

CONSTRUCTION OF AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL DATABASE OF GROUPS OF IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS IN THE PROVINCE OF BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA – EXCLUDING SPANISH AND ITALIAN

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INTRODUCTION

For many years in the United States, Canada and the European countries, numerous research projects in anthropology, sociology, psychology and education have dealt with and still analyse the topic which Horace Kallen in 1915, called »Cultural Pluralism«.

This theory defends the importance of variety as an enriching element for the recipient society, supporting it by stimulating the social dynamics as a consequence of their interrelationships and facilitating the harmonic development for the individuals, carrying it out without implying the rupture of family traditions and social values (Dolores Juliano, 1993: 40). Although Berkson, Draschler and Gordon modified these propositions later, they still maintain their importance as the basis of all subsequent trends, which are named »multiculturalistic«. The research project of this presentation should be inscribed within these perspectives.

Therefore, if we consider that the diversity, typical of pluralistic societies like ours, is functioning as a generating core of changes, we will grasp the importance of encouraging integration, not at the cost of eliminating the cultural tradition of its people, but claiming for it with the aim to achieve a beneficial space for all. For this reason, a clear representation of these groups and their original culture can help illustrate universal kinds of human behaviour and recognize the essential components and conditions which affect their actual expression.

The majority of the large countries of the world have accepted and still accept a high percentage of immigrants and foreign residents: the heterogeneity is an **integral** and interactive part of each society. The »personal identity« is no longer simple. Everyone can compose it, by combining heterogeneous elements of different areas of the culture. From a cultural standpoint, migratory movements have promoted in our country a new form of generating and expressing identity.

In Argentina, research about immigration has traditionally been made fundamentally upon two majorities: Spanish and Italian. There were few specific anthropological studies concerning small and medium groups of immigrants (Cape Verdeans, Polish, Greek, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, etc.).

As a result of our experience in the field of anthropology, working with some of

these groups and their descendants, we became aware of the need of a tool which allows, in a flexible way, to recognize the profile which characterizes the studied communities and those which will be studied in the future. Our ultimate goal was to establish in advance, sufficiently representative comparisons to describe similarities and differences between distinctive groups. Without such a tool, it would be difficult to characterize the modifications which were produced and still take place as a consequence of the cultural change and the intercultural contact.

At this stage of the research, diverse specialists in statistics were consulted, who agreed that a database is the best tool for this purpose, since it allows flexible and more efficient storage and management of the information. Thus, we considered two steps: 1. Definition and development of the data base structure, 2. Elaboration of an interface for actualization and modification of the collected data.

PRELIMINARY STUDIES

The first task of our team was to study some of the most important research works related with this task and carried out in different countries of the world; and to compare these with our own experiences in this field. From this analysis we draw a guideline, which supports the design of our planned enquiry and finally the data base structure.

The immigrant, influenced by cultural origins, expresses his identity in a dynamic way, adjusting his behaviour to the standards and the models created by his group of origin and the recipient society. He **frames** his daily life fundamentally within two elements, especially during the first stage upon his arrival to the country of destination – one being his family and his »clubs or national associations«, while the other element is public life, work and school. Both elements give him the possibility to reconstruct his identity.

On the one hand, the family develops a conservation process, **perpetuating** the elements of the culture of origin by generations, such as the native language, religion, and traditional cooking or games. At the same time, an immigrant is exposed to a series of changes, occurring as a consequence of the interaction with the local setting by incorporating new elements, i.e. the Spanish language or multicultural unions.

The clubs or national associations fulfil a double function. They help **broaden** the sensation of **affiliation** to the group, **maintaining** the connections with their native country, by specific cultural practices like their language, their music, their dances, the preparation of native food and the celebration of patriotic functions or other cultural preferences. Moreover, they help with the process of adaptation to the recipient society and the integration in the new setting by solving problems such as housing, employment or **partnership**. In both cases (family and societies) the native language operates as a symbolic factor of **cohesion** within the group. It functions as an element of identity, as a tool for the internal communication and as a factor to distinguish between the people who speak it and those who do not know it.

Therefore, the common origin (basically as a consequence of the same native origin) together with the mother language, the music and other cultural practices, like for example the »art of traditional cooking« and in some cases religion too, have facilitated and intensified the singularity of these groups, expressing their ethnical identity by participating in a different culture.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The empirical references of the first stage of this research were groups of Cape Verdean, Luvian, Syrian and Lebanese immigrants and their descendants in the Province of Buenos Aires. These groups were selected, especially the two first ones, as a consequence of the information we already had about them.

Polling was selected as the most convenient technique to collect the data to be entered into the database. It is used for individuals, immigrants or their descendants of any generation, of both genders and above 6 years old, residing in the province of Buenos Aires.

A list of potential individuals for the enquiry was elaborated. Data came from lists of local society memberships of voluntary participation. These associations represent different sectors (popular, intermediate, accommodated), socio-economic and cultural classes, and sometimes religious groups. They hold permanent and periodical meetings and keep record of their members, whom they allowed us to contact. Another important condition for their acceptance was their interest in our research, without implying any institutional intervention.

The enquiry, of a duration of approximately half an hour, was not only applied to members of these organizations, but also to all those relatives, friends and descendants that we could record »ad hoc« during the consultation. The questionnaire was set forth by advanced students of anthropology, who participated at the same time in the adaptation and improvement of the items included in it.

The pilot enquiry was made in a Syrian Lebanese community at the locality of Pergamino. The enquiry comprises basic questions about occupation, social participation, educational level, etc.; as well as open questions, referred to **attitudes** or affiliation to organizations. Other questions are confined to one option, e.g. marital status. The questions are generally accepted and understood. Comprehension varied as a consequence of the instruction level. For example, questions related to the native and second language or the origin and residence, had to be clearly explained in advance.

OPERATING DEFINITION OF THE VARIABLES

With the aim of describing precisely the meaning we wanted to give to each of the variables within the data base, we will shortly mention and exemplify some of these.

Firstly the pollster asks for the personal data of the **questioned individual**, which includes surname, name, address, sex, birth date and age. This information is separately stored in the data base and the access is restricted through a password to protect the identity of the participants of the enquiry. The individual variables sex and age allow us wide possibilities of combination with the rest of the variables.

Regarding the family situation, we consider primarily the marital status of the interviewed person, which is usually treated as a synonym of the »marital situation« in the demographic literature. This is the condition that allows us to talk about relationships in anthropology. This variable can adopt the following defined values:

Single (unmarried): person who neither has got married nor united to a partner.

Married: person who has got married (legal union of a man and a woman).

United: person who has a stable and permanent union with a partner.

Separated: person who is legally separated from his/her marital partner, but is not able to get married again.

Divorced: person whose marriage has been legally dissolved from his/her marriage and is able to get married again.

Widowed: person whose partner has died and did not get married again.

Regarding children, we asked about their number and sex.

TABLE 1

Estudio	Estado civil	Número
Sirio-Libanés97	Casado	96
Sirio-Libanés97	Divorciado	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Separado	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Soltero	85
Sirio-Libanés97	Unido	4
Sirio-Libanés97	Viudo	12

TABLE 2

Estudio	NroHijos	Número
Sirio-Libanés97		98
Sirio-Libanés97	1	13
Sirio-Libanés97	2	49
Sirio-Libanés97	3	28
Sirio-Libanés97	4	7
Sirio-Libanés97	5	3
Sirio-Libanés97	7	1
Sirio-Libanés97	11	1

The intention of the questions with reference to the family is to allow a family's subsequent typological characterization, based upon the following factors:

- 1 – the type of partnership
- 2 – the origin of the marital partner
- 3 – the actual family size
- 4 – the stage of development in his family life cycle.

As regards migration, we investigated the origin of the polled person, his parents, his grandfathers and marital partner. The origin is understood as: »if he/she has any ancestor who immigrated in any lineage (maternal or paternal) and in any generation.« Finally we set the place of birth and the present residence, and in the case of

immigrants, the date of departure from his/her country of origin and the date of arrival in Argentina.

TABLE 3

Estudio	Lugar de nacimiento	Residencia actual	Llegada	Número
Sirio-Libanés97	Siria	Argentina	1910	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1912	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1937	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1948	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1949	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1950	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1951	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1952	4
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1954	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Líbano	Argentina	1959	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Siria	Argentina	1968	2

Regarding the language we distinguished between the variable of the mother tongue, defined as »the language which is first acquired by the person and which is transformed in his/her natural instrument of thinking and communication« (UNESCO), and the variable second language »is the one acquired after the mother tongue was established. It generally coincides with the official language« (UNESCO).

TABLE 4

Estudio	Primera Lengua	Segunda Lengua	Número de Casos
Sirio-Libanés97	Arabe	Arameo	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Arabe	Castellano	22
Sirio-Libanés97	Arabe	Frances	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Arabe	Ingles	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Castellano	Arabe	44
Sirio-Libanés97	Castellano	Frances	4
Sirio-Libanés97	Castellano	Ingles	56
Sirio-Libanés97	Castellano	Italiano	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Castellano	Ninguna	69

Regarding the mother tongue, we asked if he/she understands, speaks, reads and writes it.

TABLE 5

Estudio	Lengua	Entiende	Habla	Lee	Escribe	Número
Sirio-Libanés97	Arabe	Sí	Sí	Sí	Sí	12
Sirio-Libanés97	Arabe	Sí	Sí	No	No	12
Sirio-Libanés97	Arabe	Sí	No	No	No	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Castellano	Sí	Sí	Sí	Sí	167
Sirio-Libanés97	Castellano	Sí	Sí	No	No	7

Finally there were two questions which could be considered as related to the attitudes towards learning the mother tongue and reading news related with his/her place of origin.

The variable religion is understood, in a wide sense, as the practice of any type of

TABLE 6

Estudio	Religión del Encuestado	del Padre	de la Madre	Número
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico			46
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico		Católico	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Católico		1
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Católico	Católico	107
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Islámico		1
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Islámico	Católico	4
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Islámico	Islámico	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Protestante	Católico	3
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Protestante	Protestante	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Siriano-Ortodoxo	Católico	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Católico	Siriano-Ortodoxo	Siriano-Ortodoxo	4
Sirio-Libanés97	Islámico			2
Sirio-Libanés97	Islámico	Católico	Islámico	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Islámico	Islámico	Católico	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Islámico	Islámico	Islámico	3
Sirio-Libanés97	Ninguna			1
Sirio-Libanés97	Ninguna	Católico		1
Sirio-Libanés97	Ninguna	Católico	Católico	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Ninguna	Islámico		1
Sirio-Libanés97	Ninguna	Islámico	Católico	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Ninguna	Islámico	Islámico	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Ninguna	Siriano-Ortodoxo	Siriano-Ortodoxo	3
Sirio-Libanés97	Protestante	Protestante	Protestante	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Siriano-Ortodoxo			5
Sirio-Libanés97	Siriano-Ortodoxo	Siriano-Ortodoxo	Siriano-Ortodoxo	6

religious belief. We asked about the actual religion, if there was a second one and, finally the religion of his/her father and mother.

Regarding the job, we homogenized statistical and anthropological criteria, understanding this term as: the collection of specific tasks that are practised during his/her work, of any branch of economic activities or any professional category he/she has. If the person is an immigrant, it should be specified what was his/her job in his/her place of origin, and which was the first job in Argentina.

The variables related to recreation referred to the activities that were carried out during free time. The alternatives considered were sports, dancing, cinema and television. These were complemented with the indication of affiliation to or participation in institutions, where he/she is member or regular visitor.

With the term habits, we referred to the common way of realization of cultural practices, which are linked to the place of origin, like meals, the playing of musical instruments and dances (explaining type and frequency).

TABLE 7

Estudio	Practica Danzas	Número
Caboverdeanos79	No	141
Caboverdeanos97	Sí	20
Caboverdeanos97	No	34
Japonés97	No	32
Lituanos97	Sí	21
Lituanos97	No	16
Sirio-Libanés97	Sí	63
Sirio-Libanés97	No	137

With regard to schooling, we had to make comparisons between the schooling system of Argentina and that of the other involved countries during the first part of our studies. Even if we found variations in respect to the contents and length of the cycles, the boundaries between the large categories (primary, secondary, tertiary/college) are maintained. We considered it as appropriate to distinguish within these three categories, whether these were complete or not.

TABLE 8

Estudio	Escolarización del Encuestado	Número
Sirio-Libanés97	Primario Incompleto	29
Sirio-Libanés97	Primario Completo	30
Sirio-Libanés97	Secundario Incompleto	32
Sirio-Libanés97	Secundario Completo	20
Sirio-Libanés97	Terciario Incompleto	11
Sirio-Libanés97	Terciario Completo	15
Sirio-Libanés97	Universitario Incompleto	32
Sirio-Libanés97	Universitario Completo	28

Although we recognize that these variables are not sufficient as analytical indica-

tors of social stratification and mobility, the profession and school level allow us to measure in some way the position that an individual occupies within a social scale, and also the experimented social mobility (horizontally and vertically). The latter means the social change, suffered with respect to the place of origin in relation to the present residence and the changes in profession and school level (the one of his/her own and the one of his/her parents and children).

Finally we referred to the investigated group with the term »study«.

DESIGN OF THE DATABASE

The database is built as an application of the program MS-Access 2.0©. The minimum requirements of the hardware are a computer with a 80386 processor, 75 MHz and 8 MBRAM, Windows 3.1 or newer and MS-Access 2.0. The design of the application makes it easy to handle the data offering the user menus and control buttons. Upon starting, the user can choose from a main menu, which type of work he wants to elaborate. The system allows to receive data from various studies, to add and to modify data of the inquiries (figure 1) and to analyse these, concerning the field of interest, with the help of variable parametric queries (figure 2). Different options exist to extract and present prepared reports to show the results within tables (table 1) or diagrams (diagram 1).

Figure 1: Top of the inquiry form. The fields with an arrow at the end allow only one specific selection of an answer. In this way the answers were standardized and errors were inhibited. The addresses were added in a codified mode to protect the personal information of the polled people.

The database structure is relational. It comprises 13 related basic tables. Figure 3 shows the principal structure. As the people polled (»Encuestado«) are the object of investigation, this table is centred in the figure. Its fields are related to corresponding key fields of the surrounding tables. To demonstrate the relations between various different fields of the table »Encuestado« with the same field of the table of origin (»Origen«), it is necessary to add these virtually several times. The same occurs with the tables language (»Lengua«) and religion, but we cancelled these virtual duplicates



Figure 2: Query form of variable parameters, which allows a flexible analysis of the data.

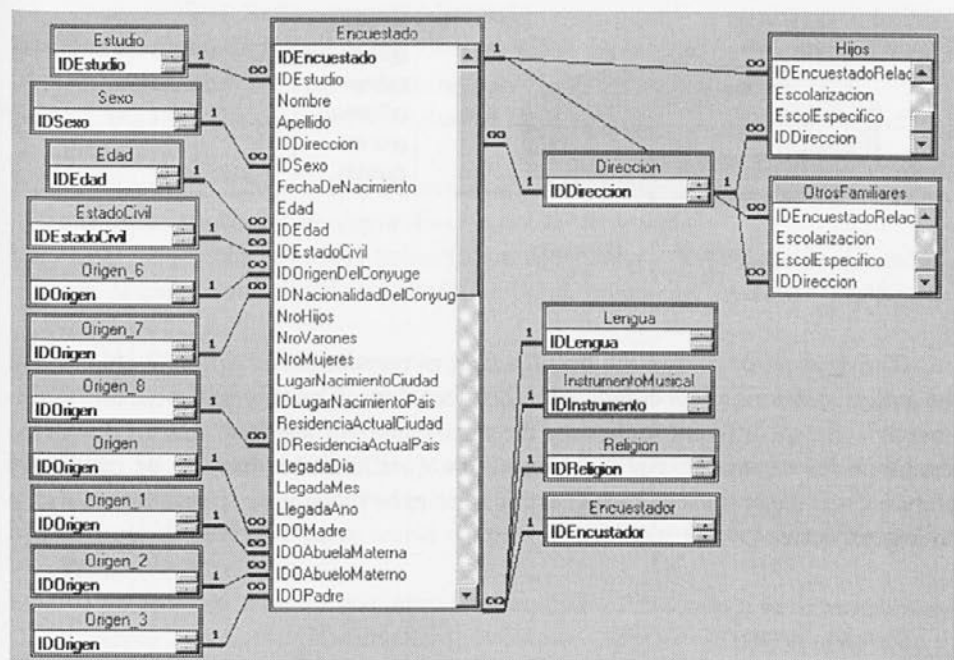


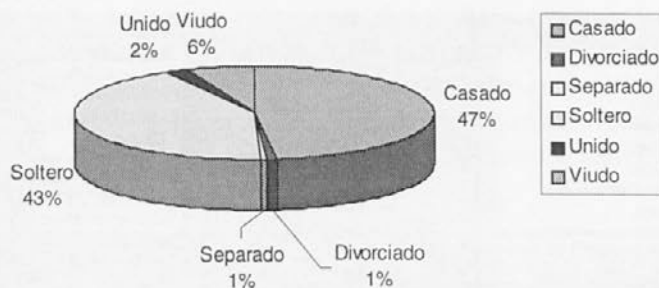
Figure 3: Relational data structure of the application. Virtual duplicates of the table origin (»Origen«) help understand the multiple relations between this and the table »Encuestado«. Virtual duplicates of the tables »Lengua« and »Religion« were excluded from the figure. Various fields of the tables, especially of the table »Encuestado« are hidden.

from the figure to avoid confusion. The relation between the table »Encuestado« and the table »Estudio« is very important for the application, because it demands that any

polled person can not be part of different studies (or it must be added twice). The directions are administered in an extra table for reasons of data protection. Moreover the entry to the whole application system is protected with passwords.

Table 1 and Diagram 1: Example of a simple query and the correspondent diagram of the result on the marital status (within the study of Sirio-Lebanese):

Estudio	Estado civil	Número
Sirio-Libanés97	Casado	96
Sirio-Libanés97	Divorciado	2
Sirio-Libanés97	Separado	1
Sirio-Libanés97	Soltero	85
Sirio-Libanés97	Unido	4
Sirio-Libanés97	Viudo	12



The application allows the management of numerous and different studies and the analysis options allow comparisons between them. The only indispensable requirement is that all different studies use the same inquiry or the same questions with the same options to answer. For this reason, the questionnaires have to be cautiously prepared and the options to each question have to be thought out carefully and with a wide perspective.

FINAL WORDS

At the moment we continue with the data collection and at the same time we are initiating the application of this method to new groups, such as: Greek, Armenian, Dutch, Danish and Bolivian. The availability of human and economic resources assigned to these studies, will allow us to advance and fulfil the final objective of this project: to undertake a socio-cultural survey of all groups of immigrants and their descendants (excluding Spanish and Italian), resident within the Province of Buenos Aires.

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POVZETEK

IZDELAVA ETNOGRAFSKE PODATKOVNE ZBIRKE O SKUPINAH PRISELJENCEV IN NJIHOVIH POTOMCEV V PROVINCI BUENOS AIRES V ARGENTINI – RAZEN ŠPANSKIH IN ITALIJANSKIH

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Priseljenske raziskave se v Argentini že tradicionalno bolj ali manj omejujejo na obe večinski narodnosti, špansko in italijansko. Le nekaj specifičnih antropoloških študij je bilo posvečenih manjšim priseljenkim skupinam (poljski, litovski, ukrajinski itd.). Na osnovi dosedanjih izkušenj pri antropoloških raziskavah nekaterih od teh skupin priseljencev in njihovih potomcev se je izkazalo, da bo izdelava podatkovne zbirke najboljša osnova za prepoznavanje značilnosti posameznih priseljenških skupnosti, tistih, ki jih že raziskujejo, in tistih, ki jih še bodo v prihodnosti.

V članku je uvodoma izpostavljen problem, ki predstavlja izhodišče načrtovanega projekta, opredeljenega v naslovu prispevka. V nadaljevanju so povzete ugotovitve predhodnih študij, nato pa so prikazane metode in tehnike izdelave podatkovne zbirke s pomočjo vprašalnikov, ki so v tem začetnem poročilu o projektu podrobno predstavljene in pojasnjene. V zaključku je najprej definirana trenutna faza raziskave: nadaljevanje zbiranja podatkov o že obravnavanih etničnih skupinah in začetek uporabe iste metode še pri drugih priseljenških skupnostih, in sicer grški, armenski, nizozemski, danski in bolivijski. Sledi še opredelitev končnega cilja projekta, to pa je socialno-kulturni pregled vseh skupin priseljencev in njihovih potomcev v provinci Buenos Aires v Argentini (razen španskih in italijanskih).