers between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians that would lead to an increase in social distance. We found differences in the knowledge level of participants with regular and almost no contact: Slovaks in regular contact with the Hungarian minority were more aware of the latter group's characteristics. Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) rank knowledge among the primary mediators of positive intergroup contact, so the lack of knowledge among respondents not in regular contact with Slovak Hungarians could have resulted in less positive attitudes being reported in the questionnaire.

Moreover, Slovaks in regular contact with minority members had more nuanced perceptions and attitudes towards them, while Slovak participants without contact with Slovak Hungarians perceive them mostly neutrally. In particular, participants without contact with the minority only briefly stated that they have no experience with Slovak Hungarians and the only thing which they perceive is the lack of language skills or different pronunciation. On the other hand, those with direct contact with Slovak Hungarians could fully describe some specifics of the minority group, involving their pride in their ethnic identity, adhering to traditions, or watching Hungarian television channels. Lampl (2007) also found that in terms of reading newspapers and watching TV the Hungarian language still dominates. Part of the participants in regular contact with Hungarians, for example, added that in some situations when they are with Hungarians they feel excluded. However, they treated these experiences as exceptions to the mostly neutral or positive relations they have with their colleagues or friends. Another share of the Slovaks who reported to having regular contact stressed that Slovak Hungarians usually speak in the Hungarian language between themselves; however, if there is someone present who does not speak Hungarian, they usually translate into the Slovak language. Mutual contact also creates space for Slovaks to spontaneously learn some Hungarian phrases. The need for mutual understanding and acknowledging individuals' own identity (by teaching Hungarian words to Slovaks, for instance) to create friendship-based relations were also highlighted in discussions with Slovak Hungarians. Efforts made at improving mutual understanding explains the findings we obtained in the quantitative study in that regular contact reduces social distance and anxiety and at the same time improves general attitudes towards the out-group, in line with the findings of Kambara (2015, 2017).

Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) argue that intergroup anxiety increases prejudice. In the focus groups, the Slovak participants did not explicitly express feelings of anxiety towards members of the Hungarian minority. Rather, their negative feelings were more the result of the anger they felt at the language barrier that occurs in situations when Hungarians cannot speak Slovak well, or who speak Hungarian in the company of Slovaks. Based on focus-group discussions with both Slovaks without regular contact and Slovak Hungarians, it can generally be said that even if there are concerns on the side of people who have not yet met members of the Hungarian minority, they often dissipate after getting to know them better. Friendship-based relationships were rated the most positive, which is consistent with the results of Pettigrew and Tropp (2006).

Further, we found no significant difference in trust levels, nor behavioural intentions towards this minority between Slovaks who had direct contact and those who did not. Feelings towards the other group – i.e., the emotional dimension of attitudes – were mostly neutral on both sides in focus-group discussions. Neutral feelings are not motivating enough to evoke a desire to approach the minority and to build trust. However, both groups mentioned specific feelings resulting from the linguistic otherness of the groups. Most negative feelings were associated with Slovak reactions to poor Slovak skills among Slovak Hungarians. The language barrier which occurs between the groups can additionally inhibit the behavioural intentions of Slovaks towards the Hungarian minority. Moreover, in the qualitative part of the research, ethnic pride was identified as a specific characteristic of Slovak Hungarians (either being proud of one's ethnicity or having a strong identity), in line with empirical research by Šutaj et al. (2008), Homišinová and Šutajová (2008), and Gallová Kriglerová and

Kadlečíková (2009). Emphasizing ethnicity usually exacerbates differences between groups and does not lead to improved trust between them. In concert with the findings of Bordás et al. (1995), all the Hungarians stated that they had experienced contempt for not speaking Slovak well or for speaking Hungarian in public. They encountered these remarks mostly from strangers who seemed to be prejudiced against the Hungarian minority, although a few of them had experienced some comments from classmates or colleagues. Participants who do not speak Slovak well mentioned feelings of doubt or anxiety regarding whether the members of the majority would accept them because of their identity or language skills. However, Slovak Hungarians pointed out that in the context of day-to-day relationships with some Slovaks, these feelings evaporate.

In conclusion, the overall picture of the coexistence of Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians is currently more positive than negative. Together with Gaertner et al. (1996), we argue that intergroup contact creates space for exploring similarities between the groups rather than differences, resulting in better attitudes. If there were more opportunities to form intergroup friendships and a shared identity through joint (professional) activities, the language barrier would spontaneously gradually decrease.

As Slovak language skills seems to be the most important topic, this should be addressed in more detail. Bakošová, the author of several modern Slovak textbooks for primary school children learning in a Hungarian environment, points out that it is necessary to learn Slovak as a foreign language. She claims that instead of teaching various rhymes in which archaic words occur, it is necessary to use modern stories that will help children learn modern vocabulary (Gdovinová, 2021). Moreover, being engaged in ordinary conversation is extremely important for children to understand the composition of sentences and reduce the shame or anxiety of speaking Slovak.

For this reason, we must mention a program similar to Erasmus+ called *Rozumieme si – cseregyerek* (We understand each other – exchange child), which aims to build mutual understanding and reduce the language barrier between Slovak and Slovak Hungarian pupils. The program involves Slovak families hosting Hungarian children for two weeks, while the Hungarian pupils visit school, classes, and afternoon activities together with the Slovak pupils. Most emphasis is placed on fostering cooperation between Slovak-Hungarian pairs who can keep in touch and choose from joint online and offline activities according to their nature and interests to make the friendship stronger and win prizes (*Az új évad – rozumieme.si*). This program not only meets Allport's criteria for fruitful contact – personal contact, similar status, cooperation, common goals, and institutional support (from schools) – it is a best practice example for overcoming language barriers and breaking down the stereotypes and anxiety experienced on both sides.

8 Limitations

Our results support the claim of an association between direct contact and prejudice. However, this tells us nothing about causality. As our study is not experimental in design, based on our results we cannot conclude whether contact is the cause of or the result of less prejudice. The limitations of our study involve sample selection. Respondents were not randomized, and the sample is not representative. Most of the respondents were university students

(individuals with an above-average educational level), which may have contributed to more complex answers from respondents but reduces the generalizability of the results. Therefore, our conclusions would be better understood as pertaining to young people in Slovakia (who belong to the middle or upper social class). In addition, we examined direct regular contact between Slovaks and Slovak Hungarians in relation to the frequency of communication and time spent together. It would be worthwhile attempting to verify our results about the attitudes of the Slovaks towards the Hungarian minority by operationalizing direct contact as 'having intergroup friendships' or 'being in a community with high percentage of Hungarians' – e.g. in a working environment, or school clubs (to fulfil the criteria of common goals and cooperation) or to focus on direct but superficial contact, such as living near Slovak Hungarians. Last but not least, when speaking about Slovak Hungarians one should keep in mind that this is very broad and general social category that includes individuals and groups with varying degrees of Hungarian and Slovak identity. Moreover, many of these people have dual attachments and their proximity to one or the other ethnic category is context dependent and situative. Those individuals with multiple attachments are liable to have more positive attitudes towards 'the Slovaks', and vice versa.

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