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Name and Sign: First Name as a Symbol of Ethnic Identity of Vojvodina Germans

In this paper we consider the choice of and use of first names among Vojvodina Germans at the beginning of the 21st century. Anthroponymy, the practice of choosing and using first names among the members of the German minority in Vojvodina will be viewed in the context of their striving to draw the symbolic borders of their ethnic community as opposed to others in their surroundings. This tendency among Vojvodina Germans is especially evident in the final decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century, when due to the political and social changes members of this community chose to forego their ethnic mimicry, and abandon the strategy of conscious temporary and/or permanent rejection of germanhood, in favor of a strategy of free manifestation of the symbols of their ethnic identity. In this context, the choice and use of personal names, aside from the public use of the German language, makes one of the two key symbols of ethnic identity of Vojvodina Germans and the renewal of germanhood which was present in the field at the time the research this paper is based on was done.

We view anthroponymy as a form of social practice which is strongly determined by numerous social and cultural factors and the results displayed in this article suggest that this practice is more influenced by macro factors such as social and cultural values than micro factors such as family heritage.

Key words: Germans, Vojvodina, ethnic identity, anthroponymy, first names