



## **Croatian roots, Chilean branches**

Identity Constructions in Third, Fourth, and Fifth-Generation Chileans of Croatian Descent



### **Master's Thesis**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the resurgence and transformation of cultural identity among Chileans of Croatian descent, focusing on the impacts of generational diversity and citizenship policy changes. The phenomenon has been shaped by historical migrations since the 1860s and a modern mutual influence between Chile and Croatia, which has shaped the reclamation of identity among the descendants. The study explores cultural engagement across generations, resulting in identity constructions, imaginaries, and narratives shaped in a diasporic context. Conducted with a mixed-methods approach, this research highlights how digital platforms and legislative changes facilitate the generations' engagement with their heritage by employing analytical frameworks centered on transnationalism and diaspora studies. Data collected from an online survey, in-depth interviews, and digital content analysis reveal a dynamic re-engagement with Croatian cultural identity, particularly among younger descendants. This study contributed to broader discussions on identity, migration, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural values.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Context.....	6
1.2 State of the Art.....	8
Croatian diasporas.....	8
Croatian diaspora in Chile .....	9
Croatia’s legal changes and strategies .....	10
1.3 Contribution .....	10
<b>2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework.....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Theories.....	11
2.2 Methods.....	14
2.3 Positionality Statement .....	17
<b>3. Imagining a Homeland: Croatian Cultural Identity in Chile.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 The Role of Imaginaries and Narratives .....	18
Imaginaries among the diaspora – Croatian institutions in Chile .....	18
Historical narratives – Croatia as a land of hardship .....	27
Contemporary narratives – Croatia as a land of opportunity .....	29
<b>4. Tracing Legislative Impacts: Citizenship and Identity .....</b>	<b>30</b>
4.1 Generational Engagement with Citizenship.....	34
4.2 The Path to Becoming a Citizen .....	39
4.3 Digital Navigation of Citizenship .....	43
<b>5. Linking Lineages: Generational Diversity and Cultural Transmission .....</b>	<b>45</b>
5.1 Intergenerational Transmission of Identity .....	47
5.2 Generational Perspectives in Music and Politics .....	49
5.3 Generational Dynamics in Cultural Reclamation .....	53
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>64</b>

## 1. Introduction

In December 2021, Gabriel Boric made headlines by winning the Chilean presidential elections. This victory was not just a national event; it resonated globally, garnering particular pride in the Croatian press. That day, a daily newspaper in Croatia highlighted with evident pride that Boric, *a Croat from Ugljan*, became the youngest president to hold office in Chile's history (Zadarski.hr 2021 [emphasis added]). Boric's family history is rooted in the migration of his great-grandparents from Ugljan—an island in Croatia's Zadar Archipelago—to Chile's southernmost region, Punta Arenas, around a century ago. However, the migration of Boric's grandparents was far from an isolated event.

For years, scholars have been fascinated by diasporic formations and the cultural identities they spawn as people relocate from one place to another. The Croatian community in Chile is a particularly intriguing case study, having formed through migrations that date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and spanning over five generations of descendants who have managed to maintain diverse links to the homeland today. This thesis investigates the resurgence of Croatian cultural identity among the third, fourth, and fifth generations of Chileans of Croatian descent. This phenomenon is rooted in historical migrations starting in the 1860s and is significantly influenced by recent changes in Croatian citizenship policies. These developments occur alongside Chile's evolving immigration landscape, indicating a mutual influence between Chile and Croatia that shapes identity reclamation and cultural engagement among Chileans of Croatian descent. The study explores the factors driving the engagement of the community across generations and the resulting identity constructions, as well as the cultural narratives and imaginaries shaped in the diasporic context.

The scholarly landscape surrounding Croatian migration to Chile has meticulously delineated the historical trajectories of the migratory movement, providing detailed narratives of their settlement in the primary regions of Magallanes and Tarapacá. Contemporary studies have expanded our comprehension of Croatian identity within Chile, examining its persistence and transformation in response to political shifts in the homeland, transcending distance, and generational span. Such research highlights a resilient identity and a latent post-war national consciousness awakening within the diaspora despite the limited maintenance of citizenship and language (Perić 2005; 2006; 2014; Bădescu 2021). However, while there is a wealth of research on the topic, there remains a gap in our knowledge around the specific impact of recent legislative changes and geopolitical events, particularly those concerning the European Union

(EU). Moreover, the intergenerational dimension of identity construction and the ways in which younger diaspora generations interpret and engage with their Croatian heritage have not been thoroughly explored.

To address this gap, this thesis employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from an online survey with qualitative insights of narrative observations extracted from online, semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, content analysis of relevant social media platforms will offer deeper insights into the community dynamics and public articulations of identity. By integrating these three approaches, we anticipate achieving a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which cultural identities are constructed and redefined within the diaspora. The research seeks to answer the following questions: How do imaginaries and narratives within the Chileans of Croatian descent shape and redefine their cultural identity? In what ways have significant political and legal changes, such as Croatia's EU integration and the amendment of citizenship policies, influenced the processes of identity construction and belonging among Chileans of Croatian descent? What are the implications of generational diversity in the reclamation of ethnic identity among Chileans of Croatian descent?

The aim of this thesis is to explore the evolution of Croatian cultural identity within the community of Chileans of Croatian descent, focusing on how identity and belonging have evolved across generations. It investigates the impact of significant political changes on this diaspora, such as Croatia's integration into the EU and amendments to its citizenship laws. By examining the processes that shape both communal and individual identity re-definition, this thesis offers new insights into the transnational and cross-temporal dynamics of the Chilean-Croatian community.

The forthcoming sections of the thesis establish the historical context of Croatian migration to Chile and delimitate the theoretical and methodological frameworks to then present the current state of Chileans of Croatian descent in the diaspora. The findings of the research integrate discussion and analysis in chapters 3, 4, and 5. In these chapters, firstly, we delve into the construction of cultural identity, examining the role of institutions in shaping the imaginaries and narratives that define and sustain the Croatian identity among descendants. Secondly, we shift the focus to political and legal spheres, discussing significant changes in Croatian citizenship laws and their impact on the descendants' engagement with their heritage and citizenship aspirations. Thirdly, we examine the digital and intergenerational transmission of ethnic identity among the descendants, exploring the methods and channels through which

these identities are maintained and transformed. Finally, the conclusion will revisit these insights, offering a reflecting summary and proposing directions for further research.

## **1.1 Context**

From the mid-19th century, a migratory movement from Croatia to Chile began in two main centers: Punta Arenas, the country's southernmost region, and Antofagasta, a northern city near the Atacama Desert. The reason for this migration can be analyzed through push and pull factors, as the phylloxera pest affected the grapevines of Dalmatia while a gold bloom was seen on the American continent. Military and political factors also played a role, with the Austro-Hungarian rule over the Dalmatian coast promoting a conscription list in 1852, causing many Dalmatians who did not accept the political interests of the empire as their own to decide to emigrate. This movement had chaotic consequences resulting from the lack of defined legislation (Perić 2006, 1196). By the 1920s, several Croatian settlements were established across Chilean territory. Soon, the internal migration of Croats became a common practice due to the centralization of the Chilean government, economy, and higher education institutions (Perić 2006, 1197). The number of immigrants arriving from Croatia to Chile decreased at the end of the First World War and stopped around 1950 (Flores Alvarado 2016, 17).

Parallel to the arrival of the first Croatian immigrants, in 1845, Chile began sponsoring and receiving groups of European immigrants under the Law of Selective Immigration (Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, n.d.). This was seen as a way to bring modernization and racial improvement to the country, a common theme in the political culture of Hispano-American countries during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Suárez-Cabrera 2015, 629). While Croatian immigration was never explicitly part of this initiative, and Croatians were never seen as colonizers of the southern territories of Chile as other groups of Europeans in the region, their place of origin was also perceived as a demarcation of social status in Chilean society.

As time passed, the Croatian immigrants and their descendants moved from occupations such as mining, construction, and cattle farming to positions of greater prestige and visibility (Jones and Bartlett 2021). According to the international service of Croatia's public broadcasting company, Croatian emigrants residing in South American countries became well known for their dedication and strong work ethic, being considered honorable individuals who take pride in their Croatian heritage and demonstrate loyalty to the country they live in (Njikoš 2021). In Chile, the Croatian influence is visible across various domains, including business –where the

Luksic family is listed as #54 in the Bloomberg Billionaires Index (Bloomberg 2024)— to political figures, scholars, writers, sportspeople, journalists, musicians, and celebrities. The establishment of Croatian migrants in both extremes of the country instigated the creation of diverse centers of diaspora-making, such as clubs, sports centers, and several folkloric groups.

Following the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Croatia's declaration of independence in 1991, the Croatian constitution included an explicit aim to protect the rights and interests of citizens abroad and to promote their ties to their homeland (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2010 Article 10). This policy shift was informed by the historical context of Yugoslavia, one of Europe's largest sources of labor migration during the Post-War period, underscoring the need to maintain strong connections with a globally dispersed population. Therefore, a Croatian citizenship law based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* was enacted, creating a form of transnational nationalism to unify all ethnic Croats under a single national group (Ragazzi and Štiks 2009, 339). In this context, Croatia took a stance in the international impulse to promote (re)migration and modified its policies to intensify the relations between the homeland and the diaspora. The diaspora strategy facilitated and increased access to Croatian citizenship and created a special legal status for Croats without citizenship (Hornstein Tomić, Hinić, and Hrستیć 2022, 98). In this period, a new national priority emerged in the shape of EU integration, promoting new changes in the discussion of the citizenship regime (Koska 2012, 397).

The citizenship law, posteriorly amended in 2011, took a stance against dual citizenship for immigrant citizens but not against dual citizenship for ethnic Croats outside Croatia (Ravlić 2017, 626). The legislation established a generational restriction for descendants up to the 3rd degree of kinship in a straight line and maintained some of the requirements from the previous amendment, such as proficiency in the Croatian language and Latin script, together with knowledge of the Croatian culture and social arrangements (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2011). A few years later, in 2013, Croatia joined the EU. This provoked a change in the migratory aspirations of the Chileans of Croatian descent that was reinforced when, in 2020, the legislation was amended once more. The amendments to the Croatian Citizenship Act from January 2020 include, among the most significant changes, the liberalization of conditions for emigrants and their descendants to acquire citizenship by naturalization. It eliminated the generational restriction, the obligations of language proficiency, and the knowledge of culture and social arrangements (Government of the Republic of Croatia, n.d.).

The 2020 legislative changes, while removing previous barriers, also introduced a notable degree of flexibility in proving ethnic Croatian ancestry. Authorities allow a range of documentary evidence to establish this connection, recognizing that geopolitical changes over the centuries have made traditional genealogical proofs challenging. For instance, birth certificates from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the Kingdom of Italy, and, posteriorly, Yugoslavia, maintained in modern-day Croatian institutions, are acceptable for citizenship application. This approach reflects a significant shift towards inclusivity that utilizes the historical documents not as tools for exclusion but as bridges that link the diaspora to the homeland.

The recent legislative amendments simplified the acquisition of Croatian citizenship, catalyzing an uptick in applications among descendants within the Chilean of Croatian descent. This legislative easing, however, also revealed a pressing need: the facilitation of the complex bureaucratic process. In response, an entrepreneurial vein within the community pulsed, with those who had successfully navigated the system offering consultancy services and creating online content to aid others in pursuing dual nationality. Such services, which include the procurement of vital historical documents, are emblematic of a burgeoning transnational network that encapsulates the Croatian government's efforts to weave the diaspora into its broader national narrative. This inclusive stance extends beyond legislative measures to cultural initiatives that leverage Croatia's idyllic Adriatic allure and rich historical patrimony as instruments of national branding. Additionally, promoting educational pursuits, particularly language programs, reflects a strategic impetus to foster and sustain a cohesive Croatian identity within the global diasporic community.

## **1.2 State of the Art**

### *Croatian diasporas*

According to Hornstein Tomić et al. (2021), Croats living outside Croatia can be classified into three different groups: the Croatian population residing in neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Croats who are recognized as indigenous minorities in 12 European countries<sup>1</sup>, and the Croatian diaspora, including emigrant communities (2022, 94). Considering

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<sup>1</sup> Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia (Bošnjak 2022, 86).



the latter group, some of the biggest settlements are overseas<sup>2</sup>, particularly in North America. The engagement of this diaspora with Croatian identity and nationalism has been extensively researched, emphasizing its role in nation-building, ethnic solidarity, and conceptualizing the homeland (Djuric 2003; Winland 2007; Perica 2011; Bellamy 2018). Studies in North America explore the cultural dynamics through the impact of music on memory and identity, language use, and kinship structures among families (Vukobratović 2018; Hlavac and Stolac 2021; Čapo 2022; Forry 2023). Research also examines return migration patterns, linking them to broader theories of assimilation and transnationalism, often influenced by motives such as nostalgia or tourism (Carter 2004; Skrbiš 2007; Čapo 2010; 2012; Peručić, Greblički, and Beljo 2022).

In Argentina, the diaspora's identity is characterized by its roots in post-World War II migration, with subsequent generations actively commemorating and reinterpreting their past (Židek 2019; 2020; 2021). Preserving the community's history and culture is an essential aspect of their identity. Research has focused on the efforts to maintain the language and preserve the Croatian culture in Argentina, including through culinary traditions and radio broadcasting (Stefanovic-Banovic and Pantovic 2013; Rajkovic Iveta and Gadze 2015; Radovich 2016; Gadze 2018; Franić, Bilić, and Cúneo 2023; Bilić and Franić 2023). Studies also explore the identity formation of Croatian emigrants and their descendants, as well as the return of Argentinians of Croatian descent to their ancestors' land (Radovich 2018; Gadze et al. 2018).

### *Croatian diaspora in Chile*

Research on migration in Chile covers both contemporary and historical movements. European migration in the 19th and 20th centuries was driven by Chile's colonization law, shaping the nation's sociocultural landscape. The 20th century saw a preference for European immigrants, but Chile eventually became mainly an emigration country due to military dictatorship (Bravo Acevedo and Norambuena Carrasco 2018). Today, the immigrant population in Chile is estimated to be 8.29%, with people from Venezuela, Perú, Colombia, and Haiti being among the most common (Servicio Nacional de Migraciones (SERMIG) and Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE) 2022). Within this context, researchers and the media have increasingly stigmatized migrants from South American and Caribbean origins, leading to a nostalgia for the European immigration of the past (Suárez-Cabrera 2015, 630).

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<sup>2</sup> The largest Croatian diasporas are in the United States (1.2M), Germany (500,000), Argentina, Australia, and Canada (250,000 each). The Croatian diaspora in Chile is estimated to span between 200,000 and 400,000 people (Republic of Croatia Central State Office for Croats Abroad, n.d.).

Studies on Croatian migration to Chile have detailed historical narratives focusing on their settlement in Magallanes and Tarapacá, and the biographies of the first migrants (Mataić Pavičić 1998; Martinic 1999; Zlatar Montan 2001). These studies highlight the demographic impact of Croatian migration, particularly in Punta Arenas, where descendants constitute a significant portion of the population (Flores Alvarado 2016; Boric Bargetto 2020). Additionally, research has explored the political involvement of descendants in local affairs over time and has compared the socioeconomic representation of Croatian migration with the internal migration from Chiloé in Chilean Patagonia (Barticevic 2015; Saldívar Arellano 2020). Contemporary scholarship examines Croatian identity in Chile, addressing how it has developed apart from the impacts of war and rule changes in the homeland (Perić 2005; Bădescu 2021). The role of folklore in the diaspora's identity has been proposed for further study (Bulicic Auspont and Koplów 2021), with research confirming the persistence of Croatian identity despite minimal language and citizenship retention (Perić 2006; 2014).

#### *Croatia's legal changes and strategies*

Ragazzi's study highlights the dynamic use of the Croatian diaspora as a rhetorical tool by governments to redefine national borders and sovereignty (2017). However, Croatia's engagement with its diaspora has been characterized as inconsistent, particularly during wartime and reconstruction phases (Garding 2018). Post-independence, Croatia evolved its citizenship regime from constitutional nationalism to ethnonational democracy (Štiks 2010; Koska 2012; Baričević 2023), with citizenship laws aimed at ethnic consolidation and EU membership standards (Ragazzi and Štiks 2009). Croatia recognizes a 'diaspora' category within its dual citizenship framework, ensuring the diaspora's participation in national development and featuring diaspora representation in its parliament (Kasapović 2012; Laguerre 2013; Ravlić 2017). The post-independence policies emphasized diaspora involvement, viewing Croats abroad as crucial to the national development (Hornstein Tomić, Hinić, and Hrstić 2022). Institutions like the Central State Office for Croats Abroad and national development strategies emphasize the role of the diaspora in strengthening the nation's global presence and supporting demographic revitalization (Bošnjak 2022).

### **1.3 Contribution**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the Croatian cultural identity within the Chileans of Croatian descent by analyzing the evolution of identity and belonging across generations as

well as the impact that recent political changes, such as Croatia's EU integration and changes in citizenship law, have had on them. This study goes beyond providing a superficial overview of the community; it investigates the underlying processes shaping communal and individual identity formation and re-definition. It seeks to shed light on the broader phenomenon of diasporic identity reconstruction, particularly within legal and geopolitical shifts. Importantly, this thesis seeks to fill a scholarly gap by offering a fresh perspective on the transnational and cross-temporal dynamics of the Chilean-Croatian community, highlighting how legal frameworks and international affiliations influence diasporic identities and aspirations.

Additionally, this research contributes to current discussions within migration studies, diaspora studies, and identity politics by exploring the fluctuating engagement with cultural identity across generations. It uncovers patterns where one generation may display ambivalence or disconnect from their heritage while subsequent generations rediscover and reinvigorate their connection. This study enriches the understanding of intergenerational identity transmission and the oscillating nature of cultural engagement, providing insights into how political changes and social dynamics can rekindle interest and pride in cultural heritage. By examining the role of the nation-state in fostering diaspora links through both cultural ties and institutional support, the thesis adds to the dialogue of the literature on long-distance nationalism and diaspora engagement. This research is expected to have multiple contributions. Firstly, it will offer tangible insights into the current state of affairs among Chileans of Croatian descent. This will address their place within Chilean society and their connections to the Croatian homeland. Secondly, it will shed light on the underexplored area of intergenerational identity transmission. Lastly, it will enrich the literature on how modern digital platforms facilitate the exploration and retention of ethnic heritage among younger generations.

## **2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

### **2.1 Theories**

In delineating the concept of diaspora, Brubaker identified three core elements: the dispersion from an origin, orientation towards the homeland, and preservation of borders (2005). Yet the applicability of these attributes is frequently debated in contemporary settings, where the essence of “home” and connections to a “homeland” may differ from historical precedents. This research adopts Brah’s interpretation of diaspora as a dynamic, evolving construct intersecting various axes of identity (1996). It is materialized through narratives articulating a

semblance of a homogeneous community legitimately linked to a distant land (Ragazzi 2017, 8). Modern diasporic formations challenge traditional notions of diaspora, typically associated with forceful and widespread displacement, by situating them within the context of globalization (Skrbiš 1999, 5). Here, diaspora signifies the shared identification with a transnational community, which individuals or groups self-identify with, through a collective memory of a shared, often idealized history (Glick-Schiller 2005, 571).

This research acknowledges the diverse generational spectrum within diasporas, including the so-called post-migrant generations –those born and raised outside their ancestral homeland, often extending beyond the second generation. Contemporary scholarship grapples with the connection such descendants maintain with their ancestral origins, frequently neglecting the impact of generational distance on homeland affiliations (Li and Chan 2018, 3). The latter is often studied through a transnational lens, which provides a framework for analyzing the sustained, multifaceted social ties that migrants maintain with their countries of origin and residence (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994, 7). Yet it's important to note that the extent of transnational engagements is not an absolute measure of one's emotional bonds or identity alignment with the homeland, as these sentiments and activities can vary significantly across different generations of descendants of migrants (Huang, Hung, and Chen 2018, 54).

In researching the diaspora's ties to the homeland and their nationalistic leanings, generational dynamics and the perpetuation of ethnonationalism become central. Glick-Schiller defines long-distance nationalism as differing from conventional nationalism in two respects: one, it's a medium for articulating collective aspirations tied to a nation-state, and two, it involves socio-political endeavors and state policies enacted in line with a transnational, national identity (2005). Skrbiš further delineates long-distance nationalism as a modern global adaptation of nationalism, transcending geographic borders and continents (1999). This conceptual framework illuminates how national identities evolve within historical diasporas, which are progressively distancing from the migration narratives of the first and second generations. These identities are shaped by the mediation of familial stories, augmented communication via digital media, and varying socio-political landscapes. Nationalist sentiments emerge as a collective phenomenon, imbricating both the public and private realms (Skrbiš 1999, 10).

The interplay between ethnic homelands and their diasporas is crucial for understanding the concept of long-distance nationalism. Homelands are not merely geographical locales but are shaped by political and cultural influences, serving as spatial representations beyond simple

territorial definitions (Skrbiš 1999, 38). The notion of homeland is deeply intertwined with nostalgia, a sentiment that bifurcates the concept of home into two distinct ideas, as delineated by Hobsbawm. *Heim* refers to the private, literal interpretation of home, whereas *Heimat* embodies a public, socially constructed notion. *Heimat* is not an individual possession but a collective construct to which individuals may affiliate, providing a foundation for identity reinforcement without necessitating individual existence; it perpetuates over time independently (Hobsbawm 1991, 67–68). This concept of *Heimat*, anchored in the past, epitomizes an idealized native land that shapes collective and personal identities and serves as a medium for articulating internal community values. Similarly, Skrbiš introduces the concept of a “distant view,” denoting a somewhat static perception of the homeland that fosters selective engagement within the diaspora, highlighting how spatial and nostalgic representations of the homeland influence diasporic identities and communal values (1999, 26).

This study, informed by the construct of collective imaginaries, conceptualizes the diasporic community of Chileans of Croatian descent utilizing aspects of Anderson’s nation. Within this framework, the community is deemed “imagined” not in the sense of being fictitious but in acknowledging that its members will never fully know the extent of their compatriots’ influence both within Chile and internationally. It is termed a “community” in accordance with its internal structure, perceived as fraternal and bonded by shared ties (Anderson 2006, 6–7). The glue holding this community together is the collective fabric of family memory, recognized as a dynamic social phenomenon rather than a static historical record. This process of remembrance is not only ongoing but actively reconstructs the past, interweaving personal and shared narratives (Švaričková-Slabáková 2021). Beyond its role in cementing familial bonds, family memory is also pivotal in forging individual identities. Here, Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” becomes pertinent, shedding light on how subsequent generations, though not directly experiencing migration themselves, inherit and internalize the ancestral narratives so profoundly that these accounts become part of their own memory (2008). For the Chilean-Croatian community, this intergenerational transmission of memory is a cornerstone in shaping the current cultural identity and sense of ethnic belonging.

In accordance with Wright’s perspective, culture is conceptualized as an active process of ascribing meaning, continuously evolving, and open to renegotiation (1998). Culture, therefore, is not static but an ensemble of practices through which collectives attribute significance to their experiences, thereby shaping social actions and institutions (Hammersley

2019). Similarly, identity is constructed through local and global influences, manifesting through narratives that assess its authenticity. Cultures are not just frameworks for identity but also serve as a repository for the articulation and contestation of interests, which in turn can be strategically utilized. The concept of identification is thus an articulative process, acknowledging the possibility of multiple identities to be negotiated within varying contexts (Hall 1997; Wright 1998). Within group dynamics, cultural identities pertain to the self-definitions that groups adopt relative to their cultural connections and experiences. Hall understands cultural identities in two distinct manners: firstly, through an essentialist and fixed lens, foregrounding shared histories and cultural foundations, and secondly, as a fluid construct continually shaped by interactions with history, culture, and power (1997). Consequently, cultural identities significantly influence individual and collective self-perception, belonging, and interrelations, often mediated by traditional cultural practices.

Building upon Yuval-Davis' framework, belonging is a multi-layered process characterized by emotional and potentially ontological attachments; it is sculpted through social positions, identifications and emotional ties, and ethical and political values. Contemporary interpretations of citizenship often represent various political efforts to create a sense of belonging in a community. Within this schema, citizenship is an expression of the participative aspect of belonging to a political body. It is critical to note that citizenship extends beyond uniform participation of allegiance to a single state. Instead, citizenship is inherently multi-layered, encompassing affiliations to regional, national, and supranational political entities, often including multiple national allegiances (Yuval-Davis 2011, 46, 69).

## **2.2 Methods**

This research adopts a mixed-methods design, systematically integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to furnish a contrasting examination of the phenomenon at hand (Hammond and Wellington 2021, 130). Quantitative methods generate numerical data amenable to statistical manipulation, while qualitative methods yield narrative data reflective of complex human experiences. This research triangulates three methodologies: an online survey, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis. The selection of a mixed-methods approach was predicated on the logistical constraints imposed by geographical dispersion, with the researcher located in Denmark and the subjects scattered across various urban centers in Chile and Croatia. The online modality emerged as the sole viable medium for conducting the research. Because of the absence of official statistics regarding the Chilean population of

Croatian descent and the lack of clarity on their generational status, the survey was deployed to delineate the demographic landscape and establish an initial community profile. The interviews were designed to extend this inquiry, aiming to delve deeper into personal accounts and narratives, thereby enriching the quantitative data with qualitative depth. Content analysis is an auxiliary method that examines the population's digital discourse to decode the collective content they engage with online.

As a systematic data collection from a population, the survey was conducted online and contained 16 questions. It was structured into three sections, each intended to dissect different aspects of the Chileans of Croatian descent's experience: demographics, perceptions of citizenship changes, and lastly, cultural engagement and personal identity. It utilized a mix of question formats, including multiple-choice for demographic data, Likert scales for attitude and opinion measures, and open-ended questions to capture personal narratives. Prior to distribution, the survey was subjected to a rigorous pilot test with a small group from the target population to ensure clarity in phrasing and relevance to the research objectives. Upon refinement, the survey was disseminated via online channels identified as popular among the diaspora, including social media groups<sup>3</sup>, and by sharing it with the diversity of Croatian clubs in the country to maximize reach and participation<sup>4</sup>. At the end of the survey, an open question was added to invite respondents to leave their email addresses in case they wanted to be contacted for a follow-up interview. The survey was left open for 10 days, and 182 responses and 70 email addresses were received for a follow-up interview. Python programming language was utilized to analyze the survey responses, leveraging its powerful libraries for data analysis and visualization to interpret trends and patterns.

From the initial set of seventy email addresses obtained through the survey, a strategic sub-sample of fifteen was chosen for follow-up interviews to ensure a representative cross-section of the surveyed demographic. The number of participants who completed the interview from this sub-sample was eight. Selection criteria were meticulously designed to reflect the diverse characteristics of the larger population. Interview candidates were contacted via email and presented with two options for conducting the interview to accommodate geographic dispersion

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<sup>3</sup> The survey was shared in two private Facebook groups: "Croatas de Chile" (4.2K members) and "Descendientes de Inmigrantes Croatas en Chile" (3K members).

<sup>4</sup> The survey was sent to Croatian Clubs located in Punta Arenas, Iquique, Antofagasta, and La Serena, as well as the Croatian Stadium and the Cultural Corporation Domovina, both located in Santiago. However, no official responses were received from these organizations to confirm whether the survey was actually distributed among their members.

and the researcher's time difference. Before conducting the interviews, all participants were given an informed consent document to sign, acknowledging the treatment of their data.

The options for conducting the interviews included a synchronous online meeting or allowing participants to submit responses through WhatsApp voice notes at their convenience. This latter method was proposed to leverage the asynchronous nature of communication, permitting interviewees to respond at a time that suited them, thus minimizing disruptions to their daily schedules. The participant's ability to choose a communication mode eliminated the need for platform-specific orientations, simplifying data collection. Moreover, WhatsApp's multifunctional capabilities allowed for the additional exchange of images and text, enriching the data's complexity and depth. This methodology, described by Bueno-Roldán and Röder as the asynchronous written-voice note format, involved dispatching questions in written form while accepting answers as audio recordings, allowing both interviewers and interviewees ample time for contemplation. Such a method has been shown to facilitate the exchange of information, alleviating the pressure often associated with written responses, which can be daunting for participants due to the demand for articulation and detailed expression. The voice note alternative mitigates this challenge by reducing the time investment and imbuing a sense of immediacy and personal presence, transforming what could be perceived as an impersonal method into a more engaging and enjoyable interaction (Bueno-Roldán and Röder 2022). The study conducted 3 semi-structured interviews via Zoom to facilitate real-time dialogue and 5 structured interviews utilizing the written-voice note approach.

Lastly, content analysis, as understood in this research, involves systematically examining texts, focusing on qualitative elements. This method goes beyond mere counting of words and phrases; it extends to a critical interpretation of the meanings and relationships embedded in the text, allowing the researcher to uncover underlying messages, cultural contexts, and the significance of content within social constructs. This approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of how texts reflect and shape social realities (Krippendorff 2018). In the scope of this study, Facebook posts and YouTube videos affiliated with Croatian culture and heritage in Chile have been subjected to this method. This enables an investigation into how these platforms contribute to shaping collective narratives and identity among Chileans of Croatian descent.



### **2.3 Positionality Statement**

As a white female, fifth-generation Chilean of Croatian descent, the researcher's engagement with this investigation is personal yet distinctly detached. Despite her Croatian heritage, she has not participated in Croatian cultural institutions, does not speak Croatian fluently, does not hold a Croatian passport, and has never visited Croatia. Her academic affiliation with the University of Copenhagen further complicates her position –often perceived as a status and class symbol within Chilean culture. Throughout the research, interactions with respondents and interviewees, who were previously unknown to the researcher, suggest that having a Croatian surname and a European institutional affiliation facilitated initial contact. This influenced participants' perceptions, leading to varied assumptions about the researchers' cultural knowledge and identity. Some interviewees perceived her as an outsider, possibly due to her European educational background, and treated her as not fully Chilean, while others assigned her an ambiguous insider status. Often, interviewees overestimated her integration within the Croatian community, incorrectly assuming she possessed a Croatian passport. These dynamics necessitated a heightened level of reflexivity in interpreting the data collected, as the researcher's identity influenced both the collection and interpretation of narratives. This positionality, marked by connection and distance from the cultural context under study, has enriched and challenged the researcher's understanding of the research topic.

### **3. Imagining a Homeland: Croatian Cultural Identity in Chile**

Cultural identity, as a matter of becoming and being, is a process that undergoes constant transformation. According to Stuart Hall, identities are the names given to the different ways of positioning ourselves within the narratives of the past (2007, 131). When discussing a historical immigrant settlement, as is the case of the Croatians in Chile, ethnic identity, as a subset of cultural identity, is associated with a group whose members identify with each other primarily based on shared ancestry. It is often inherited and built based on difference, as the awareness of belonging is not created through isolation but confrontation. In the case of Chileans of Croatian descent, the narratives of the past emerge from the historical immigration starting in the 1860s, and the contemporary identity of the descendants living in the territory cannot be separated from this primary experience. The historical influences of emigration are charged with sociopolitical and economic shifts, which mediate the engagement with the new culture of settlement and, therefore, negotiate how the cultural identity experiences acculturation, understanding the latter as the cultural changes resulting from group encounters.

John Berry's model of acculturation suggests that immigrants adapt to a new culture through four strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. In the case of the Croatian emigrants in Chile, Večeralo identifies rapid assimilation as a significant feature of the group (2022, 105). Assimilation occurs when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek interaction with other cultures (Berry 1997, 9). When migrating and establishing settlements, the strategies used are influenced not only by the local landscape of the receiving country but also by the changes in the country of origin. These changes similarly affect the sense of belonging and understanding of a shared cultural identity. According to Perić, before the First World War, immigrants primarily identified as Croats and held anti-Austrian sentiments. However, after the Second World War, Croatian emigrants' identity was influenced by *Yugoslavization*. This trend persisted until the Homeland War and the international recognition of the Republic of Croatia (Perić 2006, 1197–98). The continuous change of national affiliations and ruling political structures shaped the Chilean-Croatian cultural identity, which places the migration of the forefathers from the Dalmatian coast as a key element of the group memory (Bădescu 2021, 8).

Linked to the role of historical migration, a recent study on Croatian diaspora communities' cyberspace, Perić defines two types of identification among Chileans of Croatian descent. The first type is characterized by an essential regional Dalmatian origin, typical of the Magallanes province. The second type is loosely defined, emphasizing Slavic origin and former Yugoslavian citizenship (2014, 100). Both forms of identification reveal a layered and complex conception of cultural identity. They exhibit a cultural kinship with the homeland that is simultaneously inherited and reimagined through contemporary and historical lenses. This kinship is informed by a consciousness intertwining regional origins with broader narratives. It suggests that the diaspora's engagement with their past and present identities is not static but is an active negotiation of memory, place, and politics.

### **3.1 The Role of Imaginaries and Narratives**

#### *Imaginaries among the diaspora – Croatian institutions in Chile*

The history of Valentina's<sup>5</sup> family traces back to her great-grandparents, who migrated from Brač to Punta Arenas. Although her grandmother was born in Chile, she often talked about their Croatian heritage as an important part of her identity. In 2018, Valentina's aunt participated in

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<sup>5</sup> The research participants' names are replaced by pseudonyms unless they have consented to use their real names.

a government program to learn the Croatian language in Croatia, which caught Valentina’s interest. She, too, applied to the program and, a few months later, started learning the language while visiting the very place where her great-grandparents lived before migrating to Chile. As she explored the Croatian coast, she felt a strong connection to her ancestral homeland and decided to move back for good. When asked if she would ever think about her grandmother’s stories about her family in Croatia, she responded: “Always. Since I came here, I always think about it. First, how did they leave here, from such a beautiful place? How did it ever occur to them to go *there*?” (Interview with Valentina, 27/03/2024. Emphasis added). Valentina’s story compares Croatia and Chile, which mainly centers on the beauty of Croatia. Her ancestors' decision to trade the stunning Croatian landscapes for those in Punta Arenas is difficult for her to comprehend. This viewpoint is a common theme among Chileans of Croatian descent, who often emphasize Croatia's picturesque locations and heavenly landscapes. This perspective is particularly present in social media groups, where images are easily shared through members, and even among the Croatian organizations in the country:



Figure 1: Two flyers shared in the Facebook group “Descendientes de Inmigrantes Croatas en Chile”

As observed in Figure 1, on the left, an event carried out by the joint Croatian National Tourist Office, the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, and the Association of Travel Agencies of Croatia advertises traveling with the text: “Croatia arrives in Chile! We invite you to get to know Croatia, a destination full of history and surprising places, land of excellent wines, natural parks

and impressive architecture!”. On the right, there is a flyer advertising free Croatian language classes for the year 2024. It invites people older than 18 years old to participate twice a week. The images observed in the flyers show historical buildings and the Adriatic Sea, emphasizing Croatia’s picturesque and cultural heritage. Using such images creates a romanticized portrayal of Croatia, positioning it as a place of peace, opportunity, and natural splendor –qualities particularly appealing to those who may seek a connection with their heritage or wish to explore their ancestral homeland. The emphasis on the historic cities, with their terracotta rooftops nestled against the coastline, speaks to a deep-rooted history and a culture preserved through time, suggesting a proud national identity that cherished its past.

The fact that both events are carried out at the same location, the *Estadio Croata* (Croatian Stadium) in Santiago, is not arbitrary. Organizations are important places for imagining Croatia and spreading it to the community. According to Večeralo, there are almost thirty different associations of descendants of Croatian emigrants in Chile, the biggest number located in the capital (13), but spread all over the country, with 8 in the north and center-north and 8 in the south and center-south regions (Večeralo 2022, 107). The formation of Croatian organizations in Chile has been present since the beginning of their immigration, as societies for mutual aid were established as social spaces to reinforce collective identities and preserve culture, but also to assist other migrants in services of social protection, illness, asylum, and unemployment (Boric Bargetto 2020, 52–53). Members gathered to meet and to help each other. In contemporary times, Croatian clubs and institutions work as meeting places to preserve and disseminate traditions inherited from their ancestors.

In Magallanes, at Chile’s southern tip, the Austrian Mutual Aid Society was founded in 1896 in Punta Arenas, providing healthcare support to immigrants and their families. By 1919, it had evolved into the Dalmatian Mutual Aid Society, still in operation today. The *Austrijsko Votrogasno Društvo* (Austrian fire brigade) of 1902, known through various iterations as *Slavjansko*, *Hrvatsko*, and now as *Cuarta Compañía “Bomba Croata”* (Fourth Brigade “Croatian Brigade”), reflects a history of name changes that mirror the evolving cultural and national identity. For the preservation of culture, the short-lived *Hrvatska Čitaonica* (Croatian Library), created in 1899 to fulfill intellectual needs, was the first one of its kind, and even though it lasted only a year, it was re-established in 1911. In the realm of music, the *Hrvatsko Tamburasko Društvo “Tomislav”* (Croatian Tambura Society “Tomislav”) was founded in 1904, followed by the establishment of the *Pjevački Mješoviti Zbor Hrvatskog* (Croatian Mixed

Choir) in 1915. In 1904, the *Hrvatsko Omladinsko Dramatsko Društvo* (Croatian Youth Drama Society) was founded and dedicated to fostering theater arts. In the realm of sports, the *Hrvatski Sportski Klub "Sokol"* ("Sokol" Croatian Sports Club) was founded in 1912, inspired by the pan-Slavic physical education movement<sup>6</sup> (Martinic 1999).

The *Club Croata de Punta Arenas* (Croatian Club of Punta Arenas) was established on February 25th, 1915. The club's website divides its history into two sections: "origin" and "foundation". The former section explains the reasons behind the organization's establishment, while the latter provides factual information about its creation. Under "origin", it is explained how the immigrants in Magallanes arrived initially with Austrian nationality, which didn't really identify them. However, after Croatian immigration started to rise at the beginning of the 20th century, it became clear that a community had to be established, along with the rise of Croatian nationalism. This nationalism inspired the foundation of the *Hrvatski Dom* (Croatian Home) in 1915, which would serve as an umbrella for other preexisting institutions, such as the *Estudiantina Tomislav* and the *Club Sokol*. The *Dom* soon needed an appropriate building that would serve as the headquarters for it and the other various organizations. New institutions continued to be established in Punta Arenas, later inspired by the Yugoslavic ideals. Crossing the Strait of Magellan, in Porvenir, local committees were also created, and institutions such as the *Jugoslavenski Dom* (Yugoslav Home) and the *Sportski Klub "Jadran"* ("Jadran" Sports Club) were founded in 1926. In 1994, the *Yugoslav Dom* was renamed *Hrvatski Dom*, and in 2006, the *Club de Automovilismo Jadran Croata de Porvenir* (Jadran Croatian Automobile Club of Porvenir) was established under its umbrella. Several newspapers and literary activities can also be found in the region (Martinic 1999).

Moving to the opposite side of the country, in the northern region of Tarapacá, a series of Croatian cultural organizations emerged, beginning with the founding of the *Slavensko Društvo* (Slavic Society) in 1891. Notably, in 1896, the *Hrvatsko Dobrotvorno Društvo* (Croatian charitable society) was formed, making the first use of the national demarcation "Croatia" in the society's name in Northern Chile, distinguishing it from the Slavic associations. Concurrently, the *Slavjansko Dobrotvorno Društvo* (Slavic charitable society) was established in Iquique in 1893, during the same period as the Austro-Hungarian mutual aid society, which

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<sup>6</sup> The Sokol movement was centered on gymnastics among the Slavic nations, particularly on the South Slavs. It was deeply rooted in national and liberal ideas, aiming for the unity of Slavic nations and promoting the idea of Slavic solidarity and national pride through physical education and gymnastics (Pavlin and Čustonja 2018).

operated from 1894 to 1905, sharing facilities with the “*Salvadora N5*” brigade<sup>7</sup>. The *Slavenski Dom*, initiated in Iquique in 1904, operated until 1911 and was succeeded by the *Hrvatski Dom*, which existed briefly between 1912 and 1914. Later, the *Jugoslavensko Dobrotvorno Društvo* (Yugoslavian charitable society) functioned from 1921 to 1975, and the *Jugoslavenski Dom*, established in 1954, remained active until 1991. Following Croatian independence, it was renamed *Hrvatski Dom*, which persists until today (Zlatar Montan 2001).

In the Antofagasta region, the timeline began with the formation of the *Bomba Slava de Bomberos N3 “Dalmacia”* (Slavic Firefighting brigade N3 “Dalmatia”) in 1892, currently known as *Hrvatska Pascual Baburizza* –named after a Croatian emigrant who became one of the most important businessmen and philanthropist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chile— following closely in 1894 with the *Sociedad Slava de Socorros Mutuos* (Slavic Mutual Aid Society), which exists today, renamed as the *Sociedad Croata de Socorros Mutuos* (Croatian Mutual Aid Society). In 1957, the *Instituto Chileno-Yugoslavo de Cultura* (Chilean-Yugoslavian Institute of Culture) was founded, renamed Chilean-Croatian later, and currently not working. The *Sokol Club* was founded in 1917, originally named *Jugoslavenski Sokol*, inspired by the pan-Slav gymnastics ideology. The club mainly focused on gymnastics and athletics, but it also served as a venue for a choir, a tamburitza orchestra, and a folkloric dance group. As a sports club, it was established in 1927, and in 1947, the construction of its own stadium began. It is said that the cement used for the building was brought from Dalmatia and donated by Josip Broz Tito. To this day, it is both used as a sports center and a venue for shows (Zlatar Montan 2002). Other Croatian institutions that can be found in the north of the country include the *Hrvatski Dom Arica* and the *Hrvatski Dom La Serena*, the latter founded in 2019.

The Croatian organizations in the central zone of the country haven’t been particularly explored, as this wasn’t one of the historical immigration hotspots of the communities in the South and the North. Nevertheless, today, there are several institutions in which the descendants of Croats participate, a population that is believed to be the largest one today. The establishment of Croatian organizations in the central regions is a product of the internal migration of the Croatians who arrived at the ends of the country and of the Chileans of Croatian descent seeking higher education, and most of these institutions have been founded since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Valparaíso, the Austro-Hungarian club was founded in 1900 and was

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<sup>7</sup> The fire brigade in Iquique was established by the local population in 1874. However, it was officially managed by Austro-Hungarian members from 1880 onwards (Compañía Croata de Bomberos Dalmacia N5, n.d.).

renamed *Hrvatska Zadruga* (Croatian Cooperative) in 1906 and the Yugoslavian Club in 1918, which existed until 1922, and was refunded in 1989 as the Yugoslavian Home of Valparaíso. In 2023, the *Hrvatski Dom* Valparaíso was created.

The capital city of Santiago is home to a diverse range of Croatian organizations, each with its own focus and purpose. In the field of culture and arts, the *Jadran* Choir, established in 1932, originally began with a focus on Croatian music but has since expanded to include other Slavic music. The Chilean Croatian Cultural Corporation *Domovina*, founded in 2007, and its folkloric ensemble *Baština* showcase Croatian national traditions through performances in authentic regalia. The newest cultural addition, *Duša-Hrvatska*, was initiated in 2019 and aims to revive ancestral Croatian traditions with a sense of nostalgia. In the domain of sports and recreation, the Croatian Stadium, established post-*Jugoslavenski Dom* in 1957, is a center for sports development and the continuation of folklore. It also functions as the only *Hrvatski Dom* in Santiago and offers various cultural courses. The Croatian Stadium also hosts different organizations, such as the *Círculo de Profesionales y Empresarios de Ascendencia Croata* (Professionals and Entrepreneurs of Croatian Descent), which emerged in the 1960s to promote strong Chile-Croatia ties through professional linkages, cultural value promotion, and international collaboration. Philanthropy has its roots in the 1931 establishment of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia Croata "Jadranska Vila,"* which originally assisted less fortunate compatriots and now focuses on the elderly community. Additionally, the charity-driven *Damas Croatas*, under the Estadio Croata since 1985, organizes aid programs.

The Croatian communities in Chile have established numerous organizations over the years, reflecting a commitment to cultural preservation, social support, and community building. These key initiatives include efforts in culture, healthcare, sports, and philanthropy. Healthcare support was prominently provided by mutual aid societies, while cultural preservation has been achieved through various kinds of organizations, including libraries, musical groups, and drama societies. Sports clubs, especially those inspired by pan-Slavic ideals, play a significant role, with dedicated infrastructure built in different regions of the country.

Today, of the 182 responses recorded on the survey carried out for this research, 110 people participate in a Croatian organization in Chile (60,4%), while 72 do not (39,6%). When asked about the adherence of the respondents who participate in the organizations, they pointed out that participation in organizations makes them feel closer to Croatia and their ancestors. Out of the 110 participants in organizations, 44 point out participation in clubs and organizations as

the primary activity through which they feel connected with Croatia. However, the narratives also reveal a tension between accessibility and exclusivity. When interviewing Chileans of Croatian descent who do not engage in any organizational activity, some of the reasons behind this decision is the lack of organizations in the cities where they live (Fig 2); most of them point out that the most active organizations are usually in the big urban areas of historical migration such as Santiago, Punta Arenas, and Antofagasta.



Figure 2. A map of continental Chile showing the geographical dispersion and frequency of responses received in the survey.



A second reason why people may not join certain organizations is related to the financial cost associated with membership and the social status that comes with it. For instance, when looking at the areas where the respondents mostly come from in Figure 1, Santiago notably stands out. The Estadio Croata in Santiago has a membership system on its website that differentiates between descendants of Croats and non-descendants. For descendants, three categories are displayed: Croatian Young Adult (21-33 years old), Croatian (34-64 years old) and Senior Croatian (65+ years old). The younger and senior groups don't have to pay an incorporation fee, but to become a member, they must buy a share and pay annually. This amounts to a total of \$456.638 CLP or €442. For the middle group, one must pay an incorporation fee, buy a share, and pay annually, which equates to an amount of around \$1.136.435 or €1.100<sup>8</sup>. When asking one of the respondents about his membership at the Estadio Croata, he mentioned:

I am a member of the Croatian Stadium in Santiago de Chile. I have my grandson playing basketball there, and my granddaughter practices figure skating. The fact of participating in the Croatian Club, basically, relies upon the fact that they have a very nice canteen, it is a very good time on weekend afternoons, the pool is also nice, the children make good friends, and it is a very quiet place, in Vitacura, in the Oriente sector. The experience has been good. We have done some activities [there], such as cousin meetings (Interview with Christian, 27/03/2024)<sup>9</sup>.

The dynamic encapsulated in Christian's experience presents the Estadio Croata as providing more than cultural engagement; it also offers a recreational setting that enhances family life through sports and social activities. Yet this same environment is perceived as elitist and possibly unwelcoming by other respondents, who ultimately decide against participation due to the cost concerns and perceived misalignment with their personal and social identity:

So, at some point, since we later went to study in Santiago with my sister, my parents thought about joining the Croatian Club there. And they tried it when they had a birthday party and decided to do it at the Club. So, it was like giving even more meaning to [my father's] identity. But it seemed excessively expensive for us to participate in this. I feel like there are limits. Like, a million for signing up is... That is, there are no incentives to stay. And my dad was like: are you really going to use all the infrastructure? And I told him no because I'm unsure and prefer not to be part of this. But of course, it is a space for Croatians, and it felt like, no, I'm not part of it (Interview with Martina, 27/03/2024).

[My grandfather] used to take us to the Croatian Stadium when we were kids. But the truth was that we didn't really like the Croatian Stadium because the atmosphere there

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<sup>8</sup> In contrast, the Croatian Club in Punta Arenas' incorporation fee is \$20.000 or €19, and the yearly fee is \$30.000 or €30. Therefore, to become a member, a total of \$50.000 or €50 is needed.

<sup>9</sup> All the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Interview quotes in the text were translated by the author.

was very elegant, very *posh* as they say here, and I didn't really like it. So, when I was a kid, I didn't feel very connected to Croatian culture (Interview with Ante, 23/03/2024).

The financial aspect of participation, highlighted by the cost of membership at the Estadio Croata, emerges as a barrier, not just in financial terms but also in the perception of social status within these spaces. These accounts point towards a complex construction of cultural belonging that intersects with socioeconomic factors. The Estadio Croata in Santiago, for example, is seen less as a hub of Croatian identity and more as a venue of social prestige. Such insights could imply that while these organizations serve to maintain cultural ties, they also create implicit boundaries that can inhibit broader participation and may even lead to feelings of detachment from the very culture they aim to preserve. Fernando, a philosophy and literature high school teacher from the Chilean Patagonia, points out a third reason for not participating in the clubs, which is focused on the socio-political aspect of nationalism within the institutions:

I always researched Croatian culture, but from my point of view, my personal history. I never approached [the clubs], and in fact, it is because I do not feel the nationalism, so to speak, that is sometimes experienced within Croatian organizations. I do like Croatian culture to get to know it, to understand my history, but not in this way, for example, of perhaps exacerbating an identity that in a certain way, although it is close to me because of my family, I also feel distant because I never lived it. That doesn't mean that I never... I mean, I've probably thought about perhaps approaching an organization, participating, getting to know each other, but I've never taken the step to do so. But the same thing that I told you about what nationalism is like... What creates a bit of distance for me. Nationalism is understood in the good sense of the word, of identity, of roots (Interview with Fernando, 27/03/2024).

When asked to describe nationalism in these spaces, Fernando characterized it as non-exclusive because it also adopts Chilean nationality but emphasizes nationalism as an identity marker of belonging through tradition. In this context, he observes that, in the Chilean South, the Croatian identity has been modeled as a way of differentiating the ethnic group of two other co-existing groups in the region: on the one side, the rich colonial families of European migrants that arrived in Chile under the colonization law, and the other side, the Chilotes (people from the Chiloé archipelago in Southern Chile), which were land workers like the Croatians, but who were perceived as having a lower socioeconomic status by the local population (Personal Communication, 28/03/2024). Fernando's introspection reflects an understanding that cultural identity and nationalism can manifest in exclusivity when enmeshed with social stratification. His reluctance to engage with organizations that potentially amplify a selective nationalism underscores a desire for a more inclusive cultural connection, one that honors individual narratives without succumbing to the pressures of collective identity politics.

In the dynamic process of cultural identity, the Chileans of Croatian descent weave narratives of heritage, belonging, and differentiation. The clubs and organizations manifest a paradox of inclusion and exclusion and serve as portals to an imagined homeland. Yet, they also highlight the complexities of belonging –a process shaped by financial means, social standing, and personal ideologies. In these spaces, imaginaries of Croatia are sculpted not just from memories or stories passed down through generations but through reconnection with a homeland they've never lived in but always felt a bond with, perpetuating an identity rooted in the romanticized narratives of picturesque and historic Croatia. Conversely, for some, the cultural and financial requisites of club participation pose barriers, leading to a sense of alienation. The Chilean Croatian cultural identity is an evolving narrative, continuously redefined by the inclusivity of the past and the exclusivity of the present. Thus, the diaspora's quest for cultural identity becomes a balancing act –straddling the desire to honor ancestral ties and the individual's interpretation of what it means to be part of the Croatian story in a contemporary context.

#### *Historical narratives – Croatia as a land of hardship*

Historical narratives are a central part of the cultural identity among Chileans of Croatian descent. The focus is on the migratory story of each family's ancestors, particularly the hardships they lived through when deciding to migrate to Chile and, later, the challenges of relocation to the country. When interviewing eight Chileans of Croatian descent (third, fourth, and fifth generation) about their family history and what they know about their Croatian ancestor, the received answers contained three main sections: first, a delimitation of where their ancestor came from; second, where the ancestor arrived in Chile, and third, in which period they arrived. Most respondents would also acknowledge the geopolitical situation of Croatia at the time of migration, whether it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or Yugoslavia:

My maternal grandmother's parents were originally from Croatia, from the island of Brač. My great-grandmother was from Nerežišća, but I don't know how to pronounce it, and in the case of my great-grandfather, he was from Pučišća, I don't know the correct pronunciation as well. They arrived approximately in the 1920s in Punta Arenas, in the south of Chile. And well, they met there later, my two great-grandparents, and they got married. They must have arrived in 1918... I don't know very well; for example, my great-grandfather, his name was Esteban (Stjepan). I don't know very well what the reasons were that led him to migrate. Apparently, he didn't have a very good life there. He had more brothers. In fact, one of his brothers also migrated to Chile, first, then Argentina (...). And from what little I know, he arrived; he was an orphan of a mother, he had a stepmother, apparently, and he came escaping the war. At that time, Croatia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Interview with Fernando, 27/03/2024).

In the recounted narrative, migration is not just a movement from one geographical location to another: it's a tale of seeking refuge, a flight from war's upheaval, and the personal struggles within a fragmented family. The mention of Croatia's status under the Austro-Hungarian Empire is an essential historical background that gives us an insight into the larger forces that propelled the migration. This personal history is recounted with a sense of detachment—a product of time and assimilation—yet a firm acknowledgment of the past's importance in shaping their present identity. Additionally, the respondent's admission of uncertainty about the exact reasons for their great-grandfather's migration underscores a common thread in diasporic narratives—the partially reconstructed pasts, sometimes incomplete or lost through generations but still revered and regarded as a significant part of their identity. Still, Fernando tries to fill in that gap by putting different pieces of the family puzzle together based on what he observes in the historical context of the time of migration.

The emphasis on hardships in the ancestral narratives of the Chileans of Croatian descent is crucial to understanding the acculturation process of the historical migration, defined as the assimilation model in this research. The political climate driving Croatian migration led to the abandonment of familiar ties and the pursuit of new beginnings in Chile, where they also anticipated a community of compatriots. The assimilation—mostly observed as adopting the local language and customs while not teaching the Croatian language to the descendants—served dual purposes: facilitating integration into Chilean society and psychologically distancing the migrants from the tumultuous political circumstances they fled. This can be exemplified by a fourth-generation Chilean Croat narrative of her great-grandfather:

He arrived at Chañaral, which was the port that many had to get to, and he knew he had to get there because his family was there. And it begins to develop like, his life; he brings another brother in during this period of war that was happening in Croatia. As the letters took a long time to arrive, he felt a lot of sadness as a result of not knowing, *but he also really wanted not to be Croatian*. So, he quickly, at 14 years old, learned Spanish. There are few words that my grandfather knows today in Croatian, like he was always much more Chilean than Croatian, like a very Croatian nationality, but with a Chilean identity. And that was also transferred (Interview with Martina, 27/03/2024. Emphasis added).

This particular experience illustrates a journey of identity transformation from Croatia to Chile rather than just a geographical journey. The rapid acquisition of the Spanish language and subsequent relinquishing of his native tongue symbolized the practical and emotional necessity of integrating into Chilean society—a society that would eventually shape his and his descendants' identities. The passage reflects a common theme within diaspora communities:

the tension between preserving one's cultural heritage and adapting to a new sociocultural environment. The emphasized segment, *he also really wanted not to be Croatian* encapsulates a deliberate disassociation from the great-grandfather's national origin. This desire to dissociate may be reflective of a coping mechanism to reconcile the trauma associated with the war-torn homeland or an adaptive strategy to minimize the experience of otherness within the new societal context.

In examining the acculturation of the Chilean-Croat diaspora, the narratives of hardship in ancestral stories are particularly telling. These narratives, characterized through Anderson's framework as the imagined community's shared memories, shape the collective identity and are integral to the process of assimilation. The recounted struggles serve not merely as a historical account but also as a symbolic representation of the shift from Croatian to Chilean identity. The imagined notion of the homeland as both a place of hardship and a source of origin fosters a distant view (Skrbiš 1999) that allows for selective remembrance and a romanticization of the ancestral land. This view maintains Croatia's image as a place of struggle, impacting the community's assimilation strategy, often resulting in adopting local customs and potentially a diminished transmission of the Croatian language and traditions.

#### *Contemporary narratives – Croatia as a land of opportunity*

Narratives about contemporary Croatia differ from historical ones among Chileans of Croatian descent. While historical narratives often center on the difficulties of migrating to Chile and overcoming the challenges of language, work, and culture, contemporary narratives are usually filled with a discourse revolving around the opportunities and benefits presented by the Croatian nation. This is usually done in contrast with the Chilean situation by comparing the countries in terms of safety and opportunities to work and study.

I think that [Croatia] is safer than Chile, there are better opportunities, and there are many benefits because Croatia wants you to go... It gives many opportunities to foreigners because they want... To the foreign emigrants from Croatia, with Croatian blood, because there are very few inhabitants there, so they kind of want people to go live there, so there are many advantages. From what I understand (Interview with Ante, 23/03/2024).

The respondent's comment highlights a strategy of the Croatian government that actively encourages the return migration of individuals with Croatian heritage by offering various incentives. This approach aims to counteract the country's demographic challenges, underscoring a stark contrast to the migratory patterns of the past, where leaving Croatia was

a means of escaping socioeconomic strife. The narrative presented may also be read through Appadurai's theory on the interaction between mass migration and mass media, suggesting that imagination plays a central role in shaping local subjectivities (1996). In contemporary times, Croatia is often depicted as a safer place in comparison to the complex realities of present-day Chile through various media images and narratives. The perceived contrast between these two nations is viewed through a lens where immigration is framed through the Copenhagen Schools' dual framework of securitization and desecuritization. In this context, securitization is understood as a speech act through which immigration is considered dangerous to societal stability, economic welfare, or cultural identity. On the other hand, emigration is seen as advantageous and represents a process of desecuritization. In this case, displacement is associated with opportunities and positive experiences rather than risks (Wæver 1995):

But yes, I am interested in traveling and staying for a, more or less, long period. Well, the reason for migration to Croatia, particularly in Latin America, Chile is a country that is very complicated from a security point of view. Crime has increased a lot. We have a very high number of criminal immigrants. There are good people, obviously, like everywhere, but here it is very complicated. And I think that, from what my friend in Croatia has told me, it is much calmer, more bearable there. So that's the interest (Interview with Christian. 27/03/2024)

This response presents a dual perspective on migration, where the push factors in Chile – increased crime and perceived insecurity—are contrasted with the pull factors offered by Croatia, such as tranquility and safety. The dichotomy signifies a broader thematic shift in migration narratives from survival to opportunity. Within the immigration context in Chile, the portrayal of immigrants from South America and the Caribbean in a negative light has led to a nostalgia for the European immigration of the past. This “new immigration” was perceived as being antagonistic to the ideal of the foreign citizen of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Suárez-Cabrera 2015, 630). Within this shifting paradigm, Croatia is reimagined not merely as a historical point of departure but as an inviting destination, promising a quality of life that some descendants perceive to be diminishing in their current Chilean context.

#### **4. Tracing Legislative Impacts: Citizenship and Identity**

Paola, a public relations officer from northern Chile, grew up listening to stories about Yugoslavia, a place where her ancestors –her dear grandmother's grandparents— came from. As a fifth-generation Chilean with Croatian heritage, she always thought that she couldn't access Croatian citizenship due to the laws that didn't allow it. She also didn't participate in any

Croatian organization, which meant she had no contact with fellow Chilean Croats or information from the embassy. During a conversation in 2023 with a lawyer who was assisting her in obtaining a student visa for Paola's daughter to study in Europe, she found out that in 2020, the Croatian law for acquisition of citizenship had changed, now allowing any descendant with proof of relation to a Croatian ancestor to apply, no limits of lineage. In shock at this opportunity to connect with her ancestors while helping her daughter migrate, Paola got to work. For the whole year, she put all her efforts into navigating the systems of finding information, documents, translations, and so on (Personal communication, 03/04/2024).

An estimated 3 to 4 million Croats and people of Croat descent live outside Croatia (Bošnjak 2022, 88). Recent records indicate that the total homeland population dropped below 4 million by 2019, and projections expect a further decline (Hornstein Tomić, Hinić, and Hrستیć 2022, 94). In this context, the Croatian government has boosted different strategies to connect both population groups through political and legal changes that allow Croats abroad to go back to their homeland. Bošnjak identifies two strategic goals in the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia 2030 in which Croats outside Croatia play a crucial role: Goal 4, related to global recognition and strengthening of Croatia's international position and role, and Goal 6, focused on demographic revitalization and improving family conditions (2022). In Chile, a country in which the Croatian diaspora is characterized by its generational diversity, including not only third-generation descendants but also fourth and fifth, the change of citizenship laws has drawn particular attention.

In the survey, a section of the instrument was structured to capture insights into how legal transformations affect individual behaviors and awareness. Specifically, three questions aimed at dissecting the extent of public engagement with Croatian policy shifts and legal amendments. The initial question served as a diagnostic tool to ascertain whether the respondents were aware of Croatian policy for citizenship acquisition<sup>10</sup>. Subsequently, the second question was designed to capture the actual uptake of Croatian citizenship, aimed at measuring not only the citizenship acquisition among the respondents but also the transitional phase of those in the application process<sup>11</sup>. The third question was targeted specifically at those respondents who either already possessed Croatian citizenship or were in the application process<sup>12</sup>. It sought to determine whether the policy amendments in 2020 had a decisive impact on their decision to

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<sup>10</sup> Survey question number 5. See appendix.

<sup>11</sup> Survey question number 6.

<sup>12</sup> Survey question number 7.

apply for Croatian citizenship. To analyze the data gleaned from these questions, we will focus first on the relationship between awareness of policies and demographic markers:

Age Range	Total	Females unaware	Females aware	%Females aware	Males unaware	Males aware	%Males aware	Total unaware	Total aware
20-29	12	1	6	85,7%	0	5	100%	1	11
30-39	40	1	21	95,4%	1	17	94,4%	2	38
40-49	33	3	12	80,0%	3	15	83,3%	6	27
50-59	43	4	20	83,3%	5	14	73,6%	9	34
60-69	34	4	16	80,0%	1	13	92,8%	5	29
70-79	13	1	6	85,7%	2	4	66,6%	3	10
80-89	5	1	2	66,6%	1	1	50,0%	2	3

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to age, gender, and awareness of Croatian citizenship policies.

Table 1 categorizes the survey participants by age, gender<sup>13</sup>, and awareness of Croatian citizenship policies. This is quantified in percentages to illustrate the proportion of each gender within an age group that is aware of the policies. The data presented suggests a trend of high awareness about Croatian citizenship policies among all age groups. The younger cohorts, specifically the 20-29 age group, exhibit nearly universal awareness. This trend is noteworthy, and it may indicate that the younger generation is particularly informed or interested in these matters, perhaps due to more access to information through digital means or a greater interest in exploring heritage and identity. A slight decline can also be observed in the oldest age groups, reflecting less engagement with or less impact from current policies. In these groups' demographics, gender differences in awareness are also slightly evident, suggesting differing levels of engagement or information dissemination among males and females, as the latter group has greater percentages of policy awareness. Next, we will examine the correlation between descendant generation<sup>14</sup> and citizenship status:

<sup>13</sup> The survey presented three gender options: Female, Male, and Other. However, they only chose the first two.

<sup>14</sup> To calculate the descendant generation of the respondents, we analyzed the responses to question number 4, which asked about their Croatian ancestors. They were given several options to choose from, including Father/Mother, Grandfather/Grandmother (in Spanish: Abuelo/a), Great-Grandfather/Great-Grandmother (in Spanish: Bisabuelo/a), Great-Great-Grandfather/Great-Great-Grandmother (in Spanish: Tatarabuelo/a), and an open text response option for "others." We calculated the generation based on these options. For example, if they chose Father/Mother, they were considered second generation. If they chose Grandfather/Grandmother, they were considered third generation, and so on.



Generation	Not citizens	%Not citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Applicants	%Applicants	Total
2	10	45.5%	11	50%	1	4.5%	22
3	31	35.6%	39	44.8%	17	19.5%	87
4	13	22.0%	30	50.8%	16	27.1%	59
5	1	9.1%	6	54.5%	4	36.4%	11

Table 2. Distribution of the sample according to generation and Croatian citizenship status<sup>15</sup>.

Table 2 focuses on the sample distribution according to descendant generation and citizenship status, which becomes particularly relevant in light of the 2020 amendments to the Croatian Citizenship Act. These amendments, which took effect on January 1, 2020, aimed to simplify the acquisition of citizenship, specifically targeting emigrants and their descendants. By removing the previous generational restrictions –formerly limited to the third degree of kinship— the new law broadened eligibility for citizenship. Additionally, the amendments eliminated the requirements for applicants to demonstrate proficiency in the Croatian language and knowledge of the culture and social arrangements. Turning to Table 2, the distribution of citizenship status by generation reveals that older generations have a higher percentage of individuals who are not citizens than younger generations; suggesting that the latter are more likely to acquire Croatian citizenship. This could be influenced by factors such as increased globalization and mobility, which might encourage younger generations to claim citizenship. Moreover, the data highlights a significant portion of applicants among the younger generations, indicating a proactive approach to taking advantage of the 2020 policy changes.

The next question in the survey focused on the impact of the 2020 citizenship policy and was directed to those who had selected 'Yes' or 'Applying' values on the previous question. When quantifying the responses, most of the Croatian citizens reported that their decision to obtain citizenship was not influenced by the 2020 policy changes (59,7%). However, a substantial minority (34,4%) did affirm that the recent policy changes were decisive in undertaking the citizenship process. This indicates that the liberalization of requirements has facilitated the acquisition of citizenship for a segment of the population who may have found the previous conditions prohibitive. The responses from those currently applying for citizenship present a contrasting reality. A significant majority (81,5%) cited the 2020 policy changes as a key

<sup>15</sup> The table excludes one response of a participant whose ancestor was actually part of her husband's family.

motivator for their application. This high percentage emphasizes the effectiveness of the policy adjustments in encouraging new applications by simplifying the citizenship process and removing previous barriers. Only a small fraction (15,7%) of the applicants stated that their decision to apply was not influenced by the new policies. To gain deeper insights into the influence of the policy change, we will analyze a generational overview of the responses:

Generation	%Citizens	%Citizens influenced	%Citizens not influenced	%Applicants	%Applicants influenced	%Applicants not influenced	Total
2	50%	22.2%	77.8%	4.5%	100%	0%	22
3	44.8%	27.0%	73.0%	19.5%	75%	25%	87
4	50.8%	44.8%	55.2%	27.1%	87.5%	12.5%	59
5	54.5%	66.7%	33.3%	36.4%	100%	0%	11

Table 3. Distribution of the sample according to generation, Croatian citizenship status, and influence of the change of policy for citizenship acquisition in 2020.

Table 3 elaborates on the generational distribution of responses regarding the influence of the 2020 amendments to the Croatian Citizenship Act. For Generation 2, while half (50%) are citizens, only a smaller portion (22,2%) states that the 2020 policy influenced their citizenship status. Generation 4 shows a higher influence rate (44,8%) among citizens, indicating a more direct impact of the policy changes on this cohort’s decision to acquire citizenship. Generation 5, the youngest group, shows the highest influence rate among citizens (66,7%), underscoring the role of recent policy liberalizations in their decisions. Generations 4 and 5 show high percentages of applicants influenced by the policy (87,5% and 100%, respectively), pointing to a strong alignment between the policy’s objectives and the motivations of younger people.

#### 4.1 Generational Engagement with Citizenship

The analytical data represented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 reveal that policy awareness permeates across all age groups, with remarkably high engagement among the younger generations, potentially indicating a revival or sustained interest in Croatian heritage and identity. To complement this demographic understanding with a visual assessment of the generational spread, Figure 3 presents a graph delineating age distribution across the different generations:

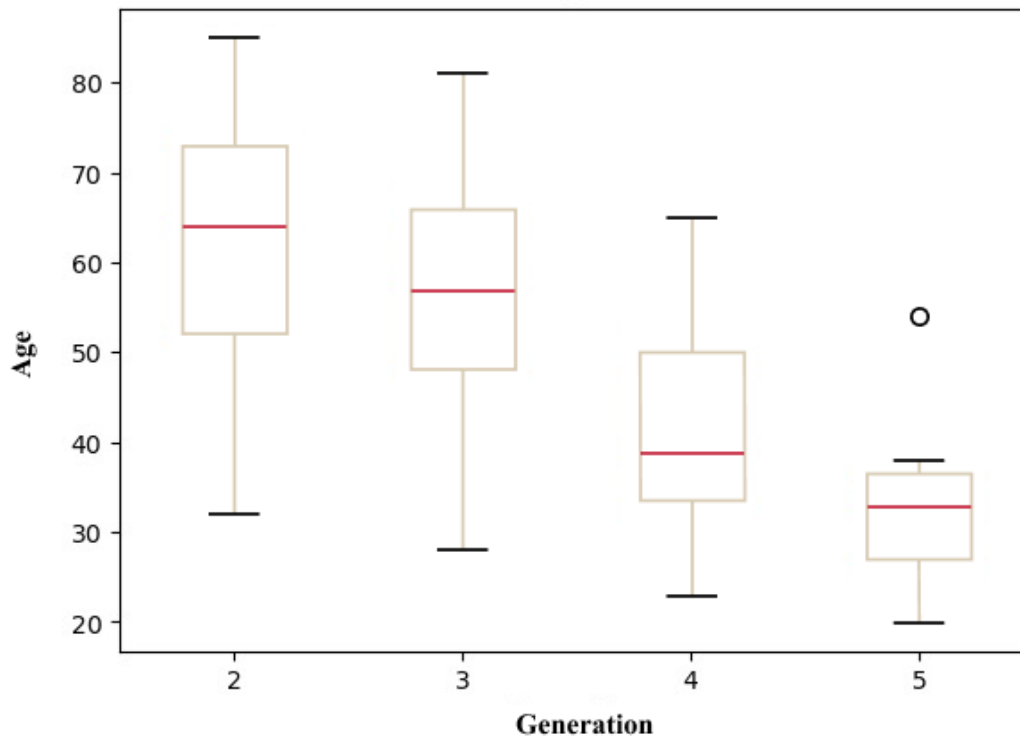


Figure 3. Boxplot of age distribution by migrant generation.

The boxplot presented in Figure 3 elucidates the age distribution among the varying generations of descendants of Croatian migrants in Chile. Notably, as the generational distance from the original migrant increases, there is a decrease in the median age. The second generation, denoting individuals with migrant parents, spans a broader age range with a higher median age, suggesting that these respondents are likely to be older. In contrast, the fifth generation, which represents individuals whose great-great-grandparents migrated, includes younger respondents with a markedly lower median age and a tighter interquartile range, indicative of a more homogeneous group in terms of age. An outlier is also observed in this generation, indicating the presence of an individual older than most of their cohort. The successive narrowing of the boxplot ranges from Generation 2 through 5 suggests a progressive concentration of ages within more recent generations, possibly due to the natural demographic thinning as time progresses from the point of initial migration.

According to the data, when we talk about Generation 3, we refer to mid-life individuals, including professionals and early retirees. In Table 2, Generation 3 represents a significant portion of the survey sample, with 87 individuals in total. Of these, 31 (35.6%) are not citizens, 39 (44.8%) are citizens, and 17 (19.5%) are in the process of applying for citizenship. This distribution suggests a relatively balanced engagement with citizenship status, with a notable

number of individuals still pursuing citizenship. According to Table 3, 27% of the third-generation citizens were influenced by the 2020 policy changes to apply for citizenship. This indicates that a significant minority found some of the liberalized conditions under the new policy compelling enough to affect their citizenship status. Among those applying for citizenship, 75% cite the 2020 changes as a motivating factor. This high percentage represents the effectiveness of the policy in encouraging applications within this generation, reflecting that removing previous barriers was particularly pertinent to their needs or circumstances.

Third-generation interaction with the citizenship process may be influenced by various factors, including career stability, family considerations, or awareness of political and legal landscapes. The motivations for becoming citizens at this stage in life could also be linked to securing a legacy of heritage connection for their children, leveraging the more favorable conditions set by the 2020 policy. This can be observed through the open-ended responses in the survey:

<b>Respondent ID</b>	<b>‘Is it important for you to have Croatian citizenship? Why?’</b>
177	Yes, it’s kind of a tribute and gratitude to my grandparents.
2	A beautiful union with my roots.
27	Because I want to know the place where my family came from.
30	Because I feel that a part of me has a connection with the Croatian people.
25	Yes, for the possibility to study or work in Europe.
68	Of course, I fully identify as part of the Croatian people.
72	Because it will facilitate getting closer to my Croatian roots.
86	Yes, it’s important for my Croatian soul but not necessary at this age.
127	For my daughter. She can group up with greater study and work possibilities in Europe.
129	I feel very identified with its traditions, my mother and grandparents transmitted to me the love for the culture.

Table 4. Sample of responses of the third-generation descendants to survey question 8.

A prevailing theme among the responses is the emotional connection to Croatian roots. Many respondents express a desire to honor their ancestry and maintain cultural ties, indicating that citizenship is not just a legal status but also a bridge to heritage. Another dominant narrative is the pragmatic aspect of holding Croatian citizenship, especially the benefits within the European context. Respondents mention the opportunities for study, work, and living in

Europe, highlighting citizenship as a practical tool for broader prospects. Interestingly, generational continuity plays a significant role. There’s a palpable intention to pass on the benefits and possibilities to future generations, as seen in responses focused on family, especially children. Age and a sense of urgency also influence the responses; some participants perceive citizenship as more vital at a younger age, while others feel it’s not as necessary later in life. Throughout the third-generation respondents, the duality of identity –between the current homeland and the ancestral one—is palpable. They navigate between the pride in the present Chilean identity and the reverent embrace of Croatian heritage.

Generation 4 represents a young cohort with high responsiveness to the amendments. According to Table 2, this group includes 59 individuals, with 22% not being citizens of Croatia, 50,8% currently holding citizenship, and a substantial 27,1% actively applying for citizenship. Table 3 reveals that 44,8% of the citizens of this generation were influenced by the policy changes, while 87,5% of the applicants were motivated by it, highlighting the effectiveness of these amendments in appealing to younger individuals who may have been previously deterred by more stringent requirements. Fourth-generation engagement with citizenship processes could be driven by practical and strategic considerations, such as professional opportunities, ease of travel within the EU, or securing long-term residency.

<b>Respondent ID</b>	<b>‘Is it important for you to have Croatian citizenship? Why?’</b>
<b>5</b>	Yes, it connects me to my family roots.
<b>14</b>	It is part of the family legacy, which is very important. I have also been to Croatia twice and now I am going again, with the idea of doing some business.
<b>164</b>	Yes, because of my daughter and I would like to invest in Croatia.
<b>11</b>	For the benefits of the European Union.
<b>35</b>	To continue family traditions that may be lost with the next generations.
<b>13</b>	Yes, because it allows us to recover the civil rights of an ancestor.
<b>178</b>	Yes, out of gratitude, continuity, pride and respect for the blood and country of our ancestors.
<b>79</b>	For recognizing my genes and honoring my ancestors in some way.
<b>114</b>	Because we are Croatians. In Latin America, the genotype and culture we have make us “different.” It is logical to look for the origins.
<b>69</b>	Yes, because I have Croatian blood.

Table 5. Sample of responses of the fourth-generation descendants to survey question 8.

The open responses from the fourth-generation Chileans of Croatian descent illustrate a connection to their heritage and practical recognition of the benefits of Croatian citizenship. A common thread is the significance of belonging and identity. Many respondents feel a duty to preserve their family's legacy and cultural traditions while also valuing the practical advantages of EU membership. Another salient narrative is the desire for reunification with family members currently residing in Croatia. Citizenship is viewed as a bridge that not only spans geographical distances but also reinforces the bond between present and past; it's an act of personal significance that ties their identity to a history and a lineage that they are eager to explore and honor. Interestingly, the responses also suggest a consciousness of their dual identity, indicating a desire to balance their Chilean upbringing with their Croatian heritage. This duality is not seen as conflicting but as enriching and providing a more comprehensive sense of self.

As the smallest group surveyed, with only 11 individuals, Generation 5 shows a high level of engagement with the citizenship process: 9,1% are not citizens, 54,4% are citizens, and 36,4% are applying for citizenship. 66.7% of the citizens stated that the 2020 amendments influenced their decision, which was the highest percentage among all generations. All the applicants from this generation were motivated by the new policy. This indicates that the policy changes were particularly important for this group. Their high responsiveness to the policy changes could be driven by the newly relaxed conditions, allowing them to more easily engage with their heritage without the burdensome prerequisites of language and cultural tests.

<b>Respondent ID</b>	<b>'Is it important for you to have Croatian citizenship? Why?'</b>
<b>12</b>	Yes, it is important to me, because I grew up listening to my grandmother about the stories of our ancestors and the effort to reach this country. As a child I felt an important connection, it was said in those times that we were of Yugoslav descendants (in the seventies) and I saw being able to access citizenship as distant. I only found out last year that the rule changed and that I had the possibility. Obtaining citizenship is honoring my ancestors and continuing their descendants.
<b>16</b>	I consider that it is important to have the possibility of planning to travel to Croatia with citizenship to see the places where my ancestors were born, to have the possibility of getting to know the culture, its language, and customs.
<b>31</b>	I would like to have something that recognizes my ancestors. When they arrived in Chile, they were Austro-Hungarians and although they arrived before the wars they could not return. Also, for academic issues.

36	Of course, since being a member of the EU opens many more doors to emigrate.
39	Yeah. I am studying my undergraduate degree in Croatia.
61	To get closer to the Croatian culture and learn a little more about the history that led my ancestors to arrive in Chile.
63	Greater opportunities.
82	Yes, it is. Because my family was never able to return, and it was a wound for them. They remembered their land with melancholy... With the passing of the years the longing to return was lost and also the generations that came did not have the interest... Unlike me, I want to know and if things work out, live there and have a family. To fulfill in a certain part the dream of my ancestors and mine obviously, because I like what I have been able to see and have investigated about the country.
108	Yes, because it is part of my history from my ancestors and it is the inheritance that my grandmother left me, and now one of my children will take advantage of the benefits of being able to go study the Croatian language.
128	Yes, because it is part of my family's history, plus I would like to settle there in the future to live and work at the same time learning the language and continuing to study for a postgraduate degree.

Table 6. Sample of responses of the fifth-generation descendants to survey question 8.

The responses from fifth-generation Chileans of Croatian descent highlight narratives of historical and familial connection, with a strong sense of continuing the legacy of ancestors. Many respondents express a desire to recognize and remember their efforts. At the same time, cultural engagement is expressed as a wish to travel to Croatia with the ease provided by citizenship to explore the birthplaces of the ancestors and immerse themselves in the culture firsthand. Academic aspirations, future planning, and opportunities are also mentioned in this group. Lastly, emotional closure is observed in a narrative about healing family wounds (ID=82). The respondent discusses the inability of past family members to return to their homeland and how, over time, the yearning to return faded. Now, the respondent sees an opportunity to fulfill what previous generations could not and to build a life in Croatia. Overall, it can be observed that this younger generation shows an interest in possibly settling in Croatia in the future, learning the language, and furthering their studies or professional careers.

#### 4.2 The Path to Becoming a Citizen

The legal and bureaucratic barriers associated with the citizenship process emerge as points of contention for some. The mention of the process as “cumbersome” or “expensive” in some of

the survey responses highlights the challenges that can deter potential applicants despite their emotional or practical inclinations. When interviewing some of the survey respondents who stated they have Croatian citizenship about the application process, the narratives remained similar:

About my experience... Well, it wasn't that complicated because when I got Croatian citizenship, I just had to hand in some papers. Before, you had to take a Croatian culture and language test (...) The translation thing was complicated because, well, someone had translated it, and they told me that it was not valid, that an official translator had to do it, so finally the papers were translated for me there, at the embassy. I had to pay the embassy so they could send them to translate it into Croatian. Well, the experience was slow. It was slow to ask the Croatian embassy for an appointment. They take a while to give you an appointment. Slow and expensive because you also have to pay for the passport and the translations (Interview with Ante, 23/03/2024).

Ante's experiences provide an example of the differences between how the process was before 2020 and how it is now, defining the current process as easier than the one before. For him, a fourth-generation Chilean of Croatian descent, eliminating prerequisites such as language and culture tests is more relevant than eliminating the kinship prerequisite, as some of his family members had already applied for citizenship at the time. However, translating documents is one of the difficulties highlighted in his experience. This is because, until last year, there were no official Croatian translators in Chile<sup>16</sup>, which is a significant oversight given the long-standing cultural engagement between the two countries. The lack of local translators posed a significant challenge in the bureaucratic process encountered by those seeking Croatian citizenship. This reflects a gap in the infrastructural support required to nurture the cultural and legal connections that have been developed over many years. Another part of the process is gathering documents to prove the kinship relation with the ancestor, which involves finding documentation issued in Croatia:

The initial process was complicated because we had to look for my grandmother's birth certificate in a church in Pučišća, in Brač. And someone did that procedure for me there. Obviously, they charged me, but they charged me for transportation on the ferry and nothing more, let's say, for sending me copies of the birth certificate, which were fortunately in a church that had not been destroyed in the war (Interview with Christian, 27/03/2024).

The citizenship process, as observed in both Ante's and Christian's experiences, is a structured and personal procedure that requires proof of Croatian descent. Interested individuals of legal

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<sup>16</sup> The only official Croatian translator in Santiago we found started offering services in February 2023 (Zubanov 2023).



age must schedule a personal appointment at the Croatian embassy in Santiago<sup>17</sup>. The application consists of various forms and documents that must be submitted in Croatian, such as a curriculum vitae outlining personal, professional, and familial details, proof of connection to Croatian culture (sometimes enhanced by stating participation in diasporic organizations), and an explanation of reasons for seeking citizenship. Additionally, one must provide identification, birth and marriage certificates, a criminal background check—all translated with Apostille legalization—and documentation related to Croatian ancestors. In his experience, Christian found that a third party in Croatia facilitated the process of discovering historical documents related to his ancestors. This person offered to locate the documents and transport them to Chile, which is a common practice among descendants living in South America. This is because the Croatian language is not widely spoken among the descendants, and most of the documents are kept in local registry institutions such as churches or archives, which are often difficult to access due to the language barrier and travel costs. As a result, requesting the services of a third party to locate and translate these documents has become a popular solution.

In Chile, some descendants who have gone through the process and migrated back to Croatia offer their services in Facebook groups. These private services are advertised through posts and comments, usually in a dynamic where a member writes asking for help, and then someone shares a recommendation of the service provided by a different user. Some of the Facebook users have banners or images detailing the services offered:

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<sup>17</sup> Although it is now not necessary to make an appointment well in advance at the embassy in Santiago from March 31, 2024, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the embassy was closed, and appointments were being taken through an online platform. These online appointments were being scheduled years in advance, taking into account the national restrictions for the spread of the virus. As a result, some descendants who applied for an appointment in 2020 could only actually go to the embassy in 2023 or 2024. This caused a delay and a backlog, as the embassy in Santiago serves not only Chileans of Croatian descent but also Bolivians, Peruvians, and Ecuadorians of Croatian descent.



Figure 4. A banner shared in the Facebook group “Descendientes de Inmigrantes Croatas en Chile”.

As observed in Figure 4, the banner offers various services, such as searching for documents in Croatia, obtaining certified translations, and registering at the Croatian Registration Office. Usually, the individuals who provide these services also act as an information source for other descendants regarding the citizenship process and embassy news. Considering these practices, Facebook has become a communication channel among Chileans of Croatian descent for the bureaucratic processes related to obtaining citizenship, traveling, studying, and working in Croatia. Therefore, Facebook is an alternative for staying put in the information about Croatia among the diaspora for those who do not necessarily participate in the clubs or follow the embassy’s communication channels. This is visible in Paola’s story right after she found out she could apply for Croatian citizenship:

So I started searching, searching, searching, and in a couple of months, I had my file ready; the only thing missing was my great-great-grandfather Mate's birth certificate. And there I entered the [Facebook] community and started looking for people who had guidance. I am going to be super critical of the system: I saw from the guidelines they told me, from the people I spoke with, that it was a system in which a lot of commercial issues were involved. That they charged an arm and a leg to go to look for a document in Croatia. And I felt that it was almost a scam... Well, the issue is that the advisors charged you so much for 15 minutes to talk to them, the man who was going to look for the document charged you more than €400. For actually going to look for a document, then an additional €40 more. And I began to feel disappointed in the sense that with so much

effort, my great-great-grandfather arrived here, he was well received, made a homeland<sup>18</sup>, he made a family, and they did not charge him a single peso to enter. Then I felt that the system was super wrong, without taking into account the backlog that exists in the embassy (...) where people without the folder assembled have the hours taken. It was... I joined this group where you sent the survey just to have certain information. I don't interact with other Croatians (...), so I worked and collected some money and went to Croatia myself to look for the documentation. Note that some people told me that it was impossible for them to receive me in the historical archive. I said this has to be a hoax; it can't be... I went to the civil registry, I introduced myself, and there they referred me to historical archives. The people there were super kind, they helped me a lot. And indeed I found my great-great-grandfather's birth certificate (Interview with Paola, 03/04/2024)

Paola's critical view of the "system" touches on the ethical concerns around the commercialization of heritage –where the pursuit of ancestral ties is marred by profiteering, detracting from the authenticity of one's connection to their past. This sentiment resonates with those in the survey who find the process cumbersome or expensive, revealing a tension between the inclusivity of the policy's intent and the exclusivity that arises from its practical application. The intermediaries, according to Paola, capitalize on the emotional and historical significance of the citizenship process, exploiting applicants' desires to connect with their lineage. The high costs for services she considered should be more accessible, and the apparent misinformation about the availability of records contribute to her perception of the system as exploitative and nearly deceptive. However, Paola's story doesn't end with disillusionment. Her initiative to bypass these gatekeepers and personally seek out her ancestral documents is a testament to her determination. Her eventual success illustrates that while commercial barriers can impede the process, personal agency and direct engagement can prevail. It's a journey that not only resulted in the acquisition of the necessary documents but also a deeper personal connection to her Croatian heritage.

### **4.3 Digital Navigation of Citizenship**

Paola's engagement with a Facebook community for assistance reflects a contemporary phenomenon where digital platforms serve as vital resources for diasporic connections and logistic support, circumventing formal channels. This communal approach to navigating citizenship, indicative of a collective endeavor, is highlighted in the work of Camila Beovic, a Chilean of Croatian descent from La Serena, who created the YouTube channel *Tutoriales*

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<sup>18</sup> In the interview, Paola uses the term "hacer patria", which directly translates into English as "make a homeland". However, the term in Spanish means more than that. It is associated with loving the nation you were born in (or the one you feel is your own) and attempting for its well-being.

*Croatas* (Croatian Tutorials) four years ago. Her experience advising and helping other descendants started in 2017 when studying for a master's in business administration. As a thesis project, she created a Croatian Club in the city where she was born and raised. The *Hrvatski Dom La Serena* was founded in 2018. With the change of legislation in 2020, Camila suddenly found herself in a position where she had to explain the citizenship process to the community repeatedly. As a response, she created *Tutoriales Croatas*, a place for sharing help for descendants of Croats not only in Chile but all of Latin America. From the point of view of business administration and focusing on easing the logistical bureaucracy, Camila created a guide on *how to be Croatian*. The latter is achieved through obtaining citizenship and a passport, cooking Croatian food, and learning about history and language. Most recently, Camila has also uploaded a few videos on how to buy real estate and open a business in Croatia.

When asked about the impact of her work, Camila highlights how her background in administration and strategic planning has helped to explain the processes related to Croatian citizenship in simpler terms than how they're usually explained in official channels. This facilitates the viewers' understanding, who sometimes carry out the process independently by learning how to do it when watching her videos. Camila also takes on the task of informing the descendants about updates on information regarding the requisites and appointments of the embassy, especially during Covid-19. In her videos, Camila delves into the importance of connecting with the ancestors' roots and of migrating to Croatia as a way of retributing to this ancestral land rather than just obtaining a passport in order to obtain the benefits of the EU (Tutoriales Croatas 2021b). Through this view, *Tutoriales Croatas* has become a platform for encouraging migration back to Croatia among the diaspora:

I invite you to do this exercise: look for your family tree. Croatian citizenship does not matter; Croatian citizenship is a piece of paper. Do you want to go live in Croatia? Go live in Croatia! Do you want to work? Work! Do you want to study? Study. You are going to have to do more paperwork, yes, but no one is going to close the door to Croatia. Croatia is there, and they are happy to receive you. They are happy that you're going to learn their language, and they are happy that you are going to support them because what better than workers, scientists, geniuses, and any type of help and support that reaches a country? Any immigrant must always want to contribute to the country. If you want to contribute to Croatia, do it. Forget about citizenship. If you can't do it now, don't stop because of paperwork (Tutoriales Croatas 2021a).

Currently, Camila has been granted funding to execute two projects related to her YouTube channel by the Central State Office for Croats Abroad (Personal communication, 21/02/2024). The latter was established in 2012 after the Act on Relations of the Republic of Croatia with

Croats Abroad was passed at the end of 2011. The Office is the central government body for relations between the Republic of Croatia and the Croats outside of the Republic, and its responsibilities include protecting their rights and interests, preserving their cultural identity, fostering relations, and promoting cooperation. The Office also designs communication strategies, supports the return and reintegration of emigrants into Croatia's socio-economic life, and aids in their businesses. Additionally, the Office maintains records of Croatians abroad, plans funding for their projects, and carries out other legislated duties.

The stories of Paola and Camila encapsulate the diaspora strategy of the Croatian government, as embodied by the Central State Office for Croats Abroad. The Office's activities, aimed at strengthening ties with the Croatian diaspora and fostering cultural, legal, and economic reconnections with the homeland, resonate with the experiences of Chileans of Croatian descent. Paola's narrative, marked by the hurdles of navigating a complex system to claim her Croatian heritage, juxtaposes Camila's proactive, community-based approach. Her platform exemplifies the strategic goal of the Croatian government to empower and engage the diaspora in a more accessible and supportive manner, leveraging digital platforms to simplify bureaucratic procedures and encourage a return to Croatian roots. The 2020 amendments to the Croatian Citizenship Act, which significantly simplified the citizenship acquisition process, reflect Croatia's broader strategy to draw its scattered population closer and reverse the demographic decline. For many descendants like Paola, these changes have opened doors that seemed perpetually closed, allowing them to rekindle a sense of identity that spans continents and generations. Meanwhile, the educational efforts of Camila and the support from the Central State Office for Croats Abroad to her projects demonstrate a synergy between individual initiatives and government strategies. Together, they facilitate a journey of return –not just physically but emotionally and culturally— for Croats abroad.

## **5. Linking Lineages: Generational Diversity and Cultural Transmission**

In the virtual realms of Facebook groups created by Chileans of Croatian descent, a transformation of social media into a dynamic cultural archive unfolds. Members do not simply interact; they seek to dig into their ancestral roots and explore their heritage with posts like, "Does anyone have information about my family? My last name is Milosevic". Such inquiries often spark cascades of responses, where community members link up, sharing contacts of

individuals with familial or historical insights or directing to resources within archives and institutions. This collective endeavor to bridge gaps in familial knowledge underscores an intergenerational urgency to connect with and reconstruct migratory histories that have been obscured or lost over time. The digital pursuit of ancestral connections reflects a broader narrative about the transformation of identity processes in contemporary times<sup>19</sup>. It allows younger generations, who may feel detached from their Croatian roots due to geographic and temporal distances, to reclaim a part of their heritage inaccessible to previous generations. This can be seen as an extension of the informational dimension of digital diaspora communication, extending the pragmatic and cultural search to a personal realm (Goudenhoofft 2015). Observing these dialogues highlights the role of modern connectivity in facilitating the preservation of cultural heritage and the reconstruction of identity across generations.

Currently, in Chile, the Croatian heritage is primarily represented by third, fourth, and fifth-generation individuals. Their lineage can be traced back to the waves of migration from the 1860s, mostly driven by the search for prosperity during significant historical events like the gold rush in the South and the nitrate boom in the North. The exodus of the Croatian migration to Chile, born out of desperation and the pursuit of opportunity, set the stage for subsequent generations, where Croatia often becomes a distant construct. Many descendants have only a vestigial sense of their Croatian heritage, as the past was often too painful for their ancestors to recount (Personal communication with Camila Beovic, 21/02/2024). In this process, descendants today face a family history containing multiple gaps of intergenerational transmission, which they seek to fill by turning to their families and through social networks.

The experiences of different generations of Chileans of Croatian descent reveal a shift in how cultural heritage is accessed and valued, particularly influenced by the digital age. Following Hansen's third-generation hypothesis—stating that the son wishes to forget what the grandson wishes to remember (1938; Huang, Hung, and Chen 2018)—we propose extending this view to the fourth and fifth generations. For the third generation, understanding and connecting with Croatian heritage often involved direct conversations with older family members, where stories and traditions were passed down verbally. This personal interaction with grandparents or other elderly relatives provides a tangible, albeit sometimes nostalgic, link to their ancestry. In

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<sup>19</sup> In relation to the digital pursuit of ancestral connections, several interviewees reported using platforms such as MyHeritage and Ancestry to explore their Croatian heritage. For an in-depth examination of these platforms and the broader academic debate on the digital search for ancestral histories, see Abel and Schroeder (2020), Lang and Winkler (2021), and Prince (2023).

contrast, the fourth and fifth generations, growing up in an era of advanced digital connectivity, have a markedly different approach. Instead of relying solely on family narratives, younger descendants often use social media and digital platforms to explore and affirm their Croatian identity. This digital dimension facilitates a broader, more dynamic engagement with their cultural identity, often bypassing traditional channels. This generational shift reinforces a broader trend where digital tools are not just supplementary but central to the contemporary diasporic experience. They enable younger Chileans of Croatian descent to independently verify, explore, and celebrate their heritage in ways that previous generations could not have imagined.

Intergenerational transmission in the context of migration refers to the process through which cultural values, practices, and identities are preserved and passed down through successive generations of an immigrant community. This phenomenon is significant in maintaining cultural identity among descendants who may be geographically and temporally removed from their original homeland. In the specific case of the Chileans of Croatian descent, this intergenerational transmission can be understood as the sustained influence of Croatian cultural heritage across multiple generations, despite these individuals being born and raised in Chile. Drawing on transnationalism, this process among Chileans of Croatian descent is understood as a dynamic, multi-generational connection to Croatian cultural heritage. Here, the concept of diaspora also provides a framework to clarify how the Croatian identity is not only maintained through direct cultural transmission but also the symbolic connection to the homeland.

### **5.1 Intergenerational Transmission of Identity**

A common theme among the responses to the survey and interviews implemented in this research is the palpable distance between the younger generations and their family history. This suggests that while the earliest Croatian immigrants might have transmitted certain cultural elements or imaginaries about Croatia to their immediate descendants, the interest and engagement in maintaining these cultural ties tended to wane over successive generations. This loss of interest can be either involuntary, due to a lack of continual exposure or significant emotional connections to those traditions, or voluntary, resulting from a conscious decision to assimilate into the local culture. Thus, by the time the narrative reaches the third, fourth, or fifth generation, the connection to specific cultural practices or the original ethnic identity may have significantly diminished, with each generation potentially moving further away from the cultural habits of their ancestors.

In response to the observed trends of cultural engagement among the third and fourth generation of Chileans of Croatian descent, a specific question was crafted to delve deeper into these interactions. The question, ‘As for your family, do you think your own experience with Croatian culture has been different (or similar) to the experience of your parents and grandparents?’ aimed to explore how individuals’ experiences vary across generations within a family. By posing this question, we aimed to identify patterns of intergenerational transmission of identity and the factors influencing the continuity or evolution of cultural practices. In our findings, a recurring pattern emerged among third, fourth, and fifth-generation respondents. Notably, there appears to be a generational gap in the engagement with Croatian ethnic identity, typically characterized by a relative disinterest from the previous generation:

Yes, my contact with Croatian culture has been different, in my case, from that of my parents, particularly with that of my mother, because my mother always talked about Croatian culture. She always talked about Croatians based on her experience with her grandmother, my great-grandmother, and also based on my grandmother, her mother. Especially, for example, in terms of dishes, meals, things of that type. But there was never greater knowledge or interest in saying: I'm going to learn the language. In my case, for example, it is different. When I was about 10 years old, I became interested in learning the Croatian language (Interview with Fernando, 27/03/2024).

Fernando’s journey reflects a more personal engagement with Croatian culture than his predecessors. His proactive approach to the Croatian language at a young age indicates a shift from passive cultural acknowledgment to active cultural participation. This narrative illustrates a revival of interest in heritage and a transformation in how cultural identity is expressed and experienced. Through this example, one can observe a broader theme within diaspora communities. As generations move further away from the point of original migration, the nature of their connection to the homeland can become both a personal choice and a collective challenge. This generational change can be seen as part of a larger trend where younger descendants view their heritage through curiosity and pride rather than the survivalist necessity that might have characterized their ancestors’ attitudes. Moreover, this narrative speaks to the potential of individual agency in the intergenerational transmission of culture. It highlights that while the broader socio-cultural environment can facilitate or hinder cultural retention, personal choices and actions are crucial in how cultural identities are maintained, transformed, and revitalized. His engagement not only redefines his personal identity but also contributes to the evolving definition of what it means to be of Croatian descent in contemporary Chile. Similarly, Darko’s account reveals a gradual but noticeable shift towards a more profound connection with his Croatian roots. Despite his father’s and grandfather’s more superficial



engagement with their origins, Darko has taken significant steps to instill a sense of belonging in his children:

I get the impression that the family quickly became *Chileanized*. My memories of my grandfather do not particularly relate to the topic of Croatia beyond understanding the family's origins. My father was interested in knowing and documenting the family's origins, but in his case, I do not recognize a special interest or effort to preserve the culture, language, or other Croatian aspects. For my part, I think there is a little more interest than the previous generations. I applied for Croatian citizenship and have tried to imprint/instill in my children some additional ideas of Croatian belonging –beyond family origins— through travel and football (Interview with Darko, 02/04/2024).

This progression highlights the generational diversification in how ethnic identity is reclaimed and celebrated. Darko's actions indicate a transition from passive to active engagement in cultural heritage. This can be seen as part of the broader phenomenon in which individuals in later generations of diaspora communities seek to reclaim their connections to their ancestral lands. This often stems from recognizing that the cultural connection may weaken or disappear entirely without active engagement. Furthermore, Darko's approach to passing on Croatian culture to his children suggests a deliberate strategy to counteract the generational dilution of ethnic identity. By embedding elements of Croatian culture, making them a part of his children's lives, he ensures that the next generation has a more vivid and personal connection to their heritage. This preserves the culture and adapts it, making it relevant to their current context and experiences.

## **5.2 Generational Perspectives in Music and Politics**

Intergenerational transmission among Chileans of Croatian descent can also go beyond the narratives around family's origin. Specific cultural artifacts can become vessels of ethnic identity and heritage. Despite the generational shifts and the erosion of some traditional practices, some artifacts retain their significance and influence identity formation within the diaspora. In Ante's case, his connection to his grandfather's story skips his father's generation, but it is still maintained through two major aspects of connection with Croatian heritage –the origin of their family last name and a song:

As for my experience with the Croatian culture... Well, my paternal grandfather, who is of Croatian origin, tells us that in the *pampa*, back in Antofagasta, he was discriminated against because he was blonde with blue eyes. They yelled "Austrian" at him in the street. He tells us that he had to defend himself. As for my dad, it is not something that interests him very much, as he was never interested in that. He's not interested now, either. The ones who were most interested in his story were me and my siblings. Because, well, when

we were kids, my grandfather told us where his last name came from; and he sang us that song, *Tamo Daleko* (Interview with Ante, 23/03/2024).

Ante's grandfather's song, *Tamo Daleko*, is a well-known song among the Croatian diaspora in Chile, with a particular local version reworked as Dalmatian-Magellanic in the south. According to Perić, the song serves various purposes: it functions as a regional anthem for Croatian descendants, is featured in celebrations, influences media such as short videos and books, and acts as a key marker of identity in both physical and digital realms (2014). Although the Chilean-Croatian community has historically not been actively involved in Croatian politics, perhaps due to the long history of migration, the song's debated origins, whether Croatian or Serbian, were often discussed in diasporic spaces, such as the Punta Arenas radio show *Hrvatska Pjeva* (Croatia Sings). Known for its pro-HDZ stance in later years, the broadcast aimed to reveal untold historical truths and origins<sup>20</sup>. In 2019, it aired a program dedicated to the song's history, defining it as a “polemic” topic. The broadcast outlines two historical narratives of the song's origins. The first traces back to the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, leading to a mass exodus of Serbian soldiers to Corfu, where they and Croatians sang the song together. This version claims that Serbians later adopted and modified the song, incorporating lyrics emphasizing Serbian identity. The second account, endorsed by the Institute of Musicology in Zagreb, attributes the song's origins to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, discovered in the diary of an Austrian captain during a North Pole expedition. According to this version, Dalmatian sailors taught the song to their crewmates as they faced the unyielding ice around them (Croacia canta - Petar Ivelić Goić 2019).

Some of the academic research speaks to the first version provided by the radio broadcast, pointing out that *Tamo Daleko* is a song that emerged from World War I on Corfu Island to express the longing of Serbian soldiers for their faraway landlocked villages, becoming a symbol of Serbianness. In the 1980s, the use of the song by a Yugoslavian rock band who played it together with the Croatian anthem provoked hostilities, leading the band to believe that the booping of the song was one of the signs of Yugoslavia's collapse (Bădescu 2020, 169). Whether *Tamo Daleko* belongs to Serbia or Croatia remains a debate among some members of the community in Chile. In contemporary times, the song's meaning among Chileans of

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<sup>20</sup> Although the show was broadcast weekly in Punta Arenas on the El Pingüino Multimedia station, only recordings from January 2019 to June 2020 (when it stopped airing) are available on YouTube. During this time, the presenter, Petar Ivelić Goić, clearly addresses his political views on supporting Franjo Tuđman's legacy (through the political party HDZ, 'Croatian Democratic Union'). This represents a conservative, center-right stand.

Croatian descent remains tied to the nostalgic distant view of the homeland. It is maintained as one of the crucial cultural artifacts for diasporic imagination and belonging. In this context, the Dalmatian-Magellanic version presents a locally re-signified version of the song, which touches upon a different audience and political landscape. After the coup of 1973 in Chile, the Isla Dawson concentration camp was created to reclude political prisoners. The Island, located in the Tierra del Fuego archipelago of Magallanes, held prisoners both from the local region and the capital. *Tamo Daleko* was sung by the prisoners and symbolized resistance, including the song in the local political memory landscape. According to Bădescu, the song's title, “There, Far Away,” referred in this context to the faraway Croatian homeland but also how far from home Isla Dawson was for its prisoners (2020, 169). In this context, the last two new verses were added to the song<sup>21</sup>:

Tamo daleko daleko kraj mora tamo je selo moje tamo je ljubav moja.	There, far away Far by the sea There is my village There is my love.
Lejos muy lejos Allá en la orilla del mar Está mi novia querida Está mi amada ciudad.	Far, far away There on the seashore Is my dear girlfriend Is my beloved city.
Mi Punta Arenas Ciudad de ensueño y amor Cuando yo vuelva a tus playas Renacerá el corazón.	My Punta Arenas City of dreams and love When I return to your beaches The heart will be reborn.
Brindemos hermanos Brindemos por el amor Que nunca más en la vida Seremos más jóvenes que hoy.	Let's toast brothers Let's toast to love Than ever again in life We will be younger than today.

The significance of *Tamo Daleko* in the Croatian community in Chile, particularly its contested origins and adaptation, illustrates how diasporas navigate identity and heritage. Originally a song that epitomizes the longing and melancholy of displacement, it has been embraced and reinterpreted to reflect a unique historical and emotional landscape. This adaptation not only preserves the cultural memory but also allows it to evolve, accommodating the local realities.

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<sup>21</sup> The lyrics were extracted from the website of the research project ‘Cantos Cautivos,’ which was dedicated to collecting testimonies from musical experiences in detention centers during the dictatorship in Chile (Cantos Cautivos, n.d.). However, many of the song recordings found only sing the first three verses.

The song's role during a violent period in Chilean history highlights its transformative power, linking the struggle and resilience of the Croatian migration to broader political and social movements within Chile. This layering of meaning makes the song a multifaceted symbol of resistance, nostalgia, and identity. It also exemplifies the intergenerational transmission of identity within the Chileans of Croatian descent, serving as a cultural vessel through which identity, customs, and narratives are passed down. As a piece of oral history, it encapsulates the traditional modes of cultural transmission, which remain vital in preserving the cultural heritage of a community with a migrant background. The approach of this transmission is not merely about preserving a static heritage but actively reconstructing and redefining it across generations. Going back to Ante's story, in 2021, he joined a Croatian folklore band in Santiago and re-encountered his grandfather's song among the band's repertoire:

We play Croatian folk songs. Among them is this song that I told you about, *Tamo Daleko*, which is a song that many Croatian immigrants who came to Chile adopted and took as their own. Because this is a song that is actually of Serbian origin. And it is a very strong song, because every time we have played it, several times on birthdays, at presentations, it is shocking to see what it does to people. People who start crying, who get very emotional, and that's a very strong song that really gets my attention. That, although as a child, when my grandfather sang it, I didn't take it seriously, now that I play it and see what it causes, I do take it seriously. It is a very strong song that talks about your distant land, which is what *Tamo Daleko* means. Well, and also about the song, being of Serbian origin, for example, we cannot play it if the Croatian ambassador in Chile is there... Well, there is also this thing about Croatia and Serbia, how there are certain... conflicts between these countries, which seems to weigh on many old Croats. But actually, in the folklore group that we play, it's like all Yugoslavs are welcome, actually. It's not a Croatia versus Serbia thing, but rather anyone who feels Croatian or Yugoslavian is welcome (Interview with Ante, 23/03/2024).

Ante's reflections on the song exemplify the changing perceptions of cultural and political identity among younger generations of Chileans of Croatian descent. This evolution underlines a significant shift from the politically charged origins of the song to its contemporary reception, which is more inclusive and less concerned with the historical geopolitical tensions that once defined its significance. In Ante's account, the emotional resonance of *Tamo Daleko* within the community represents a transition from its contentious origins to a symbol of broader Yugoslav identity that transcends specific nationalistic boundaries. For these younger members of the diaspora, the song does not merely recount a narrative of nationalistic division but serves as a bridge connecting them to a shared Yugoslav heritage, encompassing both Croatian and Serbian elements. In this sense, the manifestation of heritage and identity does not depend on political discourse, and the distancing from the song's political baggage can be partly attributed to the

generational gap in the experience of conflict. Younger descendants like Ante have not lived through the intense nationalistic strife their ancestors might have experienced; instead, they encounter these histories as stories and symbols passed down through family and community narratives. Moreover, Ante's interaction with the song in a folklore group signifies a broader trend among younger generations who prioritize cultural connections over historical divisions. This trend reflects broader societal shifts towards globalization, where cultural expressions are appreciated for their ability to unify rather than divide.

### **5.3 Generational Dynamics in Cultural Reclamation**

The transmission of identity among Chileans of Croatian descent is influenced by various factors, impacting how individuals in different generations feel a sense of belonging. Digital platforms have enabled younger generations to explore and connect with Croatian culture, bridging the emotional and physical distance from their heritage. However, each generation's engagement with this heritage varies significantly. Third, fourth, and fifth-generation descendants often find themselves renegotiating their connection to Croatia without the burden of their ancestors' traumas or political entanglements. This generational shift towards a more inclusive approach to heritage is demonstrated by Martina's account of traveling to Croatia for the first time with her family from Chile in 2014, where they engaged in collective memory and cultural rediscovery:

And there it was really like recognizing this direct link, that, although we already noticed it because my father knew of his family, being there generated a sense of belonging. Like, I am not only Chilean but also 100% Croatian. And I went to see my great-grandfather's house, my family. It was like: this is real, there are people there who generate this bond, there is history. And that has opened up that link for us that I think is a little far away, because being able to be Croatian is difficult in Chile, given that it takes an infinite period to be able to get an appointment [at the embassy], and for the documents to actually be there. The language is very difficult. So, since those gaps already exist, and my grandparents are older, as they are the first generation that could obtain nationality, they do not have the capacity to do so, and that makes it impossible to recognize themselves. So, we, new generations, with the ability to travel and take advantage of this globalized world... My grandparents, who are directly Croatian, I feel like they don't see themselves as represented. So, I think it is also a generational issue, more than recognition because he knows that he is Croatian, he has Croatian names, but it's different for him. So, for me, it was much more: I wanted to get involved, I wanted to know more, I wanted to be Croatian, I wanted to go there freely and be like my nonnas. So, of course, it's a sense of belonging (Interview with Martina, 27/03/2024).

Martina's visit to Croatia symbolizes a shift in how cultural identity is experienced by younger generations. Unlike older generations who may feel a detachment as a byproduct

of assimilation and of not being raised in a globalized world with access to the internet or traveling in an easier way, Martina's generation feels a compelling need to physically and emotionally connect with their roots. By stating her belonging to Chile and Croatia, she emphasizes a dual identity, underlining the modern diasporic experience's fluid and hybrid nature. This reflects a broader trend where physical visits to ancestral lands strengthen cultural ties and personal identity, offering tangible links to abstract concepts of heritage that were previously mediated through older family members or communal ties.

A generational gap in cultural engagement is also visible, as pointed out in Martina's grandparents' experiences, where the difficulties of traveling, obtaining citizenship, and the challenges associated with language barriers might have hindered their ability to fully embrace their Croatian identity. In contrast, she leverages the globalized context—ease of travel and more accessible transnational networks—to enhance her engagement with her heritage. This illustrates a shift from passive heritage acknowledgment, where older generations may maintain cultural aspects but not actively pursue them, to active cultural participation among the youth. It highlights a critical point in diaspora studies: each generation may renegotiate their cultural identities based on the opportunities and challenges presented by their specific social contexts.

The narrative also touches on the concept of identity as an active choice. Martina's desire to "be Croatian" and to "go there freely and be like my nonnas" highlights a voluntary and enthusiastic approach to identity reclamation, contrasting with the often involuntary or circumstantial cultural retention seen in older generations. This suggests a shift from identity as an inheritance to identity as exploration and assertion, reflecting broader socio-cultural shifts towards self-expression within globalized societies. The process of cultural reclamation varies between generations, not only in terms of how families pass down their cultural traditions and practices within their specific contexts but also due to the wider availability of information and transnational networks.

## Conclusion

This thesis investigated the resurgence and transformation of Croatian cultural identity among Chileans of Croatian descent, spanning across third, fourth, and fifth generations. The core research problem was understanding how these generations, influenced by historical migration and socio-political shifts, navigate their cultural identity and sense of belonging. The study found that changes in Croatian citizenship laws have notably eased the process of identity reclamation, promoting a deeper connection with the homeland. This legal facilitation has coincided with shifts in Chile's own sociopolitical landscape regarding immigration, creating a dynamic relationship between the two nations' political and cultural contexts. Findings from surveys and interviews indicated a generational shift in how cultural heritage is perceived and engaged with; younger generations show a proactive approach to reclaiming their heritage, markedly facilitated by digital platforms that provide a virtual bridge to their ancestral lands.

To address the research questions, the thesis first argues that the imaginaries and narratives of Chileans of Croatian descent are actively involved in the ongoing process of cultural identity formation. Each generation adapts these narratives to reflect their own experiences and realities. Cultural artifacts, such as *Tamo Daleko*, serve as connections to the Croatian homeland and become critical markers of identity within the diaspora. Secondly, political and legal changes, such as Croatia joining the EU and amending citizenship policies, have influenced the construction of identity and a sense of belonging among Chileans of Croatian descent. These changes have made it easier for them to obtain Croatian citizenship and access EU benefits, reshaping perceptions of cultural and national identity within the diaspora. Simplified access to a Croatian passport strengthens ties to Croatia and nurtures a sense of belonging, indicating the significant impact of external factors on diasporic communities' connection to their ancestral lands and their ongoing identity construction processes. Lastly, the thesis reveals that different generations have distinct attitudes toward their Croatian heritage, shaped by historical, social, and technological contexts. While older generations focus on integration and assimilation, younger generations are more interested in reclaiming their Croatian roots, facilitated by global mobility.

The findings enrich diaspora and identity studies by demonstrating how transnational ties and policy changes influence diasporic communities' engagement with their heritage. This thesis challenges traditional notions of diaspora and assimilation by highlighting a model where identity is actively constructed and negotiated across generations through physical and digital

means. It underscores the concept of “transnationalism from below”, where individual agencies and informal networks are decisive in the cultural and identity dynamics within diasporas. This research emphasizes the dynamic nature of cultural identity, revealing how younger generations, facilitated by digital platforms and global connectivity, are redefining their Croatian heritage in contemporary contexts.

The extensive gap in the migratory history of the Croatian migration to Chile raises a poignant question: Does a larger historical gap intensify the connection among descendants? The findings of this thesis suggest affirmatively, noting that as the temporal distance from the migration event increases, the desire to bridge this historical gap intensifies. This phenomenon, carried out through the digital pursuit of ancestral connections, encapsulates the contemporary methods through which these younger descendants engage with their Croatian heritage. Leveraging digital platforms, they reconstruct long histories and forge new ties to their ancestral land, navigating the dual identity of feeling both Chilean and Croatian within a globalized context. Looking forward, the concept of the digital pursuit of ancestral connections opens numerous avenues for further research. Future studies could explore how digital engagement affects other diaspora communities and whether such interactions lead to a deeper understanding of one’s heritage or if they promote a form of cultural idealization detached from current realities.



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# Appendix

## Survey questions

### A. Demographic markers

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. Where in Chile do you live?
4. Who was your Croatian ancestor?

### B. Perception of citizenship changes

5. Are you aware of Croatia's citizenship policies?
6. Do you have Croatian citizenship?
7. Did the policy change of 2020 influence your decision to apply for Croatian citizenship?
8. Is it important for you to be a Croatian citizen? Why?

### C. Cultural engagement and personal identity

9. How many times have you visited Croatia?
10. Do you think that the integration of Croatia into the EU influenced your connection with your roots?
11. Do you participate in any Croatian organization in Chile?
12. Through which activities do you feel that you connect with Croatia?
13. Evaluate your knowledge of the Croatian language on a scale of 1 to 5.
14. Evaluate your feeling of belonging to Croatia on a scale of 1 to 5.
15. Evaluate your feeling of belonging to Chile on a scale of 1 to 5.
16. Evaluate the impact of Croatia's integration into the EU on a scale of 1 to 5.