

Bachelor's Thesis Comparative European History

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Word Count: 9995

Date: 15th of June 2025

Between Marginality and Social Mobility: How Eastern Slovak Roma born in Socialist Czechoslovakia Navigated Their Way Forward

A historical study of investments in human capital and social networks in the life trajectories of Eastern Slovak Roma through historical context and personal testimonies



A Roma woman, Denisa Havrřová, working with her other non-Roma colleagues among the Roma in poor settlements in Eastern Slovakia, 2010s, [Denisa Havrřová \(1971\)](#) (consulted in June 2025)

‘The *Roma issue* is becoming one of the most significant social, cultural, and civilizational issues of the 21st century in Slovakia. Solutions to these issues require not only political will and courage, but also a vision of a multicultural Slovakia, and deep knowledge of the past failures that followed flawed solutions.’¹

¹ Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, Tom Nicholson, ‘Preface’, in: Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, and Tom Nicholson (eds.) *ČAČIPEN PAL O ROMA – A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*, (Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava, 2003), 7.

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1. Introduction.

In 1999, the situation of Slovak Roma was a significant obstacle on Slovakia's path towards integration into the European Union. Around that time, 140,000 Roma individuals lived in a ghetto-like rural settlements with the heaviest concentration in eastern Slovakia (fig. 1,2). These settlements shared the socio-economic characteristics of Third World slums, characterized by a lack of decent housing, water, electricity, and educational facilities, which was disturbing compared to the rest of the population. While undesirable conditions of Roma living conditions are still characteristic of the majority of Roma in Europe, the Slovakian Roma population faces disproportionately high levels of poverty and discrimination compared to other European countries.² Only around 15 percent of Slovakian Roma are reported to finish secondary education, and their chance of getting a university degree is thirty-five times lower than in the non-Roma Slovak community. Moreover, their long-term unemployment rate is around 80 percent.³ The discrimination towards this minority is also often latent and accepted, such as Slovak parents telling their children a common, homegrown phrase 'if you will not behave, I will sell you to the Gypsies'. This means that from an early age, non-Roma Slovak children are socialized to avoid Roma, and unconsciously accept and sustain this prejudice throughout their lives.



Fig. 1: Two Roma boys from *Letanovce*, one of the poor Roma settlements in eastern Slovakia

Photo by Michal Sváček, 2013, [Slováci zbořili nejznámější romskou osadu, obyvatele pojme nové ghetto - iDNES.cz](http://www.idnes.cz) (consulted in May 2025)

² David. Z. Scheffél, 'Slovak Roma on the Threshold of Europe', *Anthropology Today*, 20:1 (2004), 6-7; Peter Matyšák, 'Social Problems in the Roma Community in the Slovak Republic', *Clinical Social Work*, 1:1 (2015), 97; Uteeyo Dasgupta, Subha Mani, Joe Vecchi, Tomáš Želinský, 'Game of Prejudice: Experiments at the extensive and Intensive Margin', IZA – Institute of Labour Economics, (2020), 30; Stanley D. Brunn, Kvetoslava Matlovičová, Alexander Mušinka, René Matlovič, 'Policy implications of the vagaries in population estimates on the accuracy of sociographical mapping of contemporary Slovak Roma Communities', *GeoJournal*, 83 (2017), 854-855; Eva Sobotka, Peter Vermeersch, 'Governing Human Rights and Roma Inclusion: Can the EU be a Catalyst for Local Social Change?', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 34:3 (2012), 801.

³ Peter Matyšák, 'Social Problems in the Roma Community in the Slovak Republic', 100-102; Stanley D. Brunn, Kvetoslava Matlovičová, Alexander Mušinka, Rene Matlovič, 'Policy implications of the vagaries in population estimates on the accuracy of sociographical mapping of contemporary Slovak Roma Communities', 860.

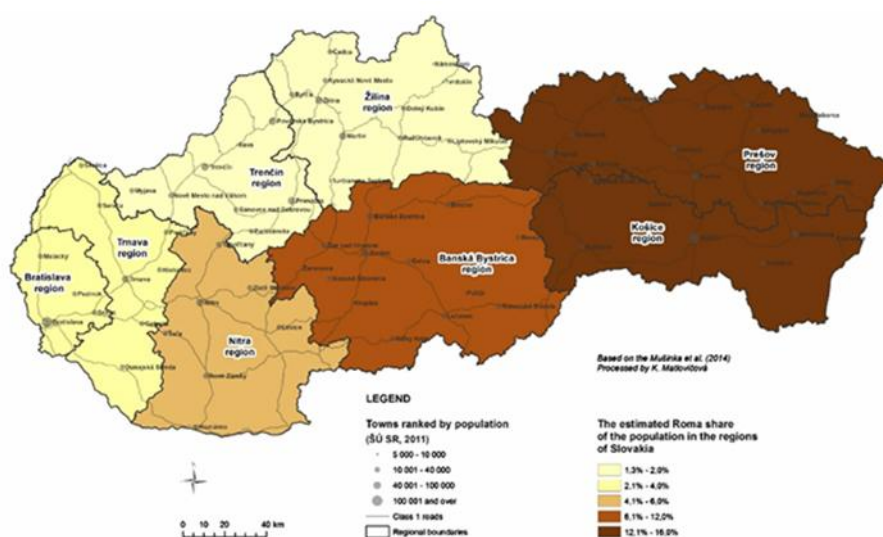


Fig. 2: The estimated Roma share of the population in the regions of Slovakia (Sociographic mapping 2013) in: Stanley D. Brunn, Kvetoslava Matlovičová, Alexander Mušíka, René Matlovič, 'Policy Implications of the vagaries in population estimates on the accuracy of sociographical mapping of contemporary Slovak Roma communities', *GeoJournal*, 83 (2018), 861.

In this context, it is rather difficult to trace the origins of discriminatory acts and attitudes towards this minority. In the academic literature, the turning point of institutionalizing anti-Roma discrimination in Czechoslovakia is considered to be the law 'on nomadic gypsies' from 1927.⁴ This law was based on the notion that all Roma are nomadic, as it is embedded in their race. Roma were banned from entering spa areas in regions like *Spiš* and the *Tatra Mountains*, prohibited from building homes, and their children were often excluded from schools.⁵ This law was not so different in its attitudes towards Roma in other European countries, and it was modelled on similar French and Bavarian laws.⁶

By 1940, racial categorization of Roma intensified under Nazi influence, and the term 'Gypsy' was officially delimited. This delimitation marked one of the first official discriminatory acts towards the 'Gypsy' population in the Slovak State.⁷ Many Roma men went to labour units in places like

⁴ After the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918, the First Czechoslovak Republic was established as a parliamentary democracy and lasted until the onset of the Second World War in 1939. In the same year, the First Slovak Republic emerged as a fascist state aligned with Nazi Germany, existing until 1945. Following the end of the war, a reconstituted Czechoslovakia was formed – this time under the control of the Communist Party, marking the beginning of a socialist regime that would persist until 1989.

⁵ Zuzana Balážová, 'Teórie začleňovania minorít do spoločnosti', *Auspicia*, 1 (2011), 120.

⁶ Vincent Danihel, 'The Roma in Slovakia – Past, Present and Future' in: *Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy* (OSCE Yearbook, 2000), 271-272; Ctibor Nečas, 'Pronásledování Cikánu v období slovenského státu', in: Martin Fotta (ed.) *Rómovia a druhá svetová vojna: Čítanka* (Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2006), 41.

⁷ Jana Hováthová, 'Genocida' in: Jana Horváthová, *Kapitoly z dejín Romů* (Človek v tísní, 2002), 44-45; Ctibor Nečas, 'Pronásledování Cikánu v období slovenského státu', in: Martin Fotta (ed.) *Rómovia a druhá svetová vojna: Čítanka* (Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2006), 41.

Hanušovce nad Topľou or *Dubnica nad Váhom*.⁸ This separation impacted Roma families, and Roma women, inferior to their male partners, were left without support. This dynamic is reflected in their petitions to the authorities, where women appealed for assistance in repatriating their partners.⁹ While the Slovak State did not carry out mass deportations of Roma as in the Czech Protectorate, the Hlinka Guard harassed Roma daily,¹⁰ imposed movement restrictions, and destroyed settlements, which escalated into mass executions of Roma after 1944, such as burning down some of the settlements.¹¹ After the Second World War, many Slovak Roma migrated to the Czech lands in search of a new life and opportunities. That was because they, particularly eastern Slovak Roma, came out of the Second World War in much worse conditions than those in the Czech lands. This was a result of poverty and persecution that made them hide in forests as ‘demoralized’.¹²

However, only one-third of all Slovak Roma were reported to live in ‘ghetto-slum’ settlements at the start of the 2000s, and the overall situation is slowly improving.¹³ Two-thirds of Slovak Roma no longer live in these problematic settlements, which means that they have already overcome a situation that substantially contributes to their cycle of poverty and lack of education.¹⁴ Together with still-present discrimination practices with clear historical roots, and a still-existing large share of Roma population with low educational attainment and substandard living conditions, there is a blurred understanding of how those Roma from eastern Slovakia, who do not live in ‘ghetto-like’ Roma settlements, attained university education and are successfully integrated into the workforce, were able to navigate their lives and overcome their past hardships. Therefore, this thesis views the Czechoslovak socialist period as a bridge between post-war efforts and present-day outcomes, and seeks to examine the factors that contributed to Roma social mobility during that time. What was the Czechoslovak agenda for improving Roma social mobility? Who helped Roma individuals from eastern Slovakia, like *Maximilián Estočák* (fig.3), to pursue a higher education? What were the bridges and obstacles for Eastern Slovak Roma in their social mobility? How do they understand the sources of their empowerment?

⁸ Jana Hováthová, ‘Genocida’, 48; Ctibor Nečas, ‘Pronásledování Cikánu v období slovenského státu’, 41.

⁹ For petitions of eastern Slovak Roma women during the Second World War see: State Archive Prešov (Prešov/Slovakia) | Archived under: ŠZŽ-Adm / 1942 / No. 40 414/42 / Petition submitted by Helena Maňkošová / 25 July 1942. State Archive Prešov (Prešov/Slovakia) | Archived under: ŠZŽ-Adm / 1942 / Nr. 37 507/42 / Petition submitted by Katarína Girgová (born Holubová) / 9 September 1942; State Archive Prešov (Prešov/Slovakia) | Archived under: ŠZŽ-Adm / 1942 / Nr. 40 414/42 / Petition submitted by Anna Bilá (born Lacková) / 25. Juli 1942. All of them are accessible online through the [Archive](#)

¹⁰ Hlinka Guard was a Slovak militia during the Second World War that collaborated with Nazi Germany, and was involved in the persecution of Jews, Roma, and political opponents.

¹¹ Jana Hováthová, ‘Genocida’, 48; Arne B. Mann, ‘Význam spomienkového rozprávania pre výskum dejín rómskeho holokaustu’, *Slovenský národopis*, 58:3 (2010), 330-331.

¹² Anna Jurová, ‘Slovenskí Rómovia v Československu v rokoch 1945-1947 (Regulácia pohybu a kontinuita persekúcie)’, *Človek a spoločnosť*, 12:1 (2009), 3-4, 29; Elena Lacková, ‘Translator’s Note’, in: Elena Lacková, *A False Dawn: My life as a Gypsy Women in Slovakia*, (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000), 10.

¹³ David Z. Scheffel, ‘Slovak Roma on the Treshold of Europe’, 7.

¹⁴ Peter Matyšák, ‘Social Problems in the Roma Community in the Slovak Republic’, 98.



Fig. 3: *Maximilián Estočák* (b. 1946) at his graduation ceremony in 1986 at the University of Prešov, eastern Slovakia. He was among the very few Roma individuals of his generation to complete a university education.¹⁵

Source: personal archive of Maximilián Estočák, 1986, [Maximilián Eštočák \(1946\)](#) (consulted in May 2025)

¹⁵ For more on contemporary educational level of this region see: Lukasz Kwadrans, Rene Luzica, Ivan Rác, 'The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology', *Kultura I Edukacja*, 2:136 (2022), 167.

1.1. Historiography.

The historiography of the Romani people remains underdeveloped across historical periods. Ari Joskowicz, a historian interested in the interplay between Jewish and transnational European minorities, argues that Romani history is often subsumed within broader narratives, particularly to the Second World War, where documentation and memory of the Romani Holocaust remain overshadowed by the Jewish experience.¹⁶ However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of these problems, which has led to increased efforts, both within and beyond Europe, to systematically collect and analyze the historical past of Romani communities.¹⁷

In Central and Eastern Europe, historical research on Romani populations faces additional challenges from broader regional differences in academic infrastructure. At the same time, the sheer size of Romani communities in these countries makes historical research into their past increasingly relevant.¹⁸ Increasing efforts to research the Roma minority bring attention to many historical periods. In this context, Marushiakova and Popov, historians and contributors to the field of Romani Studies, present groundbreaking works on Roma minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. In their work 'Roma Voices in History', they attempt to provide a collection of first-hand sources of Roma people from the 19th century up until the Second World War. Through this work, they emphasize the importance of Roma agency and their efforts towards recognition. Along with other works, they emphasize the importance of considering the voices of Roma in Romani Studies, particularly in a historical context.¹⁹

In the context of Roma historiography in the Slovak and Czech lands, Ingrid Vagačová and Martin Fotta, academics in Romani Studies, have published a foundational book collection of Romani oral histories from those who survived the Holocaust. Ctibor Nečas, a Czech historian and a contributor to this collection, points out that the contemporary problematic relations between Roma and non-Roma in Slovakia can be traced back to the era of the Second World War, when ideological notions of race influenced their position.²⁰

The historiography of Czech and Slovak Roma in postwar Czechoslovakia has increasingly focused on whether Roma were treated more as a social issue than a national minority. Recent debates have explored Roma emancipation, agency under socialism, and structural factors, including housing and educational segregation. Historians now place greater emphasis on Roma voices, lived experiences, and, in particular, the underrepresented perspectives of women. These evolving approaches aim to present Roma as active historical subjects. The following paragraphs explore these debates in more detail.

¹⁶ Ari Joskowicz, 'Separate Suffering, Shared Archives – Jewish and Romani Histories of Nazi Persecution', *History and Memory*, 28:1 (2016), 111, 116.

¹⁷ [RomArchive](#), [Romani Memory: Recollections of Roma from the Central European Perspective](#) | [Paměť národa](#), [Romani in Europe](#) | [Archives Portal Europe](#), [Search](#) | [USC Shoah Foundation](#), [sintiundroma.org](#) | „[Rassendiagnose: Zigeuner](#)“, [Hlavní stránka](#) | [Svědectví Romů a Sintů](#)

¹⁸ Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, 'Introduction', in: Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov (eds.), *Roma Voices in History*, (Brill, 2021), 19-20.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 20-21; Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, 'Gypsy Policy and Roma Activism: From the Interwar Period to Current Policies and Challenges', *Social Inclusion*, 8:2 (2020), 263.

²⁰ Ctibor Nečas, 'Pronásledování Cikánů v období slovenského státu', 41.

In the context of the socialist era, Czech historian Pavel Baloun investigated the mixed attitudes towards the Roma population in Czechoslovakia. He argues that the perception of Roma as a 'social problem' in the early 20th century shaped postwar policies that positioned Roma as requiring state intervention rather than cultural recognition.²¹ René Lužica, a Slovak ethnographer of the Roma population, emphasizes that in the early socialist period, the Roma minority was considered to be a 'regrettable remnant of capitalism' in need of assimilation. This approach failed to get rid of entrenched cultural stereotypes and instead reinforced the idea that Roma were socially problematic. This further restricted their civil participation.²²

Along with the struggles of Roma to be recognized as a national minority, Anna Jurová, the leading historical researcher in Slovakia, presented a critical perspective on the possibilities of Roma emancipation under socialism. She argues that the Czechoslovak state maintained an approach with paternalistic elements that framed Roma as a problem of the state, which resulted in policies that ultimately marginalized Roma from the broader socio-economic system. According to her, the socialist system eliminated spaces for intercultural contact and thus reinforced a legacy of exclusion that continues to shape the experiences of Slovak Roma until today.²³ In her other work, she also highlights the imbalance of historiographical attention between Slovak and Czech academics on Roma's struggles, even though both countries shared a common state and a significant history of persecution.²⁴

In contrast, Celia Donert, a historian of contemporary Central Europe, poses Roma as active members of the socialist regime, emphasizing that, like other non-Romani groups, Roma also sought forms of collective emancipation in the late socialist period. She argues that, despite prolonged struggles for citizenship rights, the 1970s marked an important moment in Roma emancipation, as they increasingly engaged with human rights discourses that mirrored developments among other Roma communities across Europe.²⁵

Together, these perspectives reveal a complexity in historiography. While Donert emphasizes the possibilities of Roma emancipation in the era of socialism, Jurová stresses the structural constraints of a socialist regime that left no room for self-determination. The debate over the freedoms and constraints of Roma people during socialist Czechoslovakia remains open.

Jana Horváthová, a Czech historian and ethnographer, researched the structural mechanisms of the Czechoslovak state, which likely contributed to the peripheral positions of Roma in today's Czech

²¹ Pavel Baloun, 'Cikáni, metla venkova! Tvorba a uplatňování proticikánských opatření v meziválečném Československu, za druhé republiky a v počáteční fázi Protektorátu Čechy a Morava (1918–1941)', *doctoral dissertation at the Charles University in Prague*, (2020), 38-39.

²² Lužica, R., 'Riešenie spoločenskej integrácie a akulturácie Cigánskeho/Rómskeho obyvateľstva v rokoch 1968-1989', *Sociológia a Spoločnosť*, 1:1 (2016), 47; René Lužica, 'Vzdelávanie rómskych žiakov v minulosti – Koncepcie a súčasná realita', in: Jozef Facuna (ed.), *Zborník zo záverečnej konferencie – Spolu s Rómami dosiahneme viac*, (Národný inštitút vzdelávania a mládeže, 2023), 131-132, 145.

²³ Anna Jurová, 'The Roma from 1945 until November 1989', in: Michal Vašečka, Martina Jurásková, Tom Nicholson (eds.), *Čaćipen Pal o Roma – A Global Report on Roma in Slovakia*, (Office of the Public Affairs of the United States Embassy in Bratislava, 2003), 59.

²⁴ Anna Jurová, 'The Slovak Roma people in Czechoslovakia in 1945-1947 (regulation of the movement and continuity of persecution)', *Človek a Spoločnosť*, 12:1, (2009), 1.

²⁵ Celia Donert, 'The Struggle for the Soul of the Gypsy: Marginality and Mass Mobilization in Stalinist Czechoslovakia', *Social History*, 33:2 (2008), 143-144; Celia Donert, 'Prague Spring for Roma!', in: Celia Donert (ed.), *The Rights of Roma: The Struggle for citizenship in postwar Czechoslovakia*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 180.

and Slovak Republics. She traces the socialist-era housing segregation of Roma to the 1965 policy of liquidation of traditional settlements, which created present-day artificially concentrated ‘urban ghettos’.²⁶ René Lužica traces the educational segregation and argues that the placement of Roma children into ‘special schools’ was not a policy designed to address educational differences but another one that perpetuated systemic discrimination, limiting their social mobility.²⁷ Anna Jurová further contributes to these themes by carefully documenting state policies, all of which are found in archives, that have either helped or hindered Roma integration into broader society, and consequently contributed to the present-day outcomes.²⁸

The majority of these debates are united in their attitude toward the Roma, who are viewed more as passive objects of policies rather than contributors to their own historical development.²⁹ This forms a critical gap in the historiography concerning the voices of Roma themselves. Much of the existing scholarship has focused on policies about Roma rather than the views and lives of Roma. Marushiakova and Popov state that a standard explanation for omitting a Roma point of view is the lack of sufficient historical sources presenting Roma's visions. However, they further state that the opposite is true, and a huge number of sources reflecting Roma's views exist. Still, they are dispersed and neglected, also due to restricted archival searches, especially in the context of Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe.³⁰ Similarly, a Slovak activist, Vera Lacková, notes that many sources regarding Roma in Slovakia and the Czech Republic remain unprocessed, and many of them have been lost. Thus, she calls for the further incorporation of oral histories in researching Romani, as it is essential for the current state of archival sources, accessibility, and the state of research in this part of Europe.³¹ This aligns with broader methodological debates in social history regarding the role of subaltern voices in historical narratives.³²

Recently, a new critique of Roma isolation in academic research has been discussed. Marushiakova and Popov criticize the ‘Roma-centric prism’ in research, which they argue reinforces the stigma by portraying Roma as fundamentally different from others, thus isolating Romani studies intellectually and socially.³³ Czech professor of history Vera Sokolova similarly critiques how historical and anthropological work, despite acknowledging Roma efforts at emancipation, often reproduces the hierarchies it seeks to dismantle. She notes that dominant knowledge systems in Czech and Slovak contexts have historically defined Roma from a position of power.³⁴

²⁶ Jana Horváthová, ‘Státem řízená asimilace’, in: Jana Horváthová (ed.), *Kapitoly z dějin Romů*, (Člověk v tísni, 2002), 51-52.

²⁷ René Lužica, ‘Vzdělávání rómských žiakov v minulosti – Koncepcie a súčasná realita’, 145.

²⁸ Anna Jurová, *Rómska menšina na Slovensku v dokumentoch (1945-1975)*, (Spoločenskovedný ústav SAV Košice, 2008), 1-1302.

²⁹ Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, ‘Introduction’, 18.

³⁰ Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, ‘Introduction’, 19-21; Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, ‘Letter to Stalin: Roma Activism vs. Gypsy Nomadism in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe before WWII’, *Social Inclusion*, 8:2 (2020) 266.

³¹ Vera Lacková, ‘How I became a partisan. Filmmaking as a resistance strategy against oblivion’, in: Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Jekateryna Dunajeva (eds.), *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery*, (ERIAC, 2020), 175-176.

³² Daniel Woolf, ‘Transitions: Historical Writing from the Inter-War Period to the Present’, in: Daniel Woolf, *A Concise History of History – Global Historiography from Antiquity to the Present*, (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 268-269.

³³ Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, ‘Introduction’, 19,22.

³⁴ Vera Sokolova, ‘Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks’, in: Vera Sokolova, *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity – Discourses on Roma in Communist Czechoslovakia*, (ibidem-verlag, 2008), 31,39.

Romani women have also begun to receive more attention than in previous years. Celia Donert emphasizes that implicitly racialized state policies during socialism were especially evident in the treatment of Romani women, as exemplified by widespread practices of their sterilization.³⁵ Human rights expert, Claude Cahn, further states that such sterilizations in Czechoslovakia only stopped in 2004 as a result of international pressure.³⁶ Human rights activists, Albert and Szilvasi, point out that with the forced sterilization of Romani women since the 1970s, Czechoslovakia did not do anything exceptional, as this was adopted by other states too.³⁷ Here, the point needs to be made that histories of Romani women still need to be further researched, as the intersection of gender and minority has placed them in an exceptionally vulnerable position.

The historiography of Roma in postwar Czechoslovakia has evolved through debates on citizenship, agency, structural racism, and persecution. Yet, it often fails to provide a more positive light on Slovak Roma and pays little attention to themes such as success or achieved social mobility. Moreover, historians do not seem to put Roma's voices at the centre of attention. Instead, they continue to write about Roma, but without the Roma people themselves. Therefore, this thesis seeks to center the Slovak Roma during socialist Czechoslovakia and give voice to those who successfully navigated paths of social mobility. It shifts from an 'isolationist' narrative. It highlights Roma individuals who do not belong to the one-third of Roma living in slums, or to around 85 percent who did not attain higher education, or did not manage to be employed. It also responds to Jurova's critique of the underrepresentation of Slovak Roma in academia and heeds Marushiakova's warning against the 'Roma-centric prism'. In doing so, this thesis does not downplay the systemic barriers faced by the Roma minority, both historically and today, but it challenges the marginalization of Roma in Romani studies. This thesis does not seek to position the Roma as entirely marginalized or fully integrated, but instead acknowledges that they deserve attention to their 'success' and history on their own.³⁸

1.2. Methodology.

This thesis adopts a life course perspective to examine how Slovak Roma individuals successfully navigated significant transitions, more particularly education, residential mobility, and career, within the context of both structural opportunities and social resources. These transitions are considered the primary indicators of upward social mobility.³⁹ Life course theory provides a framework for this thesis to understand how Roma individuals' trajectories are shaped not only by personal choices but also by

³⁵ Celia Donert, 'Women's Rights and Global Socialism: Gendering Socialist Internationalism during the Cold War', *International Review of Social History*, 67:1 (2022), 11.

³⁶ Claude Cahn, 'Justice Delayed: The Right to Effective Remedy for Victims of Coercive Sterilization in the Czech Republic', *Health and Human Rights*, 19:2 (2017), 18.

³⁷ Gwendolyn Albert, Marek Szilvasi, 'Intersectional Discrimination of Romani Women Forcibly Sterilized in the Former Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic', *Health and Human Rights*, 19:2 (2017), 25.

³⁸ It is important to note that the socialist era posed significant challenges for all citizens, as state-imposed restrictions, such as limitations on travel or religious freedom, impacted the population at large. Yet, the Roma were often subjected to enduring prejudices that marked them as distinct from other Czechoslovak citizens.

³⁹ On housing: Peter Matyšák, 'Social Problems in the Roma Community in the Slovak Republic', *Clinical Social Work*, 1:1 (2015), 104; On employment: *Ibidem*, 99-100; On education: *Ibidem*, 102-103.

the timing of institutional influences and social relationships.⁴⁰ To analyze their successful transitions within structural opportunities and social resources, this thesis draws on the concepts of human capital and social capital. Human capital, in the form of skills, knowledge, education, and abilities that individuals can acquire, reflects state-level investments that shape the structural conditions under which individuals operate (macro level).⁴¹ In the context of social mobility, it is often stated that investment in human capital, such as through education or job training, is one of the primary tools of the state, enabling people to move from lower to higher social status.⁴² Furthermore, social capital, embodied in networks, forms one of the primary individual resources through which one can pursue agency in their upward mobility.⁴³ Positioned within the framework of Social Capital theory, as developed by Bourdieu, Putnam, and Coleman, this paper distinguishes between mezzo (bridging) and micro (bonding) levels of social networks.⁴⁴ This includes the micro level of closed networks of similar individuals (family, relatives, and Roma friends), and mezzo level networks consisting of persons that are not similar to the individual in an ethnical sense (non-Roma), as well as networks formed through interactions with local authorities like teachers, or local institutions with predominantly native population.⁴⁵

The first chapter of this thesis explores the state's investment in human capital among Roma. Here, the thesis will focus on the official initiatives of the socialist Czechoslovak government regarding the Roma minority and how these initiatives created opportunities for their social upward mobility. This chapter will also provide the historical context, which remains highly relevant as it affects the life course of every individual.⁴⁶ Secondly, twelve semi-structured interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis to assess three levels through which an individual can pursue improvement: macro-level state investment in human capital, and mezzo- and micro-level forms of social capital embedded in social networks. In the third and last chapter of this thesis, an interpretive phenomenological analysis of the interviews will be used to make sense of Roma's lived experiences. Here, the thesis aims to identify key factors that empower Roma, resulting in upward mobility, both in the past and present, from the direct

⁴⁰ G.H. Elder Jr., M. Kirkpatrick Johnson, R. Crosnoe, 'The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory', in: J.T. Mortimer, M.J. Shanahan (eds.) *Handbook of the Life Course – Handbook of Sociology and Social Research* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 12.

⁴¹ Burton A. Weisbrod, 'Investing in Human Capital', *The Journal of Human Resources*, 1:1 (1966), 5-7; Zachary Porreca, 'Environmental Sustainability and Human Capital Development', *Consilience*, 22 (2020), 48;

⁴² Gary S. Becker, 'Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis', *Journal of Political Economy*, 70:5 (1962), 9-10.

⁴³ Jan Kok, 'Women's agency in historical family systems', in: Jan Luiten van Zanden, Auke Rijpma, Jan Kok (eds.), *Agency, Gender and Economic Development in the World Economy 1850-2000* (Routledge, London, 2017), 13.

⁴⁴ Robert D. Putnam, 'Social Capital and Public Affairs', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 47:8 (1994), 5-19; On Bourdieu's and Coleman's theories of Social Capital: Silvia Rogošić, Branislava Baranović, 'Social Capital and Educational Achievements: Coleman vs. Bourdieu', *CEPS Journal*, 6:2 (2016), 84-91.

⁴⁵ Bonding and bridging SC: Robert D. Putnam, 'Social Capital and Public Affairs', 5-19; Bram Lancee, 'The Economic Return of Immigrants' Bonding and Bridging Social Capital: The Case of the Netherlands', *International Migration Review*, 44:1 (2016), 205-208; This framework was also used in the context of Roma minority in: Elena-Loreni Baciú, Theofild-Andrei Lazar, 'The influence of Social Capital on the Educational Attainment of Roma Persons: Evidence from a qualitative Study in Romania' in: Mendes et al. (eds.) *Social and Economic Vulnerability of Roma People* (West University of Timisoara, Timisoara, 2021), 187. All three levels of bonding, bridging, and linking of marginalized groups and structural inequality were used in: Simon Szreter, Michael Woolcock, 'Healthy by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health', *International Epidemiological Association*, 33:4 (2004), 655; While the importance of other types of resources, such as cultural or economic, in fully understanding the scope of individual agency is recognized, this thesis will focus exclusively on human and social resources. This decision is based on the difficulty of reliably assessing other types of capital through the available data.

⁴⁶ G.H. Elder Jr., M. Kirkpatrick Johnson, R. Crosnoe, 'The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory', 12.

perspective of Roma. Moreover, in each chapter, this thesis will address discrimination as it affects the benefits of social and human capital.⁴⁷ By touching upon those three chapters, this paper aims to answer the question of how Eastern Slovak Roma born between 1941 and 1973 in socialist Czechoslovakia navigated their upward mobility through social networks and state investments in human capital.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Nan Lin, 'Inequality in Social Capital', *Contemporary Sociology*, 29:6 (2000), 786.

⁴⁸ See appendix for the usage of the term 'Roma' in this thesis

2. Chapter 1: State investments in the human capital of Roma: agenda and initiatives for Slovak Roma in socialist Czechoslovakia

2.1. The early socialism: the assimilation process (1948-1969)

After the Communist Party seized power in 1948, the national committees started to fulfil the key role in providing tasks focused on the Roma population to address the so-called ‘Gypsy issue’.⁴⁹ These tasks were aimed at ‘cultural adaptation’ and ‘re-education’, but were also characterized by unprofessionalism and a lack of relevant knowledge. Many Czechoslovak functionaries of the national committees were burdened with prejudice from the war era, which negated the process of equality between the Roma population and the majority.⁵⁰ Their main aim was to prescriptively include them in the work process, as this was an important element of the Czechoslovakian socialist effort to transform their people to ‘the working people’.⁵¹

One of the first steps taken by the socialist government was the 1949 resolution, titled ‘*Gypsies and Persons Living by their Way of Life*’. In some of the most problematic settlements in Slovakia, the resolution initiated the construction of roads, wells, hygienic facilities, and power supplies. Attention was also turned to the problem of school attendance by Romani children to eliminate their illiteracy. However, the necessary prerequisites for their attendance were not created, and the percentage of Romani children attending school was insignificant. The resolution further required the establishment of centres for the Roma by regional and district national committees. Those who were unemployed were placed in work centres, and many children were sent to special residential care centres for educational purposes. These centres provided accommodation, meals, work placements, healthcare, and essential hygienic services.⁵²

To further support the social advancement of the Roma population, a literacy program was initiated in 1951 and continued into the mid-1960s. Its primary goal was to address the high levels of illiteracy, particularly in eastern Slovakia. However, it achieved limited success as most of these measures were largely formalities, designed without a real understanding of Roma contemporary mentality.⁵³ In 1952, the government issued a decree that emphasized the importance of school attendance but also proclaimed assisting the Romani population in the spirit of ‘Stalinist nationality

⁴⁹ According to the founder of Czech Romani Studies, Milena Hübschmannová, the ‘gypsy issue’ can be generally defined as the challenges of coexistence between two ethnic groups with different socio-cultural systems, where one represents the dominant society, non-Roma, and the other minority, Roma community. The Roma minority is socially disadvantaged, and power dynamic influences the possibilities for Roma social mobility. In reference of ‘what to do with the integration of Roma minority, the term ‘Gypsy question’ is also widely used. More about ‘Gypsy issue’ and what it meant in Czechoslovakian context: Milena Hübschmannová, ‘Co je tzv. Cikanska otazka?’, *Czech Sociological Review*, 6:2 (1970), 109-110.

⁵⁰ Anna Jurová, ‘The Roma from 1945 until November 1989’, 59; Lukasz Kwadrans, Rene Luzica, Ivan Rác, ‘The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology’, 165.

⁵¹ Lukasz Kwadrans, Rene Luzica, Ivan Rác, ‘The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology’, 167.

⁵² Ibidem, 165; Eva Davidová, ‘Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)’, in: Hristo Kyuchukov (ed.), *New Faces of Antigypsyism in Modern Europe*, (NGO Slovo, 2012), 21.

⁵³ Eva Davidová, ‘Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)’, 23; They mainly failed to increase the motivation of Roma children to participate in such programs, as they did not get familiar with their needs at the time.

politics'. This officially rejected racial discrimination. The national committees were supposed to make sure that Roma people are not discriminated against in public life and can attend schools.⁵⁴

State organs often clashed with officials at the municipal level. They expected the socio-economic position of Slovak Roma to be resolved through the process of industrialization and social reforms in Slovakia, without the need for a special or targeted approach.⁵⁵

For example, in the 1950s, at the initiative of the Slovak National Government, several surveys were conducted in Roma settlements within Slovak territory.⁵⁶ One of the survey from 1953 highlights, except the poor living conditions in Roma communities, the lack of attention by the district national committees to address the 'Gypsy issue'. Roma communities, mainly in regions of *Vysoké Tatry* and *Poprad* (central-east Slovakia), were reported to '*not have access to drinkable water and as a consequence, they are responsible for contagious diseases and in some cases deaths*'. Furthermore, it was stated that '*local national committees refused to grant Roma families building permits in residential areas, which led them to construct cramped houses in segregated settlements. This, in turn, hindered the development of basic infrastructure such as toilets and sewage systems*'. Consequently, the report provides suggestions to improve the situation in all regions: '*in terms of housing: a, to make use of the initiative for constructing new family houses in such a way that Gypsies build their homes according to an approved plan directly within the villages. At the same time, restrict the construction of houses in remote areas outside the villages without official permission and a designated building plot; b, to allocate housing to families in villages who lack the financial means to build new homes, while also encouraging these families to eventually construct proper houses of their own*'. Then in terms of education they suggest: '*a, to ensure the regular school attendance of school-age children; b, to send capable youth on to higher education so that, over time, we may develop a Roma intelligentsia that will accelerate the resolution of the entire problem; c, eliminate illiteracy along all individuals by organizing evening courses at cultural centres, community gatherings, and schools*'.⁵⁷ While the state's agenda appeared promising, it seems that it did not ensure the effective implementation of these programs across various levels of state administration.

In the late 1950s, Czechoslovak state authorities pursued a universal solution to the '*Gypsy question*', debating between ethnic recognition and assimilation. The Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, inspired by the Stalinist national politics, opted for nation-directed assimilation. This took the form of further social assistance and educational work, meanwhile suppressing the cultural identity of Roma and trying to remake them into classless, homogenous socialist citizens. Thus, the state

⁵⁴ Vera Sokolova, 'On the Road to Socialism' in: Vera Sokolova, Andreas Umland (ed.), *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity – Discourses on Roma in Communist Czechoslovakia*, (ibidem-Verlag, 2008), 87.

⁵⁵ Anna Jurová, 'The Roma from 1945 until November 1989', 48.

⁵⁶ Lukasz Kwadrans, Rene Luzica, Ivan Rác, 'The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology', 165-166.

⁵⁷ State National Archive in Bratislava, fund of the Commission of the Interior (*Poverenictvo vnútra*) – Administration (1949-1950), box no. 1023, file no. 2150.

provided various forms of support, albeit with some paternalistic elements.⁵⁸

In 1958, the socialist parliament passed a law to permanently settle nomadic Roma, responding to state claims that their ‘movement’ was undermining previous integration efforts. The law was enacted as part of assimilation policies in the form of police interventions. Overnight, all Roma had to settle right where they were caught permanently.⁵⁹ However, since nomadic Roma constituted less than one-tenth of the Roma population in 1950s Czechoslovakia, the law effectively targeted the broader cultural differences of all Roma, not just those who were vagrant.⁶⁰ Although directives were issued to local institutions and integration quotas were established, the assimilation strategy was implemented without prior research or the allocation of adequate funding to support the settlement scheme.⁶¹ These forced settlements only proved to be a criminogenic factor. In response to this stringent law, broader society began to actively endorse these assimilation practices to align with the dominant state ideology.⁶² For example, school workers demanded that Roma parents not speak with their children in the Roma language, which would secure their success in schools. However, this was never proved to work at that time.⁶³ Roma men were exclusively assigned to unqualified and physically demanding work. Factory clubs rarely organised training courses for Roma, and improvement in professional qualification occurred only on an individual basis, typically among those who joined the Communist Party.⁶⁴ Between 1959 and 1965, the employment and school attendance of Slovak Roma increased slightly.⁶⁵

In 1965, the Government Committee executed the plan to liquidate Roma settlements and their ‘dispersal from places of high concentration’. This plan also aimed to construct new housing places for Roma families, including water wells, basic hygienic facilities, roads, and some power supplies. In Slovakia alone, the planned ‘dispersal’ concerned almost ten thousand Roma families. Despite this measure giving housing to many, the simultaneous liquidation of old ‘ghetto-like’ settlements and providing new housing initiatives failed to be realized, which resulted in the uncontrolled migration of Slovak Roma to the Czech lands. In urban cities, new isolated settlements of Roma developed, such as today’s *Luník 9* in Košice, eastern Slovakia (Fig. 4). Moreover, the dissolution of communities and their subsequent (and often uneven) settlement in assigned settlements allowed Roma people from different

⁵⁸ Jana Hováthová, ‘Státem řízená asimilace’, 51; Anna Jurová, ‘The Roma from 1945 until November 1989’, 48; Eva Davidová, ‘Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)’, 18.

⁵⁹ Jana Horváthová, ‘Státem řízená asimilace’, 51; Vera Sokolova, ‘The Anti-nomadic Legislation and the Process of Implementation’ in: Vera Sokolova, Andreas Umland (ed.), *Cultural Politics of Ethnicity – Discourses on Roma in Communist Czechoslovakia*, (ibidem-Verlag, 2008), 99-101; Eva Davidová, ‘Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)’, 22-23.

⁶⁰ Milena Hubschmannová, ‘Co je tzv. Cikánska otázka’, 105-120.

⁶¹ Otto Ulč, ‘Communist national minority policy: The case of the gypsies in Czechoslovakia’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 20:4 (2007), 426.

⁶² An integral part of this law was the order that broader society was supposed to ‘use educational means to achieve that these ‘formerly nomadic persons’ become proper working citizens.’ More about it: Vera Sokolova, ‘The Anti-nomadic Legislation and the Process of Implementation’, 99.

⁶³ Eva Davidová, ‘Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)’, 22-23; Vera Sokolova, ‘The Anti-nomadic Legislation and the Process of Implementation’, 92-93; Jana Hováthová, ‘Státem řízená asimilace’, 51.

⁶⁴ Lukasz Kwadrans, Rene Luzica, Ivan Rác, ‘The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology’, 168; Anna Jurová, ‘The Roma from 1945 until November 1989’, 58.

⁶⁵ Anna Jurová, *Vývoj rómskej problematiky na Slovensku po roku 1945*, (Goldpress, 1993), 75; Anna Jurová, ‘The Roma from 1945 until November 1989’, 57.

environments to live together. This meant that Romani people, from better and worse social realities, lived in such proximity that the sudden harmonious coexistence was unattainable. The proposed solution was inadequately planned and lacked a solid foundation in either scientific research or practical experience. As Horváthová writes, ‘this resettlement was an indication of absolute misunderstanding and unawareness of Romani culture...’.⁶⁶ This measure was itself contradictory, officially aiming at a better social situation for Roma, but resulting in another place of social exclusion.

During this period, a huge amount of financial help was provided to the Roma minority. Receiving that much state assistance in the form of subsidies required and taught the Roma to become highly dependent on state welfare. As Horvathová argues, this ‘protective’ approach to Roma paralyzed and weakened their eternal self-sufficiency, and the real problems of Roma could not be resolved by material benefits.⁶⁷ The social barriers to inclusion persisted among a notable segment of the Roma population, and in certain regions, it gradually worsened.⁶⁸



Fig. 4: Present-day Luník 9 in Košice, eastern Slovakia. Another segregated Roma settlement as a result of the 1965 resolution, theoretically aimed at improving the previous housing segregation.

Photo by Nigel Dickson, 2014, [Roma Slovakia | Nigel Dickinson](#) (consulted in June 2025)

⁶⁶ Jana Horváthová, ‘Státem řízená asimilace’, 52; Eva Davidová, ‘Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)’, 24. On problematic forced settlements of Roma families also: René Lužica, ‘Riešenie spoločenskej integrácie a akulturácie Cigánskeho/Rómskeho obyvateľstva v rokoch 1968-1989’, 46.

⁶⁷ Jana Horváthová, ‘Státem řízená asimilace’, 53.

⁶⁸ Eva Davidová, ‘Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)’, 25; Anna Jurová, ‘The Roma from 1945 until November 1989’, 54-55.

2.2. *The late socialism: the acculturation process (1969-1989)*

The late 1960s in Czechoslovakia, marked by the Prague Spring, saw growing public support for reforms like the abolition of censorship and 'Socialism with a Human Face'. These changes were short-lived, as the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion reimposed Soviet-style control through the Normalisation period. The separate Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics were created through federalization, but the Communist Party maintained central control. During Normalisation, career opportunities increasingly depended on party membership, especially in Slovakia, where it also brought material benefits.⁶⁹ The state shaped the social mobility of both the Roma and non-Roma populations.

The state's approach to addressing Roma issues evolved during this period. For the first time, the state officially recognized some of its cultural specifics. It brought more Roma into its representation, in the form of the short-lived cultural organization Union of Gypsies-Roma (1969), the publication of Roma newspapers such as *Romano lil*, and an interest in academic studies of Roma language and culture.

Moreover, the state's approach to Roma remained centrally driven, but much of the actual work was delegated to local institutions or social workers. This was often done without clear legislative grounding or dedicated resources, and local bodies lacked support.⁷⁰

In 1972, the federal government staffed the state apparatus with qualified social workers and implemented consistent activities among Roma communities.⁷¹ Until the end of the 1980s, Roma youth aged fifteen could participate in social and health courses provided by state social care. For Roma youth aged between seven and fourteen, summer recreational camps were organized. These courses and camps aimed to address shortcomings in socialization and upbringing and increase motivation for the education of children from non-integrated or partially integrated families. Thus, it was also open to non-Roma communities, even though the majority of poorly integrated citizens consisted of Roma.⁷²

In the 1970s, Slovak state representatives began cooperating with the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and launched a nationwide research project. The sociological research, in particular, highlighted the operation of systematic social work among Roma citizens. They also approved the previous state agenda and identified key accelerating factors, including the inclusion of Roma men and women in the production process, improving their professional qualifications, overcoming illiteracy, strengthening the role of schools, and promoting extracurricular education. Furthermore, providing care for the distribution and housing of Roma, systematic care for Roma women to change their status within the family and society, overcoming mutual social distance between the majority and Roma, or increasing the role of Roma in transforming their way of life.⁷³

⁶⁹ Laura Cashman, 'Remembering 1948 and 1968: Reflection on Two Pivotal Years in Czech and Slovak History', in: Laura Cashman (ed.) *1948 and 1968 – Dramatic Milestones in Czech and Slovak History* (Routledge, 2010), 7-10.

⁷⁰ Jakub Csabay, 'Institutional Dynamics of State-minority Relations: The Case of Roma communities in Slovakia', *Nationalities Papers*, 54:2 (2024), 868-869.

⁷¹ Lukasz Kwadrans, Rene Luzica, Ivan Rác, 'The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology', 169; René Lužica, 'Riešenie spoločenskej integrácie a akulturácie Cigánskeho/Rómskeho obyvateľstva v rokoch 1968-1989', 33-35.

⁷² René Lužica, 'Riešenie spoločenskej integrácie a akulturácie Cigánskeho/Rómskeho obyvateľstva v rokoch 1968-1989', 36.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 39.

In 1975, the state implemented a 'methodical card' that included the name of the social worker responsible for one Roma family, basic information about the family members, their social and housing situations, and a planned approach to improving their condition. Generally, the state increased the number of employed social workers, resulting in a total of 107 across the entire Czechoslovak federal state. This practically meant that each social worker was responsible for more than a thousand people. Moreover, the effectiveness of their work was inconsistent and largely dependent on the individual worker's abilities. As a result, positive outcomes were reported only in the West Bohemian region, while Slovakia experienced little to no improvement.⁷⁴

Around 1976, the state introduced the concept of coercive sterilization of Roma women. Later research discovered that the majority of women who underwent sterilization did not know about it in advance or were not informed about its consequences. There were cases when they were abandoned by their husbands because, according to the Roma traditions, an infertile woman is no longer a 'true' woman. For Roma women, with their already weak position within both state and Roma societies, losing their male partners often meant a downfall in social mobility.⁷⁵

Between 1976 and 1984, financial subsidies amounted to 225 crowns per Roma person per year.⁷⁶ This material aspect of the solution led to the formation of a group that prioritized material values over those of education or career. This solution also led to insufficient attention being given to other areas of support, resulting in the failure to implement effective measures for further Roma social mobility.⁷⁷

The last 'five-year plan' before the democratic transition focused once again on the employment of men and women, schools, an increase in housing culture, and the resolution of the distance between societies. The operations of regional committees were increased to one session per month. The motivation for improving the lives of Roma people was also the fact that key resorts, which employed an unskilled and unqualified labour force of Roma, were no longer able to admit more workers. And because of that, the planned results of social advancement of Roma would only be achieved by increasing financial donations, for which the state did not have money.⁷⁸

The democratic transition after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 meant a better future for the Slovak society. However, the Roma minority experienced turbulent times, in which their socioeconomic conditions worsened, and unemployment increased due to the privatization of businesses and further decentralization of the 'Roma issue'. The era of sudden, unsupervised collective beliefs saw the rise of extremist groups towards Roma minorities.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ibidem, 40-41.

⁷⁵ Eva Davidová, 'Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)', 28.

⁷⁶ René Lužica, 'Riešenie spoločenskej integrácie a akulturácie Cigánskeho/Rómskeho obyvateľstva v rokoch 1968-1989', 42; Jana Horváthová, 'Státom řízená asimilace', 53.

⁷⁷ Eva Davidová, 'Antigypsyism in Czechoslovakia during the Communist Era (1950-1989)', 29.

⁷⁸ René Lužica, 'Riešenie spoločenskej integrácie a akulturácie Cigánskeho/Rómskeho obyvateľstva v rokoch 1968-1989', 42-43.

⁷⁹ Jakub Csabay, 'Institutional Dynamics of State-minority Relations: The Case of Roma communities in Slovakia', 875; Alexander Mušinka, Jana Kolesárová, 'Situation of the Roma in Slovakia and their Status in the Contemporary Slovak Society – Brief outline of the Roma Situation and of Associated Problems', *Central European Regional Policy and Human Geography*, 2 (2012), 8.

Various Czechoslovak institutions tasked with addressing the Roma integration made promising contributions to programs aimed at resolving the ‘Roma issue’ and creating an ‘accepting’ Slovak society. However, when we consider the discrimination towards and condition of the Slovakian Roma minority today, it seems that these measures had a limited long-term impact. The question remains as to how these initiatives translated into tangible outcomes in the social mobility of Roma lives. To fully understand their impact, it is essential to look beyond institutional agendas and examine how such measures functioned in practice. In this context, the role of individual agency becomes crucial, particularly in terms of the resources that shape it. Among these, social capital and human investment capital emerge as key factors.⁸⁰ The upcoming chapter explores how different levels of these capitals have influenced the social mobility of the Roma minority in Eastern Slovakia.

⁸⁰Jan Kok, ‘Women’s agency in historical family systems’, 13.

3. Chapter 2: Social and human capital in practice: macro, mezzo, and micro-level factors in the life courses of eastern Slovak Roma.

This chapter adopts a life course perspective not to map specific transitions but to compare how different cohorts, shaped by distinct historical regimes, developed and utilized human capital investments and social capital throughout their social pathways. Social pathways refer to the trajectories of education, career, and residence that individuals follow throughout their lives in society.⁸¹ The emphasis is on the interplay between generational membership and broader institutional context.

In this part of the thesis, twelve testimonies of Slovak Roma are used to explore the macro level of human capital investments, as well as the mezzo and micro levels of social capital that Roma utilized in their life courses. These testimonies are accessed through *the Archive of Memory of Nations*, one of Europe's biggest collections of witnesses.⁸² It has been publicly open since 2008 as a database of witnesses who experienced events of the 20th century.

The sample is limited to those individuals who come from eastern Slovakia, as this area is repeatedly considered to be the most problematic of all Roma communities in the territory of former Czechoslovakia.⁸³ By doing this, this thesis will highlight that integrated Roma also live in this region, without framing the Roma community as isolated. This thesis deliberately limits the sample to individuals who can be categorized into two distinct age groups: those born between 1941 and 1952 and those born between 1962 and 1973. Each generation, consisting of six individuals, spans eleven years and was selected to ensure comparability of generational differences. The primary reason for this division lies in the contrasting historical contexts that shaped their formative years: members of the older generation experienced childhood during the post-war consolidation of socialism. They entered adulthood during the height of the Communist regime. In contrast, the younger generation spent their childhood in the later phase of socialist normalization and transitioned into adulthood on the eve of the regime's decline. This temporal structuring of the sample enables the observation of the diverse realities of social mobility among those born at different times throughout the socialist regime, which aligns with the Life Course theory framework.⁸⁴

3.1. Education.

In the context of education, the older generation (1941-1952) predominantly utilized bonding social capital embedded in *family networks*. Every individual in the sample stated *parents'* support in pursuing their education. For example, *František Godla* (b. 1946) stated that despite his mother being a stay-at-home mother and not able to read or write, she regretted this and 'she took all the responsibility of taking

⁸¹ Glen Elder Jr., Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson, Robert Crosnoe, 'The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory', 8.

⁸² [Memory of Nations](#)

⁸³ Anna Jurová, *Vývoj rómskej problematiky na Slovensku po roku 1945*, 75; Anna Jurová, 'The Roma from 1945 until November 1989', 53-55; Anna Jurová, 'Slovenskí Rómovia v Československu v rokoch 1945-1947 (Regulácia pohybu a kontinuita perzekúcie)', 15,17-18; Lukasz Kwadrans, Rene Luzica, Ivan Rác, 'The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology', 167.

⁸⁴ See Appendix for more information about sources used in this thesis (source criticism)

care of him so he could get a good education'. Similarly, *Maximilián Estočák* (b. 1946) stated that his parents were only able to attain elementary school, but they understood that higher education is a key means to achieve better employment in the future. It seems that once parents realized their full responsibility despite their disadvantaged situations, they were able to influence their children to aim for a better education. Sometimes, parents served as a direct example, as in the case of *Milan Lacko* (b. 1941). His mother, *Elena Lacková*, was a highly educated Roma woman who wanted him to pursue his education. He stated 'I don't think that there is going to be another such Roma woman like my mom'.

Three individuals mentioned bridging social networks. *Maximilián Estočák* (b. 1946) and *František Godla* (b.1946), mentioned *teachers* at their universities as being an inspiration. *František* remembered 'one teacher at the university was very attentive and tried to help when I struggled with something'. *Maximilián* stated that teachers at the university were one of the reasons why he was able to finish his degree successfully. *Milan Lacko* (b. 1941) also said that the *municipal labour office* gave him a recommendation on where to continue to high school, and he followed their suggestion.

Only *Ladislav Mirga* (b. 1949) stated a state initiative to help him with education. He participated in a six-month *state-sponsored literacy course*, which provided him with foundational reading skills necessary to pursue education.

For five individuals from the younger generation (1962-1973), family networks remained important in their educational journey, but all of them predominantly reported various bridging social networks. They mainly considered *teachers* in schools and *non-Roma classmates* as helpful in their studies. For example, *Ivan Mirga* (b. 1968) had no intention of going to the gymnasium, and he probably would not have gone if his elementary school director had not approached his parents. *Igor Dužda* (b. 1968) stated that his entire family, including siblings and aunts, helped him with the costs of his education. However, it was his *class teacher* who told his mother that Igor excels in mathematics, and he recommends that he continue and attend high school. *Ludovít Gunár* (b. 1962) and *Elena Cinová* (b.1973) stated that their *non-Roma classmates* were especially helpful in their studies.

Only *Stanislav Čína* (b. 1972) mentioned some state-organized initiatives, such as *trips specifically for Roma people*, which he considered educationally valuable.

Both generations relied on bonding social capital in the form of families, but the younger generation seemed to have more bridging social networks, such as teachers or classmates. This likely reflects growing public awareness of the importance of Roma education, especially in late socialism.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Anna Jurová, 'The Roma from 1945 until November 1989', 58-59.

3.2. Housing.

In terms of housing, every individual of the older generation relied on macro-level state initiatives. This makes sense as receiving a place to live in that era was increasingly guaranteed by the state and often linked to state employment.⁸⁶ For example, *Milan Lacko (b. 1941)* described how, when he was young and his family moved to Czechia, they were assigned apartments after the Germans' withdrawal. After returning to Slovakia, the state offered them an apartment in the city of *Prešov* twice. Later, he stated that because he managed to get a good job, he ended up in a state-offered four-room apartment. Similarly, *Maximilián Estočák (b. 1946)* received an apartment in *Prešov* in the 1960s.

None of the individuals in this generation reported having networks of bridging social capital, and only *František Godla (b. 1946)* mentioned that after his marriage in 1970, he and his wife stayed at *his wife's parents' house* for more than two years. However, later he received a *state-assigned apartment* for his family twice.⁸⁷

Three individuals from the younger generation continued to utilize state housing initiatives, but all of them primarily relied on bonding social capital. For example, *Ludovít Gunár (b. 1962)*, born in the Roma settlement, managed to build a better house with the help of his *brothers* and *other Roma members* from the settlement, who built more rooms in the house. *Igor Dužda (b. 1968)* recalls how he was fortunate to live in a small house provided by *his dad's work*. *Elena Cinová (b. 1973)* recalls living in an apartment from her *father's business*, which was well-integrated into a non-Roma majority area. After her marriage, she and her husband lived in her *parents' house* for two years, but then her *father* bought them a house in the city.

Only *Igor Dužda (b. 1968)* mentioned bridging social capital in terms of housing when he rented an apartment through his *non-Roma friend*, and later asked for another condo at the *municipal office*.

The older generation appears to have utilized a state-initiated housing program, likely as a result of the broad state initiatives aimed at providing housing. In contrast, the younger generation tended to rely more on familial support when seeking housing, which reflects the perceived limitations of state housing solutions.⁸⁸ Moreover, the 'normalisation period' after 1968 meant that general improvements in the standards of living were more limited to participation in the Communist Party.⁸⁹ This further restricted access to decent state resources for other people. As a result, it seems that members of the younger generation were increasingly dependent on bonding social capital within their families and communities.

⁸⁶ Gábor Szüdi, Jaroslava Kováčová, "Building hope: from a shack to 3E house" – Innovative housing approach in the provision of affordable housing for Roma in Slovakia', *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 31:3 (2016), 424.

⁸⁷ Although many families, both Roma and non-Roma, received housing with the assistance of mezzo-level local institutions, these provisions were ultimately part of a centrally planned investment driven by the socialist state's broader ideological commitment to equality.

⁸⁸ Filip Markovič, 'When a home is not a house: Housing conditions of marginalized Roma communities in Slovakia and the policies designed to improve them', *Master Thesis in Public Policy*, (2021), 10.

⁸⁹ Laura Cashman, 'Remembering 1948 and 1968: Reflection on Two Pivotal Years in Czech and Slovak History', 7-10.

3.3. Career.

In terms of career, the older generation appears to utilize state initiatives for employment and bridging social networks equally. *Ladislav Mirga* (b. 1949) relied only on low-skilled state employment through job training, just like *Ludovít Petík* (b. 1952). *Eugen Brindziak* (b. 1946) recalled how, during socialism, his family was permitted to relocate to Germany for his music career through the *socialist agency Slovkoncert*. After he returned to Slovakia, the *Slovak ministries* sponsored him to create a Roma theatre with solely Roma singers, dancers, and musicians. He teaches music in Trenčín, and he got this job through his *non-Roma friends*. *František Godla* (b. 1946) managed to secure a teaching position in the gymnasium because *one of the docents at his university* offered him this opportunity. He navigated his later teaching career through further networks of *non-Roma friends*.

Only two individuals stated bonding social capital in their careers. *Milan Lacko* (b. 1941) got his first official job in his *father's firm*, and *Eugén Brindziak* (b. 1946) got the inspiration from his *father*, who was also a musician.

Three individuals from the younger generation (born 1962-1973) continued to rely on state employment in low-skill sectors and cooperatives, but each individual reported bridging social networks, including *non-Roma friends*, *neighbors*, *colleagues*, or *university staff*. For example, *Ivan Mirga* (b. 1968) managed to change his job position because he knew *the mayor of the town*. *Jarmila Vaňová* (b. 1965) got offered a job as a redactor through 'networks of *non-Roma friends and acquaintances*'.

Only two stated factors of bonding social networks in combination with the broader non-Roma society. For example, *Igor Dužda* (b. 1968) was searching for a job immediately after the 1989 revolution. Like many people in that era, he registered at *the labour office at the local town administration*. One of the workers was his *non-Roma friend*, so she tried to help him. After an unsuccessful job interview, he was offered a job at the Slovak Radio and Television. He was recommended by his *aunt*, who had a connection to the institution's director. *Igor* stated that with support from *family* and *Roma peers*, he built his career and was twice named best editor at Radio Patria Košice. He believes the financial barrier to voting led to strong backing from wealthier *non-Roma voters*.

Roma people from both generations navigated their careers primarily through bridging networks. However, the older generation also used state initiatives, and the younger generation continued to do so, but also utilized more diverse bridging social networks. Both generations occasionally mentioned bonding social capital.

3.4. Discrimination: the failure of social capital.

Three individuals from the older generation reported almost none to very few instances of latent acts of discrimination. Another three individuals have mentioned experiencing acts of discrimination, however, all of these incidents occurred after the transition to the new democratic regime. These acts of discrimination were exclusively from the non-Roma broader community. For example, *Maximilián Estočák (b. 1946)* remembered that he was sitting in the restaurant with his other friends in the 1990s, and a group of *non-Roma people* commented, ‘look who is sitting with whites’. *František Godla (b. 1946)* mentions a *university teacher* questioning his intention to study upon learning he was Roma. Later, as a gymnasium director, he was subjected to inspections due to his ethnicity. In the early 1990s, he was even *denied service at a restaurant* because he was Roma. *Ludovít Petík (b.1952)* recently received a letter from his *neighbour* stating that he is ‘just a Gypsy and he does not belong here’, after living for 45 years on the same floor among non-Roma community.

The later generation mentions more discrimination than the earlier generation. Only a few experienced discrimination before the 1990s, but all of them faced discriminatory situations after the transition to the new regime. For example, *Ludovít Gunár (b. 1962)* recalls that growing up in a Roma settlement in *Rožňava* meant that *non-Roma people* would not let him into the local shop or enter a local pub. He also mentioned that *teachers* were expecting much more from Roma than from non-Roma students. *Jarmila Vaňová (b.1965)* stated: ‘during socialism I did not come across any direct discrimination, but it was because of the ideology that did not allow people to say or act in that way, however, the regime allowed them to grow the hate within themselves and once the regime fell and people could say whatever they wanted, all the dirt came to the surface’. In the new regime, she experienced only the latent form of discrimination, but is aware of the extent of discrimination the Roma community has to go through. *Igor Dužda (b. 1968)* recalled attending a job interview and being rejected after a lengthy inspection. His non-Roma classmate, with the same education, got quickly admitted after the same interview, just right after *Igor*. *Elena Cinová (b. 1973)* first encountered discrimination when she began attending university in the 1990s. While she was travelling by bus with a group of her Roma friends, a group of *non-Roma people* entered the bus and commented on their appearance. Not long after, her friend Miro was beaten by a *group of ‘skinheads’* while peacefully walking home. She further stated that he ended up being beaten to the extent that he left school education completely.

Both generations stated that exclusively mezzo-level social networks, in the form of a broader non-Roma community, were the primary source of discrimination in their lives, showing that even though bridging social capital can serve as a bridge to, for example, career opportunities, it is often also an obstacle. Nevertheless, the help coming from these networks, despite their common failures, seems to have been strong enough to help Eastern Slovak Roma to pursue improvement.

4. Chapter 3: Eastern Slovak Roma perspective - perceived forms of empowerment in the social mobility.

The previous chapter examined the role of three levels of capital following the life trajectories of Eastern Slovak Roma. This chapter discusses the direct perspectives of these individuals on their perceived sources of empowerment that have contributed to or continue to contribute to the social advancement of Roma. Therefore, by interpretative phenomenological analysis, this chapter aims to analyse and summarize these points.⁹⁰

4.1. The older generation (1941-1952).

All individuals from this generation state that their *employment* serves as the primary source of empowerment, providing motivation for their lives. Many of them refer to socialism while talking about employment. For example, *Ladislav Mirga (b. 1949)* states that ‘during Czechoslovakia, Roma people had money, more than they have now. Everyone wanted to build houses and provide for kids, because there were jobs for them.’ Similarly, *Maximilián Estočák (b. 1946)* saw the era before 1989 a bit better in terms of living conditions, as ‘we had fewer poor Roma because of an official given in state law that the Roma population had to work, and so they worked’. He continues that unemployment is high and the only solution to change the Roma issue is more state effort to *give jobs to Roma*, ‘so we can make it work just like in the previous regime’. *Milan Lacko (b. 1941)* reflected that, although the previous regime offered relatively limited material wealth, it simultaneously ensured access to cheap necessities, which in turn allowed for ‘a greater sense of personal space in everyday life’.

Furthermore, five individuals also stated *education* as the primary driving force for improvement. *Ludovít Petík (b. 1952)* was aware that obtaining a job in a democratic, capitalist regime is more challenging without education, unlike in socialism, where even Roma without education could find work relatively easily. He stated that ‘if Roma do not have education, they have no chance to get a job’. He further called upon more initiatives from the state governments to *implement requalification courses* for Roma to advance in education, further stating that ‘we can not leave this nation like this... Roma in poor settlements cannot help themselves.’ Similarly, *Maximilián Estočák (b. 1946)* stated that, after years of work experience, he realized that the biggest issue in the development of the Roma population was *educational attainment*. He saw *the opening of the Roma kindergarten* in Chmiňanské Jakubovany as a valuable source of empowerment, as Roma children could learn the Slovak language and hygiene practices. This would help them continue their education and integrate more effectively into the broader Slovak community. He continued to express his positive attitude towards *state-offered scholarships* and the socialist state initiatives to organize *summer camps* for Roma children, which help them pursue their education despite financial poverty. Moreover, *Maximilián Estočák (b.1946)* further

⁹⁰ Their reflections will be presented concerning both the former socialist regime and the present-day democratic period, which may at times appear ambiguous or overlapping. However, the central focus lies not in precisely attributing their experiences to a specific political era, but rather in identifying the factors they perceive as sources of empowerment.

stated that attention needs to be given to the *education of parents*, both at the state and local levels. Parents are the primary factors in empowering their children to succeed in education, but state institutions must ensure that parents educate themselves first.

Every individual in this generation also emphasized the importance of coexistence between *Roma and non-Roma communities*. For example, *Ladislav Mirga* (b. 1949) discussed the Roma community of Letanovce. This Roma community has been previously segregated from the non-Roma, so they have not had the opportunity to learn from them. ‘Nobody let them in the village and nobody showed them how to do certain things’, furtherly stating that even though he was poor, he was lucky to be surrounded by a mixed non-Roma and Roma population, which contributed to his motivation for success in education. *Eugén Brindziak* (b. 1946) stated that ‘the most important thing is to mix non-Roma and Roma everywhere and not separate them. So they can learn from each other’.

Individuals of the first generation predominantly consider the macro-level state initiatives as their primary source of empowerment. Additionally, they were largely nostalgic about socialism when discussing it, which makes sense given that they spent the majority of their lives under socialism, a system that offered a degree of protection from open discrimination, provided access to essential resources, and fostered a sense of security to which they had become accustomed.⁹¹ Even though they often mention bonding capital, such as families, as a starting point, they also acknowledge that mainly macro-level structures, along with those on the mezzo-level, function as foundational preconditions for the effectiveness of bonding social network forces.

As important as macro-level initiatives are for this generation to feel empowered, they often become sources of disempowerment. For example, *Eugén Brindziak* (b. 1946) criticized the approach of the present era, where Roma students are automatically placed in *different classes* from the non-Roma population. As a consequence, Roma children from problematic environments have very few good examples for their future development. He continued by criticizing that ‘the state has financial means to get Roma into universities, but there would not be anyone who would work with brooms’. Similarly, *František Godla* (b. 1946) stated that because the Slovak government officially recognizes *separate educational institutions* for Roma, it contributes to more prejudices of the non-Roma community, as they do not have enough contact to learn from one another. He continued that these mezzo-level social prejudices result from the state approach, and are a big problem in the Roma sense of empowerment. In addition to these failures of state-level initiatives, *Maximilián Estočák* (b. 1946) noted that local municipalities often fail to *integrate Roma families* into non-Roma areas effectively.

⁹¹ Here, it is essential to note that non-Roma Slovak older generations also speak positively about socialism in Czechoslovakia, primarily referring to the sense of security and belonging that made their lives easier. Roma were treated differently from the non-Roma, but both communities in the same generation share a nostalgic sentiment about the era.

4.2. *The younger generation (1962-1973).*

In terms of state initiatives, three individuals felt encouraged by the *job security*. *Ludovít Gunár (b.1962)* felt encouraged during the previous regime when the Roma community, along with the non-Roma community, received advance payments and regular wages for their work. He further continued that nowadays, Roma individuals are no longer sure if they will receive their payment. He also stated that state initiatives for Roma *school camps* were uplifting and provided him with a great deal of knowledge on his educational path.

In terms of bridging social networks, five individuals stated the importance of *close contact with the non-Roma population*. For example, *Igor Dužda (b.1968)* stated: ‘I have always supported *socialization with non-Roma* as a means of social mobility... it starts with learning the Slovak language’. *Elena Cinová (b. 1973)*, growing up on a street with a mixed Roma and non-Roma population, saw that close contacts between cultures helped Roma integration, and they became ‘cleaner and behaved’. *Jarmila Vaňová (b. 1965)* was aware of the mezzo-level efforts for Roma in the form of cultural events, and she pointed out that, meanwhile, they bring joy to the Roma, but this is not what this minority truly needs. ‘We should step away from investing so much in cultural events about music and festivals, and start putting attention to real problems, such as *more social assistants* for Roma families.’

All of them stated various forms of sources of improvement, some of which were not stated by the previous generation. These sources for improvement primarily focused on bridging social networks. For example, *Stanislav Cína (b. 1972)* thought that to empower Roma communities, Roma individuals should be *more exposed to other successful Roma*, as it happened to him: ‘around the 1990s, a woman came to me and said that if she did not see him on television, she would not have studied at university herself.’ According to him and *Elena Cinová (b. 1973)*, more empowerment comes with *education*, and *more education comes with new generations*, as younger generations increasingly access educational opportunities. They emphasised the importance of expanding the role of *educational assistants* in supporting Roma students who often struggle with the Slovak language. Moreover, *Jarmila Vaňová (b.1965)*, *Elena Cinová (b. 1973)*, and *Stanislav Cína (b.1972)* noted that the opportunity to *embrace their Roma identity* played a significant role in feeling powerful, which in turn enhanced their confidence to pursue upward social mobility. *Elena* stated that a few years ago, she was not aware of her Roma identity, but she was aware of her ‘difference’ her whole life. Getting to know her culture at the university gave her the motivation to study and learn new things, demonstrating that Roma are also capable of doing so. *Jarmila* also stressed the importance of *travelling*. Travelling to other parts of the world detached her from the Slovak notion of the Roma community as something to be ashamed of. She was able to accept who she is and continue to grow, while in socialism, the state made her culturally enclosed strictly within the family and community. She is now aware that ‘Slovakia is still not sensitive towards human rights, especially when it comes to the Roma community’.

While the younger generation also drew on macro-level state initiatives, their narratives placed greater emphasis on mezzo-level networks of non-Roma communities, as well as on a broader range of

empowerment resources. They felt less nostalgic sentiments for the socialist regime when expressing their sources of empowerment compared to the older generation.

As much as this generation stressed the importance of mezzo-level forms of empowerment, it also stated that bridging social networks are often the main source of disempowerment. For example, *Ivan Mirga* (b. 1968) observed that, at the municipal level, *local institutions* demonstrate an insufficient concern for the needs and well-being of their Roma populations. Similarly, *Igor Dužda* (b. 1968) emphasised that *local councils* should *assume greater accountability* for their policies and practices concerning Roma communities. ‘They often built social houses, but did not provide any money for repairs over time, and did not care about which type of families they put to live together.... Local institutions do not care about respectable, decent Roma who are, just by being Roma, socially disadvantaged.’ Moreover, *Ludovít Gunár* (b. 1962) told the story of heightened tensions between broader *sympathizers of anti-Roma sentiments*, stating that after the Krásna Hôrka Castle was burned, people blamed the Roma community living close by. For more than two weeks, they had to collaborate with the police and form security groups to patrol the settlement for protection. ‘Before, I felt secure living here... nowadays, it is no longer a safe place, and I do not have a space to think about other things to pursue in my life’ In the same way, *Stanislav Čína* (b. 1972) described general *prejudices of non-Roma* as ‘stigmatizing the Roma community and the reason why so many Roma struggle with the never-ending cycle of social stagnation.’ Similarly, *Ivan Mirga* (b. 1968) said: ‘The non-Roma society serves as an obstacle to living your life with dignity as a Roma person’.

5. Conclusion.

Following the historical challenges after the Second World War, a significant portion of Slovak Roma remains disengaged from higher education, struggles with employment opportunities, and continues to live in conditions resembling ‘ghetto-like’ settlements. While the share of these individuals remains high, little is known about those who do not belong to it. Treating Czechoslovak socialism as a bridge between the past and present-day outcomes, this thesis asks how these ‘successful’ Eastern Slovak Roma, born in socialist Czechoslovakia between 1941 and 1973, navigated social mobility through social networks and investments in human capital.

During the socialist era, the state invested in the human capital of its Roma minority through centrally distributed housing, specialized educational centers for Roma children, and the employment of social workers, although often with insufficient scope and implementation. The authorities lacked research-based evidence to support these measures. They typically delegated their execution to local institutions that had not yet learned how to integrate the Roma community into broader society. This resulted in many contradictory approaches.

To see how such human capital investments worked in practice, this thesis thematically analysed testimonies of twelve Roma individuals from eastern Slovakia and traced their major trajectories in social mobility – education, housing, and career. These testimonies also made it possible to trace the impact of social networks. These, together with human capital investments, form the most essential resources through which one can pursue agency and thus achieve improvement. Furthermore, the thesis not only studies the factors affecting Roma lives, but also centres their voices to portray their perceived sources of empowerment in social mobility.

The findings suggest that Roma individuals primarily relied on social networks in their upward mobility. A generational comparison highlights the changing significance of these resources. The older generation relied more on state-supported human capital initiatives than on social networks, especially in shaping housing trajectories. The younger generation, while still relying on state initiatives, predominantly mobilized networks of social capital in all major trajectories.

Despite both generations having experienced some forms of discrimination, it did not stop them from achieving social mobility. The older generation reported less discrimination, likely because they lived longer under socialism, when discrimination was publicly prohibited. Both generations experienced discrimination primarily after 1989, mainly from the bridging of social networks. This confirms that the socialist state failed to eliminate broader societal prejudices.

The older generation expressed the human capital state investments as the primary source of empowerment, yet also considered them the main source of disempowerment. The younger generation identified new forms of empowerment, such as emancipation and travel, and considered the broader non-Roma society both an opportunity and a source of discouragement.

The older generations’ greater emphasis on state initiatives reflects their learned dependency on state mechanisms, where the early socialist regime did not teach them how to improve their education,

but instead provided them with low-skilled jobs and basic housing. In contrast, the younger generations' higher reliance on and perceived importance of bridging social networks reflect the initial decentralization of Roma initiatives after 1968 and their gradual emancipation. The role of the state was increasingly replaced by that of broader society as Slovakia neared democratic transition.

This thesis succeeded in casting a more favourable light on Eastern Slovak Roma individuals. It also amplified the lived experiences of these Roma individuals while also contextualizing them within historical contexts and structural forces. However, future research should give attention to the diverse experiences among Roma women within these communities since this thesis's gendered analysis is limited. Furthermore, future studies should include more representative samples and conduct interviews specifically on human capital investments and social networks in Roma upward mobility, as the interviews used in this thesis may not provide a complete picture. Some forms of networks and state investments may have been omitted because they were not the interviewers' primary focus. Moreover, future research should include varying starting circumstances to examine intergenerational mobility from parents to children. All of this would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Slovak Roma navigated social mobility. Such historical insights are valuable for informing policies that support the integration of today's Roma minority.

6. Appendix.

6.1. The term 'Roma'.

To refer to the minority of Romani origin, this paper uses the term 'Roma'. This expression has been used in professional literature and the public sphere since 1989, in a political sense, but not in an ethnic one. Although the term 'Gypsies' carries certain negative connotations, it is used in this thesis in specific contexts for reasons related to its historical usage. Acknowledging the group diversity of this community, this thesis uses 'Roma' in its political sense, embracing all Roma groups, even though some parts of it do not use this term.⁹² In the second and third segments of this paper, however, Roma testimonies consist of all those who also openly identify themselves as 'Roma', and thus the use of the term is accurate.

6.2. Source criticism.

Testimonies of individual eyewitnesses are organized according to epochs, anniversaries, or thematic categories. Testimonies used in this paper are accessed through the thematic category of *national minorities* and, further, *Roma*.

Each testimony under my research was recorded in 2017 in the presence of Slovak academics: Alexander Mušíinka, Martin Rodák, and Július Rusnák. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, with questions designed to capture the life stories and social conditions of Roma communities in the 20th century. This format left space for interviewees to share insights of personal importance. In the course of an average of two hours, interviewers asked around 20 questions, mostly expanding but sometimes also changing the direction of the interview.

Ten of the testimonies analyzed in this study originate from the project "Romani Memory: Recollections of Roma from the Central European Perspective," which aims to document the lives of Roma individuals who were active in social and civic life in the Visegrad countries during the Communist era. Two additional testimonies are drawn from the project *Stories of the 20th Century*, funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme. While these interviews stem from different initiatives, all of the individuals share a common background: they are Roma who live outside of ghetto-like settlements, have managed to pursue higher education, and have succeeded in the job market. Although the source projects differ, this does not affect the nature or depth of information provided by the testimonies, as each narrative focuses on personal life stories.

Each of the testimonies was carefully transcribed and fully documented, resulting in 241 pages of text. This allowed me to repeatedly read their life stories through the thematic analysis of macro-state help, as well as mezzo and micro levels of social networks, and to understand the forms of social capital and human capital investments the interviewees mobilized throughout their lives.

⁹² More about the term 'Roma': Lukasz Kwadrans, René Lužica, Ivan Rác, 'The impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology', 163.

6.3. Overview of Interviewees used in the Thesis.

The Older Generation (born between 1941 and 1952)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year of birth</i>	<i>City of residence</i>	<i>Gender</i>
Milan Lacko	1941	Kapušany	male
Eugén Brindziak	1946	Jelšava	male
Maximilián Estočák	1946	Prešov	male
František Godla	1946	Ovčie	male
Ladislav Mirga	1949	Spišský Štvrtok	male
Ľudovít Petík	1952	Ražňany	male

The Younger Generation (born between 1962 and 1973)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year of birth</i>	<i>City of residence</i>	<i>Gender</i>
Ľudovít Gunár	1962	Krásnohorské Podhradie	male
Jarmila Vaňová	1965	Košice	female
Igor Dužda	1968	Veľký Šariš	male
Ivan Mirga	1968	Spišská Nová Ves	male
Stanislav Čína	1972	Stropkov/ Veľký Šariš	male
Elena Činová	1973	Humenné	female

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7.3. List of figures

Title photo: A Roma woman, Denisa Havrňová, working with her other non-Roma colleagues among the Roma in poor settlements in Eastern Slovakia, 2010s, Personal archive of Denisa Havrňová, 2010s, [Denisa Havrňová \(1971\)](#) (consulted in June 2025)

Figure 1: 'Two Roma boys from *Letanovce*, one of the poor Roma settlements in eastern Slovakia.' Photo by Michal Sváček, 2013, [Slováci zbořili nejznámější romskou osadu, obyvatele pojme nové ghetto - iDNES.cz](#) (consulted in May 2025)

Figure 2: 'The estimated Roma share of the population in the regions of Slovakia (Sociographic mapping 2013)' in: Stanley D. Brunn, Kvetoslava Matlovičová, Alexander Mušinka, René Matlovič, 'Policy Implications of the vagaries in population estimates on the accuracy of sociographical mapping of contemporary Slovak Roma communities', *GeoJournal*, 83 (2018), 861.

Figure 3: 'Maximilián Estočák (b. 1946) at his graduation ceremony in 1986 at the University of Prešov, eastern Slovakia. He was among the very few Roma individuals of his generation to complete a university education.' Personal archive of Maximilián Estočák, 1986, [Maximilián Estočák \(1946\)](#) (consulted in May 2025)

Figure 4: 'Present-day Luník 9 in Košice, eastern Slovakia. Another segregated Roma settlement as a result of the 1965 resolution, theoretically aimed at improving the previous housing segregation.' Photo by Nigel Dickson, 2014, [Roma Slovakia | Nigel Dickinson](#) (consulted in June 2025)