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Slovak Organisations and Societies in the USA at the Turn of 19th and 20th Centuries: Preservation of Ethnic Identity and Mutual Aid

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Abstract

This study examines Slovak compatriot associations in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as institutional structures of mutual aid, community organization and immigrant adaptation. The analysis focuses on the National Slovak Society and American Živena and is based on the qualitative content analysis of associational statutes and organizational documents. The study demonstrates that Slovak associations fulfilled functions extending beyond welfare assistance alone. Alongside systems of sickness, disability and death benefits, they also organized educational, publishing and cultural activities that contributed to the stabilization of Slovak immigrant community life in the United States. The comparison of the National Slovak Society and American Živena reveals differences between male and female organizational models within Slovak associational life. Whereas the National Slovak Society emphasized mutual aid and financial administration, American Živena focused more strongly on women's educational and cultural activities. The findings situate Slovak associations within the broader context of immigrant mutual aid organizations in the United States and contribute to the historiography of Slovak migration and immigrant associational life.

Keywords: Slovak migration; immigrant associations; social integration

1. Introduction

Mass migration from the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary to the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represents one of the most significant social processes in the modern history of Central Europe. Slovak emigration was predominantly economic in nature and was determined by a combination of structural factors—agrarian overpopulation, a lack of employment opportunities, the social stratification of the rural population, and the ongoing industrialization of the northeastern and Midwestern states of the United States. Emigrants directed their migration primarily to the industrial regions of Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, and Connecticut, where they found employment in mines, metallurgical enterprises, and factories (Bielik 1979).

Historiography has primarily addressed Slovak emigration in terms of the causes of migration, the demographic structure of emigrants, and the political activities of the diaspora. Considerable attention has also been devoted to the emergence of compatriot organizations, particularly mutual aid and fraternal associations that began to form from the 1880s onward. Research has highlighted their important role in social security, national



Academic Editor: Jordi Marti-Henneberg

Received: 23 March 2026

Revised: 2 July 2026

Accepted: 7 July 2026

Published: 15 July 2026

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mobilization, and the cultural life. However, their function as mechanisms of social integration and mediators between immigrant communities and American society has received less systematic attention.

The present study builds upon existing research and develops it further toward an analysis of associations as institutions of social integration. It proceeds from the assumption that associational life represented not only a response to the economic insecurity of migrants, but also a structured mechanism of community stabilization within a new social environment.

Earlier experiences of internal and seasonal migration within the Kingdom of Hungary contributed to the emergence of collective forms of migrant organization in the transatlantic environment. Migration to the United States represented a qualitative expansion of earlier mobility patterns rather than their complete disruption (Čulen 1942).

The structural conditions of the United States—including rapid industrialization, high demand for labour, the absence of state social security for migrants, and linguistic barriers—created an environment in which individual migration strategies proved insufficient. Under these conditions, collective mechanisms of mutual assistance emerged to reduce social risks and stabilize immigrant communities (Dobrotkova 2013).

Slovak associations developed as organized forms of protection, solidarity, and adaptation within the industrial immigrant environment of the United States (Husek 1978).

Associations institutionalized solidarity through membership rules, financial contributions, benefit systems and collective funds. Through these mechanism, social risks such as illness, workplace accidents, or death were collectively managed (Megles et al. 1978).

However, their significance extended beyond economic and insurance functions. Associations created a space for cultural continuity, language preservation, and collective identity. At the same-time, they facilitated adaption to American civic and social life without requiring immediate assimilation.

The present study draws upon the concept of ethnic organizations, which played a significant role in the United States during industrialization. In historiography, fraternal and mutual aid associations are interpreted not only as economic protective mechanisms but also as platforms for collective identity, social participation, and community organization.

In this study, integration is understood as a process combining social stabilization, cultural adaptation, and symbolic continuity and the preservation of collective identity. It is therefore not interpreted as complete assimilation, but as a dynamic form of adaptation within the host society.

From this perspective, Slovak compatriot organizations cannot be understood merely as spontaneous support associations responding to social risks but rather as structured mechanisms of mutual aid, community organization and immigrant adaptation that simultaneously stabilized the community, cultivated collective identity, and mediated adaptation to the American social environment.

The study contributes to existing historiography by examining Slovak immigrant associations not only as welfare organizations, but also as institutional structures that organized community life, mutual aid and cultural activities within the Slovak diaspora in the United States. Through the analysis of associational statutes and normative documents, the article focuses on aspects of organizational practice that have received comparatively less systematic attention in previous research.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How did Slovak immigrant associations institutionalize systems of mutual aid and social protection in the United States?
2. In what way did the National Slovak Society and American Živena contribute to the organization of Slovak immigrant community life?

3. What differences may be identified between male and female organizational models within Slovak immigrant associational structures?

2. Materials and Methods

The aim of this study is to analyse Slovak compatriot associations in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as institutional mechanisms of social integration within the immigrant community. Rather than measuring integration empirically, the study examines how associations formally conceptualized and institutionally organized mechanisms of social support, solidarity and adaptation within the Slovak immigrant environment. In this study, integration is understood as a process combining social stabilization, mutual assistance, cultural continuity and gradual adaptation to American civic and social life. Associations are therefore examined as organized structures mediating between immigrant solidarity and adaptation to the host society.

The analysis focuses primarily on organizational structures, systems of social protections, membership rules, financial mechanisms and cultural and educational activities reflected in the normative documents of Slovak immigrant associations. Chronologically, the analysis focuses primarily on the period between the 1880s and the outbreak of the First World War, which represented the most intensive phase of Slovak mass migration to the United States and the formative period of Slovak associational life.

The primary source base of the research consists of normative documents of Slovak associations, particularly the *Statutes of the National Slovak Society* (1906) (Rovnianek 1906), the statutes of the first mutual aid organizations, and the founding and organizational documents of *American Živena*. The analysis materials include organizational statutes, founding documents, membership regulations, internal financial provisions, and published organizational texts related to the activities of Slovak immigrant associations. These sources were selected because they provide insight into the formal organization of associations, systems of benefits, financial structures, membership regulations and declared social and cultural objectives. Although normative documents do not fully reflect everyday organizational practice, they make it possible to reconstruct the institutional principles and value framework upon which associational life was organized.

Methodologically, the research combines the historical-analytical approach with qualitative content analysis of normative and organizational documents. The statutes were examined with regard to the following:

- Organizational objectives;
- Membership criteria;
- Systems of financial contributions and funds;
- Social protection mechanisms;
- Formulations reflecting cultural, national and integrative aims.

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify recurring themes related to solidarity, social protection, collective identity, education, language use, and adaptation to American society. Particular attention was devoted to formulations defining membership obligations, systems of benefits, organization aims, and references to national and cultural identity.

The study also applies a comparative perspective through the analysis of the organizational models of the *National Slovak Society* and *American Živena*. This comparison makes it possible to identify both common integrative functions and differences related to gender, organizational structure, and forms of community activity.

The study is limited primarily by the character of its source base. Since statutes and organizational documents reflect normative and institutional rather than everyday social practice, the article does not seek to reconstruct the complete lived experience of migrants. Instead, it focuses on the formal mechanisms through which solidarity, social protection and

collective identity were institutionally organized within the Slovak immigrant community. The article contributes to existing historiography by focusing not only on migration itself, but also on the institutional organization of immigrant life and the role of associational structures in the stabilization of Slovak communities in the United States.

The methodological contribution of this study lies in the historically grounded interpretation of associational statutes as normative sources. Rather than using them only to describe the formal structure of Slovak immigrant associations, the study reads these documents as evidence of how immigrant organization defined their own institutional role, social responsibilities and cultural priorities. This approach requires a distinction between declared norms and everyday practice: the statutes do not provide a complete picture of lived experience, but they reveal what forms of solidarity, discipline, welfare provision and cultural continuity were considered legitimate and necessary within the associational framework.

The innovative aspect of study lies in shifting the analysis from a descriptive account of Slovak associational development to the examination of the institutional mechanisms through which immigrant communities organized mutual aid, cultural continuity and adaptation. In this perspective, welfare support, financial discipline, education, gendered associational activity and identity preservation are not treated as separate functions, but as interrelated elements of immigrant self-organization. The comparison of the National Slovak Society and American Živena further shows that these mechanisms took different organizational forms within male and female associational models.

The broader relevance of this approach lies in its applicability to other historical studies of migration and ethnic associational life. Since many immigrant communities in the United States created similar statutes, membership regulations and benefit systems, the analytical model used here may be applied comparatively to examine how ethnic organizations formalized solidarity, social protection, cultural continuity and adaptation to the host society. The Slovak-American case is therefore analysed not as an isolated example, but as a historically specific case through which wider patterns of immigrant institutionalization can be explored.

3. The Formation of Slovak Associational Life in the United States in the Nineteenth Century

The process of forming Slovak associations and organizations in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century represented one of the fundamental mechanisms of social adaptation of Slovak emigrants within a new social environment. The emergence of these institutions reflected the broader social conditions of industrial immigration in the United States, where immigrant communities frequently organized mutual aid associations in response to economic insecurity, occupational risks and the absence of state welfare protection. Slovak emigration was predominantly economic in nature and was closely connected to the processes of industrialization in the northeastern and Midwestern states of the United States, where employment opportunities in mines, metallurgical enterprises, and factories were concentrated (Bielik 1979).

Most Slovak emigrants originated from agrarian regions of the Kingdom of Hungary and entered industrial occupations characterized by physically demanding labour, employment instability and high workplace risks. In cases of illness, injury or death, immigrant families often lacked systematic social protection, since employers and public institutions provided only limited welfare support to newly arrived migrants (Byington 1910).

Economic marginalization was further intensified by linguistic and cultural barriers. Most Slovak immigrants did not speak English, which significantly limited their ability to defend their rights, navigate the legal system, and communicate effectively with employers. Within this context, collective forms of self-organization based on the principles of ethnic

solidarity and mutual assistance began to emerge. The first Slovak associations in the United States developed as a practical response to the everyday social risks faced by migrants, and their primary function was the provision of material and financial support (Megles et al. 1978).

The earliest documented form of Slovak compatriot self-organization was *Persi Uherszko-Szlovenszky v nyemoci podporujuci spolek*, founded on 3 March 1883 in New York and known in the American environment as *The First Slovak Health Benefit Society* (Dobrotkova 2013). This first Slovak–Hungarian association represented the inaugural moment of the institutionalization of Slovak associational life in the United States. The organizations served as an important model for later Slovak mutual aid and fraternal associations established in immigrant communities across the United States. Its establishment was a direct response to the absence of social security and the high level of occupational risks in the industrial environment of American cities. The membership base consisted primarily of emigrants from eastern Slovakia, and its principal aim was to provide sickness and death benefits for members and their families.

An important aspect of the association's functioning was its normative and linguistic structure. Its statutes were written in Slovak with strong elements of the eastern Slovak Spiš dialect and Hungarian grammatical influences. Slovak was established as the exclusive official language of the organization. The statutes stipulated that proposals submitted in another language should not be accepted and that the linguistic rules were to remain unchanged if the association consisted of at least seven members: “zasadne náverhy nemajú bicz prijate alebo recz jedna nyepremenyicz, dokyal lyen 7 udove toho szpolku tervajú” (Čulen 1942). Slovak as the official language of the association reflected an effort to preserve communication and collective cohesion within the immigrant environment. At the same time, it represented an early expression of emerging Slovak national consciousness among emigrants originating from the Kingdom of Hungary (Čulen 1942; Dobrotkova 2013).

Although the association carried a Slovak–Hungarian designation in its name, its internal functioning indicates a gradual shift from a Hungarian framework toward a distinct Slovak identity. The first president of the association, Ján Hecko, together with his collaborators, created an organizational model in which social protection was intertwined with an implicit national and identity dimension. The association remained active until the early 1890s, when internal disagreements and differing views on organizational cooperation contributed to its dissolution. Nevertheless, its experience provided an important foundation for the establishment of further Slovak organizations in the New York environment, particularly the *New Yorszky Szlovenszky Szpolec*, which built upon its organizational and ideological foundations and remained active until 1918 (Veselý 1979).

After 1883, the organizational activity of Slovak emigrants began to expand rapidly. New local associations emerged in areas with a growing concentration of Slovak population, particularly in the states of Connecticut, Ohio, New York, and Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania gradually established itself as the principal centre of Slovak compatriot life in the United States, which was closely related to the large number of Slovak workers employed in coal mines and metallurgical industries. The first Slovak association in this region was the *Church and Sick-Benefit Society*, founded in 1884 in Hazleton, which later became part of the broader organizational structure of the *First Slovak Catholic Union* (Megles et al. 1978).

A characteristic feature of the early associations was their naming after Christian saints and Hungarian rulers, reflecting the enduring confessional orientation of emigrants and the symbolic world transferred from their homeland (Correspondence of Paula Novomestská with Elena M. Šoltésová, Literary Archive of the Slovak National Library, sign. M 98 F 21). Among the most important organizations of this period was the Passaic-based *Society of St. Stephen, King of Hungary*, founded on 2 November 1884, which became one of the main

initiators of the idea of broader organizational integration among Slovak associations in the United States (Čulen 1942). Slovak served as the language of its proceedings.

As noted by Megles et al. (1978), between 1883 and 1890 there were approximately fifty local Slovak mutual aid associations according to available records. Their functions gradually expanded beyond purely economic support. Associations became spaces of social interaction, organizing social gatherings, lectures, religious celebrations, and cultural events. In this way, they facilitated the adaptation of newly arrived emigrants while simultaneously strengthening the internal cohesion of the community (Megles et al. 1978). These organizations gradually developed from local support structures into broader institutions of immigrant community life.

By the late 1880s, a gradual shift could also be observed in the ideological and linguistic orientation of associations. Whereas older organizations used names in Slovak–Hungarian transcription, newer associations increasingly adopted English or bilingual names, reflecting adaptation to the American legal and social environment. This development reflected the gradual adaptation of Slovak immigrant organizations to the institutional and linguistic environment of the United States (Veselý 1979).

The quantitative expansion of associational life became particularly evident in the 1890s. By the end of 1893, as many as 277 Slovak associations had been recorded, with the highest concentration in Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio (Bielik 1982; Dobrotkova 2013). The rapid growth in the number of associations reflected both continuing migration and the increasing institutional organization of Slovak immigrant communities.

The culmination of the process of institutionalizing associational life was the establishment of supralocal organizations in 1890. The founding of the *National Slovak Society* as a secular and inclusive platform and the creation of the *First Slovak Catholic Union* as a confessionally grounded organization represented two parallel models of organizing the Slovak community. Both organizations built upon the experience of local associations and created mechanisms for systematic social integration, collective representation, and the long-term stabilization of the Slovak ethnic segment within the United States (Husek 1978).

The development of Slovak associational life in the United States demonstrates that immigrant organizations fulfilled functions extending beyond material assistance alone. Alongside social protection, they contributed to the organization of community life, the preservation of language and cultural identity and the gradual adaptation of Slovak migrants to the American social environment.

4. The National Slovak Society as an Integrative Platform for Slovak Americans

The establishment of the *National Slovak Society* represented a significant turning point in the institutional organization of Slovak emigrants in the United States. Whereas earlier Slovak associations functioned primarily as local mutual aid societies responding to the immediate social needs, the *National Slovak Society* gradually developed into a supra-local organization combining social protection, cultural activity, and collective representation. The organization reflected broader patterns characteristic of immigrant fraternal associations in the United States during the late nineteenth century, where systems of mutual aid were frequently connected with educational and community activities (Husek 1978).

The association was formally established on 15 February 1890 in Pittsburgh. The founding convention, held on 16–18 February 1890, adopted the statutes and elected the principal governing bodies of the organization (Bielik 1982). From its inception, the association presented itself as a civic, non-denominational organization open to all Slovaks regardless of regional origin. Symbolically, it identified itself with Slovak national symbols and with the ideals of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” (Rovnianek 2004).

The 1894 charter, by which the association was incorporated in the state of Pennsylvania, clearly defined its mission:

“The union was formed for the purpose of assisting the Slovak people in misfortune, sickness, and in the event of death, now and hereafter residing in this district, state, and elsewhere in the United States; to educate and instruct them in the English language and other branches of knowledge so that they may become capable of fulfilling their duties as citizens and stand on an equal footing with English-speaking citizens ...”. (Rovnianek 1906)

This provision demonstrates that the association combined mutual aid with educational and civic objectives. Alongside social protection, the statutes emphasized language acquisition, civic participation and the ability of immigrants to function within American society. Assistance in cases of illness and death constituted a basic pillar of the association and reflected the social conditions of industrial immigrant communities in the late nineteenth century. The statutes therefore codified a collective system of support intended to compensate for the limited availability of public welfare institutions.

The educational activities of the association reflected the practical needs of immigrant adaptation. Knowledge of English and familiarity with civic institutions were increasingly necessary for employment, communication with public authorities and participation in American public life. The statutes therefore represented a broader normative framework linking social, organizational and cultural functions.

Membership conditions in the *National Slovak Society* were regulated in detail in the *General Statutes of the Branches*. According to the statutes, a member could be “every Slovak and Slav who is not less than 16 and not more than 45 years of age, is in full health, lives in a moral and honest manner, and is a Christian” (Rovnianek 1906). These criteria reflected both the insurance-oriented character of the organization and the moral expectations characteristic of immigrant fraternal societies during this period. The requirement of Christian affiliation points to the confessional and cultural framework within which the association operated, despite its formally non-denominational character.

The statutes also established a differentiated system of membership contributions. The entrance fee increased according to the age of the applicant, reflecting the actuarial logic of risk. A member aged 16–20 paid an entrance fee of USD 1.00; aged 20–25, USD 1.50; aged 25–30, USD 2.50; aged 30–35, USD 3.50; aged 35–40, USD 5.00; and aged 40–45, USD 10.00 (Rovnianek 1906). The increase in the entrance fee with advancing age clearly indicates that the association considered the higher probability of illness or death among older members. In addition to the age-graded entrance fee, each new member was also obliged to pay a special contribution: “Besides this, every member is obliged to pay 50 cents to the basic fund” (Rovnianek 1906). This contribution was allocated to the basic capital of the organization and strengthened its financial stability (Rovnianek 1906).

Regular monthly contributions were regulated in §27 of the statutes and constituted a comprehensively structured system of financing. Each member was obliged to pay monthly 50 cents to the branch treasury, 6 cents to the Main Branch, 1 cent to the Poor Fund, 2 cents to the National Fund, 5 cents to the Reserve Fund, and 5 cents to the Home Fund (Rovnianek 1906). The existence of differentiated funds demonstrates the relatively developed financial organization of the association and its effort to combine welfare, organizational and cultural functions within a single institutional structure.

The special-purpose funds fulfilled distinct functions. The *Poor Fund* supported socially vulnerable members, while the *Reserve Fund* served as a mechanism of financial stabilization. A particularly important role was played by *National Fund*, which according to the statutes was intended “for the spiritual uplift of the Slovak nation in America and in the old country”. (Rovnianek 1906). The existence of the Home Fund demonstrates that

the association attempted to expand its activities beyond immediate insurance functions toward broader forms of institutional social care. Together, the differentiated system of funds reflected the effort to combine welfare protection, organizational stability and cultural-national activities within a single institutional framework.

One of the key pillars of the *National Slovak Society's* activities was its elaborate system of benefits and social security, which was laid down in detail in the statutes of the organization. The system reflected the broader social insecurity experienced by industrial immigrant communities in the United States during this period. The statutes defined the conditions and forms of benefits in a detailed and standardized manner, thereby institutionalizing collective mutual assistance within the association.

In the event of the death of a member, the statutes clearly established the amount of the death benefit: "...the heirs of the deceased member ... shall receive from the National Society USD 1000 as a death benefit" (Rovnianek 1906). This sum represented a basic form of protection for surviving dependents. The situation of the death of a member's wife was also regulated separately, with §134 establishing a benefit of USD 300 (Rovnianek 1906). The differentiation of benefits reflected the gendered structure of family and economic roles characteristic of immigrant communities at the turn of the century.

The statutes also regulated disability benefits in detail, grading them according to the type and extent of bodily injury. The loss of one eye entitled the member to a benefit of USD 100; the loss of an arm, USD 300; the loss of a leg, USD 200; and the loss of both limbs or the sight of both eyes, USD 1000 (Rovnianek 1906). The detailed classification of injuries reflected the actuarial and insurance-oriented character of the organization's welfare system.

Sickness benefits were equally clearly defined. The statutes stated that they were to be paid "for 13 weeks at \$5 and for the second 13 weeks at \$2.50" (Rovnianek 1906).

The statutes also contained provisions relating to suicide, according to which no death benefit was to be paid in the event of the intentional self-killing of a member (Rovnianek 1906). Similar exclusions were characteristic of fraternal insurance associations during this period and reflected both actuarial principles and prevailing moral norms.

Through system of sickness, disability and death benefits, the association partially compensated for the limited availability of public welfare protection available to immigrant workers in the industrial environment of the United States.

The statutes of the Main Branch of the *National Slovak Society* precisely defined the organization's internal financial structure through the systematic division of funds. They listed: "Commercial Fund, Death Fund, Reserve Fund, Poor Fund, National Fund, Home Fund" (Rovnianek 1906). The differentiated structure of funds reflected the relatively developed organizational and financial administration of the association.

The Commercial Fund secured economic operations and the management of financial resources within the broader economic framework of the organization. The Death Fund constituted the foundation of the insurance system and was directly tied to the payment of death benefits. The Reserve Fund represented a stabilizing mechanism intended to guarantee financial equilibrium and the capacity to respond to extraordinary situations. The Poor Fund was an expression of social solidarity toward the most vulnerable members of the community and created a separate space for assistance in cases of material hardship.

A special position within this structure was held by the National Fund, whose purpose was stated in the statutes in unequivocal terms: "The National Fund is for the spiritual uplift of the Slovak nation in America and in the old country" (Rovnianek 1906). The National Fund demonstrates that the organization combined welfare objectives with cultural and national activities aimed at preserving Slovak identity within the immigrant environment. The reference to activities "in America and in the old country" also reflected the transatlantic

orientation of Slovak immigrant associational life. The organizational structure of the association therefore combined welfare, financial and cultural functions within a single institutional framework.

Literary and periodical activity constituted an integral part of the *National Slovak Society's* operations and was normatively anchored directly in its statutes. According to §111, the association maintained its own official organ (Rovnianek 1906), which ensured systematic communication between the Main Branch and local branches. In geographically dispersed immigrant communities, the official publication functioned as an important instrument of organizational coordination and communication.

The official organ primarily fulfilled informational and coordinating functions. It enabled regular contact between the central leadership and local branches and informed members about conventions, amendments to statutes, financial matters and organizational activities.

The significance of the official organ, however, extended beyond administration alone. Through Slovak-language periodicals, cultural and national ideas were disseminated among immigrant's communities. Slovak-language press played an important role in maintaining cultural continuity and collective identity within immigrant communities (Stolárik 1997). Alongside administrative communication, periodicals also reinforced community cohesion by disseminating information related to organizational life, mutual aid and cultural activities.

The National Slovak Society combined several interconnected functions characteristic of immigrant fraternal organizations at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Rovnianek 1906). Alongside systems of social protection, the organization also developed mechanisms of financial administration, community coordination and cultural activity. System of sickness, disability and death benefits partially compensated for the absence of broader welfare protection available to immigrant workers in the United States during this period. The National Fund reflected the organization's support for cultural and national activities within Slovak immigrant communities. The differentiated structure of organizational funds reflected the relatively developed financial administration of the association.

The association also supported the acquisition of the English language and orientation in the American civic and legal environment, as reflected in its declared aim "to educate and instruct in the English language and other branches of knowledge so that they may become capable of fulfilling their duties as citizens" (Rovnianek 1906). This objective reflected the practical importance of language acquisition and civic orientation for immigrant adaptation within American society. The National Slovak Society therefore functioned not only as a mutual aid organization, but also as an important institutional structure contributing to the stabilization and organization of Slovak immigrant community life in the United States.

5. American Živena as a Woman's Association of the Slovak Diaspora in the United States

The female dimension of Slovak emigration to the United States constituted a significant, though numerically smaller, component of compatriot life over the long term. According to Dobrotkova (2013), women accounted for approximately 30% of all Slovak emigrants in the United States. Their position within immigrant communities was shaped not only by employment conditions, but also by family and household responsibilities. In many immigrant communities, women participated in maintaining boarding households, domestic economies and family support networks that contributed to the everyday functioning of Slovak migrant life (Dobrotkova 2013).

The impulse for establishing an independent women's association arose from the need to institutionalize these forms of mutual assistance and community activity. Peter V. Rovnianek played an important role in supporting the establishment of the asso-

ciation and referred to the organizational model of Živena in Slovakia. (Rovnianek 2004). At the founding assembly, he explicitly stated that his model was the “homeland” Živena in Slovakia, while simultaneously pointing to the different social conditions in which the American organization was to take shape.

The first assembly of *American Živena* was held on 19 July 1891 and was attended by twelve women. Basic organizational rules defining the character of the association were adopted during its inaugural phase. The membership fee was set at one dollar, meetings were to be held twice a month, and an age limit for membership was introduced. Members could be women between 18 and 40 years of age, while no account was taken of their confessional affiliation or worldview. (Dobrotková 2014). The absence of confessional restrictions distinguished the organization from several contemporaneous immigrant associations organized along denominational lines.

The founding documents clearly confirm that American Živena initially functioned as a mutual aid association. In cooperation with the *National Slovak Society*, it provided sickness benefits, assistance in the form of loans, and direct support to mothers for six weeks after childbirth. The aims of the association, however, extended beyond the framework of material assistance. As in the case of Živena in Slovakia, educational activities directed toward woman and girls formed an important part of the organization’s program. The organization reflected continuing cultural and ideological connections between Slovak immigrant communities and associational developments in Slovakia (Bartalská 1995).

The organizational development of the association was marked by a gradual increase in membership. During the first year, the number of members rose to forty, and three local branches were established: *Živena* in New York, *Daughters of the Tatras* in Chicago, and *Maidens of the Mother of Levoča* in Mount Pleasant. Anna Szent Andrášová became the chairwoman of the association. At the founding meeting, Peter Rovnianek addressed the participants with the words: “Sisters, let us love one another and work for the welfare of our families and the honor of the nation” (Dobrotková 2014).

The beginnings of the association were accompanied by organizational difficulties. Several activists participated simultaneously in other compatriot organizations, while the geographical distance between Slovak immigrant communities complicated communication and coordination. Political tensions connected to national movements within the Kingdom of Hungary also influenced perceptions of Slovak associational activity among emigrants (Rovnianek 2004). Despite these obstacles, the association expanded.

In 1895, American Živena had twenty branches; one year later twenty-six; and in the following year already fifty-one. In 1899, the organization recorded eighty-two branches and 1167 members, (*Živena* 1933) while by In 1910, American Živena had 125 branches with 4172 dues-paying members. The growth of the branch network reflected the increasing institutional stabilization of Slovak woman’s associational life in the United States (Bartalská 1995).

From 1908 onward, American Živena published its own journal under the same title. The establishment of the journal reflected the growing organizational stability of the association. The periodical published reports on organizational activities, minutes, educational texts, and maintained contact with Slovak editorial offices, particularly *Dennica* and *Živena* in Slovakia. The editors of the American edition were successively M. Ferienčíková, E. Križanová, P. Blažek, and later M. T. Mravcová and J. Cieker. Slovak-language women’s periodicals contributed to communication among geographically dispersed immigrant communities and supported cultural continuity within the diaspora (Stolárik 1997).

On the initiative and with the support of compatriot associations, American Živena established a *National Fund*, through which it supported editorial activities, authors’ honoraria, and cultural and national projects in Slovakia. Financial assistance also supported

selected cultural and educational activities connected to Slovak national life in the homeland environment. American Živena admitted several prominent figures of Slovak cultural life as honorary members, including Elena Maróthy-Šoltésová, Terézia Vansová, and Ľudmila Podjavorinská (*Národné Noviny* 1902).

The activities of the association were financed through membership fees, donations, theatrical performances and concerts. An important component of its activities also became the *Lipa* production cooperative and the distribution of embroidered products from Slovakia, Handicraft production and their circulation of embroidered products contributed to maintaining cultural traditions within immigrants' communities. American Živena combined mutual aid, educational work and cultural activity within a women-oriented associational structure. The organization contributed to the institutional development of Slovak immigrant community life and represented one of the most important Slovak women's associations in the United States before the First World War (*Živena* 1921).

6. Conclusions

The present study analysed Slovak compatriot associations in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as institutional structures of mutual aid, community organization and immigrant adaptation. Through the content analysis of the statutes and normative documents of the *National Slovak Society* and *American Živena*, it was possible to reconstruct their organizational model, financial architecture, system of social protection and selected cultural and educational activities. The analysis demonstrated that these organizations developed relatively stable organizational mechanisms based on membership rules, collective funds and systems of mutual support.

The analysis also demonstrated that systems of sickness, disability and death benefits constituted one of the principal dimensions of associational activities. The detailed regulation of benefits and organizational funds reflected the social insecurity experienced by immigrant workers in the industrial environment of United States during this period. In the context of limited welfare protection available to immigrants, mutual aid associations provided organized forms of collective assistance for members and their family.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrated that reducing the significance of these associations exclusively to their welfare and insurance function would be insufficient. The statutes and organizational activities of both associations also included educational, publishing and cultural initiatives connected to the preservation of Slovak language and collective identity. Literary and periodical activities, together with cultural and educational projects, contributed to communication and cultural continuity within geographically dispersed immigrant communities.

The activities of these organizations had several interconnected social, organizational and cultural dimensions. Membership regulations, financial structures and organizational discipline contributed to the internal cohesion and long-term functioning of associational life. At the same time, educational activities and support for English-language instruction facilitated adaptation to the civic and social environment of the United States.

The comparison of male and female organizational models also pointed to gender-differentiated forms of associational activity. Whereas the *National Slovak Society* emphasized large-scale mutual aid, centralized administration and financial management, *American Živena* developed a more community-oriented model connected to women's educational, cultural and family activities. Despite their differences, both organizations participated in the broader institutional development of Slovak immigrant community life in the United States.

From a methodological perspective, the study confirmed that the normative documents and associational statutes represent important sources for the analysis of immigrant

organizational structures. Such documents provide insight into organizational priorities, welfare mechanisms, membership structures, and declared cultural objectives.

The findings of the research also point to a broader interpretive framework. Slovak compatriot associations may be situated within the wider phenomenon of immigrant mutual aid and fraternal organizations in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar organizations contributed to the institutional stabilization of immigrant communities through systems of collective support, associational organization and cultural activity.

The analysed associations contributed to the organization of Slovak immigrant community life through mutual aid activities, educational initiatives and system of collective organization. Further research may focus on comparative analysis of other Central European immigrant associations and on the social and generational dynamics of associational life within migration communities.

The study therefore offers a transferable historical–analytical framework for examining how immigrant associations institutionalized mutual aid, cultural community and adaptation within different ethnic communities.

Funding: Funded by the EUNextGenerationEU through the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia under the project No. 09I03-03-V02-00042.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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