

Poverty, segregation and social exclusion of Roma communities in Slovakia

Alena Rochovská¹, CDFMR, Jurina Rusnáková², CDFMR

¹Comenius University Bratislava, Department of Human Geography and Demography, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Mlynská dolina, 842 10, Bratislava, Slovakia, phone: +421 917 598 770, e-mail: rochovska@fns.uniba.sk (corresponding author), ²Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra - Department of Roma Studies

How to cite:

Rochovská, A. and Rusnáková, J., 2018: Poverty, segregation and social exclusion of Roma communities in Slovakia. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 42(42), 195-212. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2478/bog-2018-0039>.

Abstract. This paper examines the issue of poverty and social exclusion of Roma in Slovakia. It highlights the problem of poverty among Roma communities, which together with segregation leads to absolute poverty and social exclusion. Based on ethnographic research the paper examines conditions in which inhabitants of segregated Roma communities sustain their livelihoods. In the qualitative part of our research we ask how inhabitants of segregated settlements organize and manage their livelihood and what strategies and practices they use to ensure social reproduction. Further, we assess the articulations between exclusion and social networks and other spheres of assets, including formal and informal labour, state benefits and the use of material assets. We argue that spatial segregation has an enormous impact on poverty.

Article details:

Received: 12 April 2017
Revised: 10 August 2018
Accepted: 5 October 2018

Key words:

Roma population,
Slovakia, poverty,
social exclusion,
segregation

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1. Introduction

In 2000, a well-known American sociologist Michael Burawoy published his study on poverty and livelihood strategies of people in post-socialist Russia (Burawoy et al. 2000). Based on in-depth interviews, yet mainly on direct ethnographic research, he examined what was the response of households to the post-socialist transformation, growing insecurity, loss of jobs and deepening poverty. Since then, his findings have inspired many other researchers, especially geographers who reflect the situation in the post-socialist countries using his theory of assets (for example, Stenning et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2006; 2007, etc.) in the context of inequalities, poverty and space. The development of Slovakia's society after 1989 has brought numerous significant changes eliciting the process of societal polarization and increasing sprawl of the poor. Increases of social inequalities and growth of poverty are typical features of all post-socialist societies, which until 1989 were relatively homogeneous. In the 1990s, a rapid growth of income differences was observed, generating further inequalities in society. Primarily, this polarization leads to the formation of the following two extreme categories: a new elite and a new class of those who are poor. Thus, the transformation processes have not brought benefits and improvements in living standards for all social groups. There are some population groups who face a higher risk of poverty than others. Among the so-called marginalized population groups authors recognize the elderly, women, children, the unemployed, ethnic minorities, etc. These marginalized groups include Roma communities, too, as they were not disposed to face the transformation processes (Kagami 1997; Barany 2000; Ringold 2000; Magyari et al. 2001.). Romanies had been generally rather poor even before the 1989 regime change; however, the nature of their poverty changed considerably. Most of them ranked among the poorest social groups after 1989. Numerous researchers discussing poverty issues (such as Radičová 2001a; 2004; Kol. Autorov 2002; Sirovátka 2003; 2004; Džambazovič 2007; Ružička 2012) conclude that Romanies have become the most vulnerable population group threatened by poverty and social exclusion, as shown also by frequent qualitative in-depth studies (Radičová

et al. 2002; Rusnáková et al. 2011) and surveys focused on the living conditions of Roma communities (Filadelfiová and Gerbery 2012; Mušinka et al. 2014). Based on the findings of Roma communities poverty surveys, Džambazovič (2007) claims that due to multiple disadvantages, Roma community members have become the most endangered social category in Slovakia. The authors of the study titled "Poverty and Welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic" deliver the following: "As a whole, Roma in Slovakia are overrepresented among the poor and are worse off in terms of nearly all basic social indicators, including education and health status, housing conditions and access to opportunities in the labour market and within civil society." (Kol. Autorov 2002). A part of the Roma population is threatened by absolute poverty, related with social exclusion and spatial segregation (Rusnáková et al. 2015).

In this paper, our intention is to pay attention to spatial segregation as one of the key poverty-related factors. The paper will show that the poverty of the Roma population and the inability to leave the state of poverty are very often related with spatial marginality and physical segregation from the majority. Using Burawoy's concept of assets we argue that access to different assets creates livelihood in Roma households and it is closely related to segregation and poverty. We would like to highlight some of our findings from several research projects dealing with the issues of livelihood strategies and poverty in segregated Roma communities based mainly on qualitative research, in-deep interviews and participative observation.

This paper draws from qualitative research methods, though some statistical data related to spatial distribution are shown. The qualitative approach has obvious benefits and drawbacks. Data on Roma communities are unreliable and also difficult to obtain. Even basic population data are also the subject of dispute, since Roma do often not identify themselves as Roma; therefore, survey-based research has serious limitations. The research results presented in the paper come from several research projects dealing with various aspects of poverty, living conditions, social networks within Roma communities and were carried out during the years 2013–2017. Interviews were conducted with dozens of respondents of different age, sex and education. Most of the interviews were held directly in households, though

some in community centres, too. Besides Roma, we have also questioned social workers, representatives of municipalities, teachers and non-Roma residents living in those communities. The interview work was complemented with observations in villages, streets, households, schools, community centres, etc. It took place in two regions in the east of Slovakia, investigated communities were of different size and proportion of the Roma, with segregated and non-segregated communities.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first part we offer a short description of the Roma population in Slovakia from the historical point of view, the development of the Roma population (size) and its spatial specifics within the country. The second part of the paper is focused on spatial aspects of poverty, especially on segregation. We argue that poverty is strongly influenced by space. The general theoretical approach will concern segregation. The aim of the third, main part of the paper is to link the issue of Roma poverty with space. We deal with the problem of segregation of Roma population living in marginalized communities, which has a major impact on their extreme poverty or even social exclusion. We offer a view on the relation between poverty and segregation through the lens of people living in marginalised Roma communities.

2. Roma population in Slovakia

The ethnic Roma population has been observed in Europe since the Middle Ages. The first historical report on Roma in what is now Slovakia dates back to the year 1322. The first reports on Roma smithery families settling on the outskirts of Slovakia's medieval towns date back to the 16th century. Former nomad communities were forced to accept a new, settled style of living. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, with growing persecution in western Europe, inflows of Roma migrants coming from the west were reported in this territory. In the Enlightenment, Empress Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II made several attempts to support the assimilation of the Roma ethnicity (such as constraints on nomadic life, prohibition of the Roma language, introduction of compulsory school attendance). In 1927, the Act on Nomadic Roma,

the first juridical document of this kind in Europe was passed, imposing the obligation of registration in the municipality of domicile and introducing so-called "Gypsy ID" based on ethnic affiliation.

World War II was the darkest period in the history of the Roma population. The Nuremberg Race Laws issued in 1935 and ancillary ordinances classified Gypsies as an undesirable "element of racial impurity". About 300,000 Roma inhabitants of Europe are estimated to have died during World War II.

Moving Roma dwellings away from public roads was one of the severest interventions into the existence of local Roma communities, which resulted in their fatal isolation from municipalities. Despite of the attempts to move back and closer to towns after the war, these were rarely successful and in many cases their isolation was even reinforced. Therefore, many recently isolated communities were established during the war as a result of the application of the segregation policy (Kumanová et al. 2006).

The socialist regime brought controlled social assimilation of the Roma. Romanies were restricted from declaring their own ethnicity and Roma ethnicity was officially eliminated. All attempts to maintain their own cultural and ethnic identity and support emancipation were quashed, too. Several policies aimed at the "dispersion" of Roma concentrations were applied throughout the decades, including controlled relocation of some Roma communities from Slovakia to Czechia. "Related to the refusal to accept Roma ethnicity, a problem of the designation of the Roma occurred, which led to a definition of a Gypsy, naming a person of Gypsy origin" (Kotvanová et al. 2003). The "otherness" of the Roma was considered a manifestation of social pathology. As a consequence, social policy was aimed at the removal of such a phenomenon (Kol. Autorov 1999). On the other hand, real social problems of Roma communities remained omitted. The assimilation of Roma was supposed to be attained via the policies aimed at unemployment solutions, housing issues, education and general re-education of the Roma leading to the transformation of their traditional way of life. Mann (1996) notes that this kind of generous material public aid for the Roma lacking any "human dimension" devastated positive awareness step by step and resulted in the loss of personal motivations and apathy. Mann names the post-war history of the Roma population in Czechia

and Slovakia as a process of their deculturation. In spite of the criticism of somewhat paternalist and anti-ethnic approaches towards Romanies, some of the aid programs have brought positive changes for Roma households, e.g. lifelong education programs, field health-care projects, awareness training programmes and measures aimed at eliminating the poorest Roma settlements and upgrading infrastructure in the settlements where community life was supposed to be preserved. Some of the former Roma settlements were displaced and tens of thousands of Romanies have been resettled. However, some of the ambitious plans of the poorest settlements' total removal as declared by then supreme country's politicians have never been implemented, and consequences of some of the prior mistakes are evident even today.

As Radičová (2001) argues, the negative effects of the societal transformation after 1989 on the Roma population have been exacerbated by their stratification rootlessness. Romanies were excluded from the stratification pyramids established in the former regime either before or during the transformation period. Due to their low skills and poor education, they could be formally classified neither within the official labour nor social networks. Hence the position of the Roma population within the society in this period is a result of the long-term historical evolution of their coexistence with Slovakia's majority population. Though the year 1989 brought profound societal changes including democratization and the launch of civil-society restoration with quite promising prospects of a Roma policy turn, the economic transformation process led to the growth of the burden carried by the Roma ethnic population (Kotvanová et al. 2003). The living standards in a part of Roma communities have deteriorated substantially within a relatively short period (accompanied by a growth of the unemployment rate, rural Roma communities' enlargement caused by re-migration of Roma families who failed to keep their jobs in towns, housing environment worsening, etc.).

Undoubtedly, Slovakia (together with Romania and Hungary) ranks among the societies with the highest absolute numbers of the Roma population and the highest percentage of the Roma within the total population (together with Romania and Macedonia). According to the findings of Vaňo and Meszároš (2004), the Roma population is Slovakia's third largest ethnic group (after Slovak and Hungarian) with the most dynamic growth. The reproductive behaviour of the Roma population is somewhat different in comparison with the majority population (higher natality rate, higher mortality rate), which results in a contrasting age structure. Roma communities are generally younger, the pre-reproductive aged population is massively represented in the Roma population.

The very first statistics on Slovakia's Roma population date back to the end of the 18th century, finding about 36 thousand Romanies. Until 1991, in all post-war population censuses the residents' opportunities regarding ethnicity declaration were limited only to a set of selected ethnicities; however, Roma ethnicity was excluded. Romanies were, therefore, forced to declare one of the official available ethnicity categories. Later, in the 1991 census the citizens of Slovakia had again the possibility to declare Roma ethnicity. Surprisingly, only 76 thousand inhabitants took the chance to do so. Neither the consecutive censuses have shown higher numbers of Roma (see Table 1).

Unsurprisingly, the differences between official statistics and real numbers of the Roma in Slovakia are quite high, as previously reported, for example, by Podolák (2000), Jordan (1996), (2002) or Seewann (1994) (the official spatial distribution of self-declared Roma ethnicity according to the 2011 population census is shown in Fig. 1 and the qualified estimate published in the Atlas of Roma Communities 2013 is presented in Fig. 2). The unwillingness of the Roma to declare their ethnicity can be rooted in their ethnic history, stigmatization by the majority population, the negative reputation of the Roma ethnicity and the controlled repres-

Table 1. Roma ethnicity residents as declared in Population and Housing Censuses

Year	1991	2001	2011
Number of Roma	75 802	89 920	105 738

Source: Matlovičová et al. 2012

sion of ethnicity-related identity under the communist regime. Consequently, all attempts to estimate real numbers of the Roma in Slovakia brought hazy numbers, usually between 400 and 600 thousand. The first real picture of the Roma population size and Roma settlements and communities was presented in the Atlas of Roma Communities 2004 (Radičová et al. 2004), updated in 2013 (Mušínska et al. 2014) (Table 2).

As for the administrative division, Slovakia has been subdivided into eight self-governing regions (*kraje* – NUTS 3) and 79 districts (*okresy* – LAU 1). The spatial distribution of the Roma in particular regions is relatively uneven (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2), according to the Atlas of the Roma Communities 2013 (Mušínska et al. 2014).

Most of them are concentrated in eastern part of the country, away from the capital city. Three regions (Banská Bystrica, Košický and Prešovský kraj) have a dominant representation of municipalities with Roma communities, followed by the Nitriansky region with a little difference. The first three are the least developed regions in terms of most poverty indicators, for example the unemployment rate, population below the poverty line, the number of outgoing workers, the income level and others (Golias 2017). The Nitriansky region has “improved” over the past few years (probably due to the arrival of several major investors), but in general it also belongs to the group of less-developed regions. “*The widening of poverty can partly be related to the expansion of the Roma population ... The high correlation between the poverty rate and the share of the Roma population also results from the comparison of the districts. The correlation coefficient is 0.79 for the poverty index and 0.85 for the unemployment rate.*” (Golias 2017: 3)

A very specific feature of Roma population’s spatial distribution is their residence in homogeneous ethnic settlements named Roma communities, described by Rusnáková and Pollák (2012) as follows: “*...it is a settlement (spatially delimited), resid-*

ed by Roma (or predominantly by Roma). It is part of a town (hence lacks its own self-government), but often isolated from the built-up area (by distance or a barrier, such as a river, railway, etc.) or within the built-up area (Roma street, Roma neighborhood), formed in a relatively autonomous socio-cultural structure.”

The concentrated communities are home to 53.5% of all Roma, the rest of them are dispersed within the dominant Slovak ethnic population in mixed neighbourhoods. A growing share of the Roma living in concentrations within the built-up areas of towns and segregated communities has been observed. In 1988, these communities embraced only 14,988 inhabitants, but they witnessed 127,429 persons in 2000 and 190,950 residents in 2010 (Matlovičová et al. 2012). In 2013, the Roma communities mapping identified 803 Roma concentrations (in 583 municipalities) with 215,555 Roma residents. Out of 2,890 Slovakia’s municipalities, 1,070 are resided by the Roma.

3. Poverty and social exclusion of the Roma in Slovakia

Poverty is a profound individual as well as social issue and represents a barrier to human rights application. The state of poverty restrains a person’s freedom and opportunities, affects one’s present and future, individual ambitions and success. Poverty is multidimensional and apart from a lack of income and material assets, the poor are often disadvantaged in many other ways, including stereotypes and charge of individual’s own responsibility for being poor. Being poor often means being disadvantaged in (or excluded from) access to elementary rights to housing, health- and social care, education, labour and public-control participation. Poverty is a complex multidimensional phenomenon induced and affected by numerous factors

Table 2. Slovakia’s total Roma population estimates

Year	2003	2013
Absolute number	320 000	402 840
Percentage within the total population	5.94	7.45

Source: Radičová et al. 2004; Mušínska et al. 2014

independent from one's personal control. Simultaneously, it demonstrates itself in many different ways and consequences and hence no definition of poverty is comprehensive enough.

Poverty is often tightly related to inequalities. We agree with Mareš (1999) who defines it as an expression of extreme inequalities, as a distance of the poor from the rich or the rest of the population, respectively. As Kol. Autorov (2002) state, inequalities related to the opportunities of the Roma result from their multiple disadvantages: a disadvantage related to their social status evolution throughout the history accompanied by the public policy applied towards the Roma minority, a disadvantage of exclusion from the stratification pyramids (mentioned above in the paper) and a disadvantage of inappropriate flexibility of the Roma themselves in the environment of the post-socialist transitive society.

The notion of poverty has been constantly transforming in space and time. In the initial attempts to comprehend poverty, it was related to physical (or material) survival. The recent approach to poverty is generally rooted in cultural and social concepts including a wider spectrum of living conditions. Various poverty definitions may both differ from or correspond to one another depending on approaches or views applied towards their subject matter, including the merest lack-of-incomes approach, various poverty-perception concepts or the identification of factors and consequences of poverty. Factors increasing the risk of poverty include, for example, *unemployment* (especially long-term unemployment), *low-skilled labour positions*, *family size and structure* (single-parent families or multiple children families), *age structure* (risk groups of children, youth and seniors), *gender* (women), *low skills and poor qualification*, *ethnic minority affiliation*, *region* or *locality*. Before 1989, poverty in Slovakia was mostly related to demographic features. However, the social transformation induced a shift from this so-called old poverty towards a new labour-market associated poverty. From this point of view, persons excluded from the labour market with their family members are the most threatened ones. As to the duration of the in-poverty-status, it is necessary to mention that Roma community members certainly rank among those who are the most affected by long-term poverty and inter-generational reproduction of poverty.

Before more attention is paid to poverty of the Roma in this paper, we should emphasize that this issue does not concern all Roma minority members. The Roma population in Slovakia is highly heterogeneous from an ethnographical point of view. There are several subethnic Roma groups in the country different from many points of view, including the social conditions perspective. For example, Kyuchukov et al. (2015), Ráčová - Samko (2015), Lehoczka (2006), Mann (1992) bring interesting information about the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Roma.

The perception of Roma poverty as an issue of ethnicity or ethnic minority may lead to biased and reckless generalization. “...[G]eneralization and ascription of poverty to Roma ethnicity or even Roma mentality is misleading, unmoral and harmful” (Rusnáková 2007).

The large “invisible” part of the Roma in Slovakia lives in conditions that are standard for the neighbourhood within the location in which their household is located. Poverty does not even apply to all inhabitants of Roma settlements (ethnic concentrations) or to all inhabitants of poor and segregated Roma sites. Like any other, Roma communities are internally abundantly stratified. As the quotes from our interviews (below in the text) show, even in the poorest localities, households actively seek out available resources and use them to secure their livelihood (e.g. neighbourhood networks, good relations with the majority population, informal employment, etc.). The availability of “regular” assets (e.g. as defined by Buravoy) is, however, significantly more constrained for these people. The best way to explain the lack of assets among the Roma is by the concept of social exclusion that emphasizes the dynamics and processes involving deprivations, multidimensional disadvantage, relationship aspects (such as social participation, integration). This concept concerns social groups (e.g. ethnic ones) rather than individuals and is related to failures of a society or societal systems more than to an individual's failure. It often leads to limited opportunities to participate in society life, social isolation and seclusion from society (Džambazovič and Gerbery 2005). The social exclusion concept has been widely discussed by numerous authors (for example Abrahamson 1995; Atkinson 2000; Berghman 1995; Mareš 2000 and others) who agree that so-

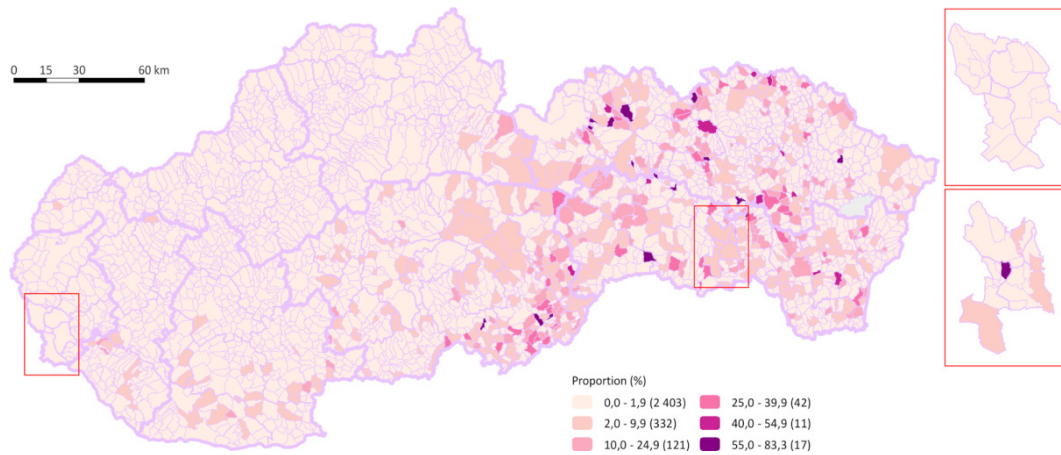


Fig.1. Population of declared Roma ethnicity in municipalities of Slovakia, 2011
Source: Bleha et al. (2014)

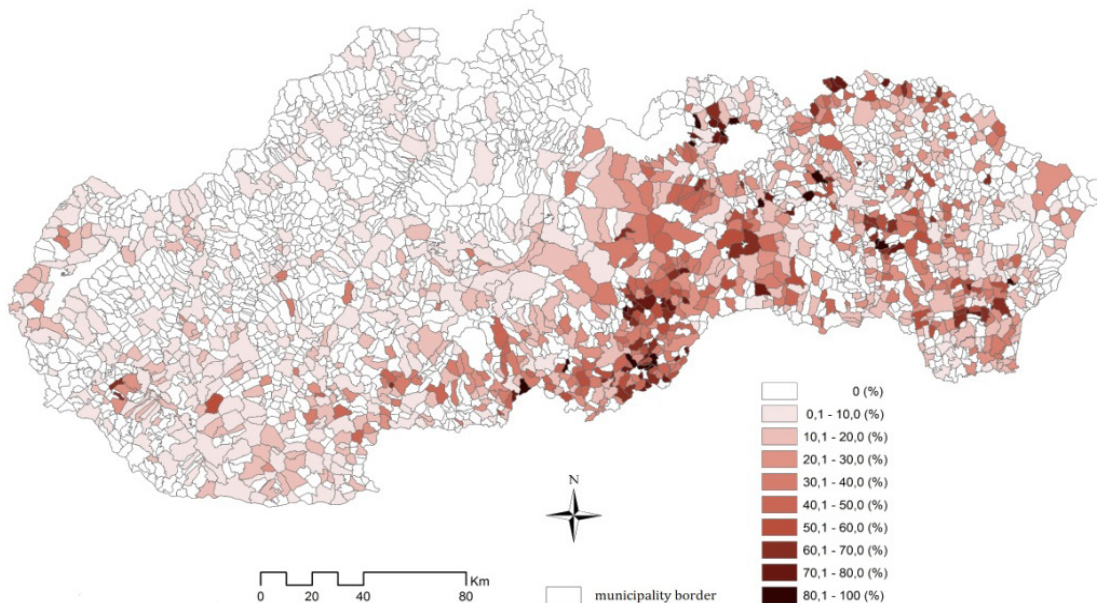


Fig.2. The share of the Roma population in municipalities of Slovakia (a qualified estimate 2013)
Source: Mušinka et al. (2014)

cial exclusion is a consequence of unequal access of individuals or social groups to elementary societal assets and often leads to exclusion from participation in society life. Social exclusion is multidimensional and identifiable in real geographical space.

A high percentage of Roma reside in worse housing conditions as compared to the majority population (see, for example, Ružička 2012). Low life quality, material and financial deficiencies, exclusion from access to social assets (essential access to the labour market) are not typical attributes of marginalized Roma communities only, as they

threaten a considerable part of the Roma population outside the marginalized communities, too. Households located in the segregated Roma communities are territorially disadvantaged by the distance to the municipality core, poor accessibility and access to the road network, poor infrastructure and many other factors. Thus, territoriality represents one of the essential aspects of poverty and social exclusion.

When responding to questions concerning anxieties, inconveniences and disadvantages, only a part of the respondents group referred to poverty or miserable living conditions. Only some of

them gave a relevant response after a detailed request of the questioner (such as *“Are you not worried about your living conditions?”*) even though a considerable share of the respondents repeatedly cope with food insecurity or deficiency. These situations often force them to take loans (from relatives or friends, or nonbanks), do shopping on credit in a local grocery or prepare stored food. Many report that hunger is the only solution sometimes. Some respondents refer to occasional troubles with housing comfort (heating, access to drinking water or electricity). Such responses lead us to raising the question why these severe living conditions are not generally perceived as “critical”. The following explanation was offered by a Roma activist (living in the majority population environment): *“They have lived in poverty all their lives and have never recognized anything else. Nowadays younger generations have had no experience with work, and those who have are slowly dying out. They got used to it and hardly know anything else.”* Poverty is often interpreted in relationship with an absolute shortage of resources (no housing, lack of food), as reported in the following response: *“The hardest thing is when you have no food for your children, you run out of everything and there is nothing to feed them with.”* Such attitudes lead to distorted descriptions of their own material situation. *“I am satisfied unless my roof is leaky. There are many who are worse off than me.”* replied one of the respondents living in an overcrowded shed near a forest.

Vast and increasing territorial inequalities are clearly observable in Slovakia’s territory as one of the specific attributes of a post-socialist society. The spatiality of poverty, especially segregation, is a very specific feature of the Roma community. The segregated Roma communities represent the areas where the ethnicity-related vertical disadvantage associates with spatial marginalization, which considerably increases the risk of poverty (see, for example, Sigona 2005; Matlovičová et al. 2012; Rusnáková et al. 2015). The key determinants of spatial segregation include primarily: social class, ethnicity, life- and family-cycle phase, lifestyle, confession. Out of these, ethnicity and race seem to be the most decisive factors (Džambazovič 2007). As for the marginalized Roma communities, a combination of race or ethnic segregation often acts together with social marginalization. Spatial marginalization is fre-

quently manifested through the “ghettoization” of the Roma within urban surroundings and secluded Roma dwellings isolated within rural environments.

“The minimal and symbolic nature of social contacts with the “outside world” is closely connected with spatial segregation. The more homogeneous and endogenous the community or neighbourhood, the more enclosed it is for the outer society, but simultaneously, the more receptive individual families become towards community influence. The community has taken over control” (Džambazovič 2007: 450).

In descriptions of poor communities, some authors frequently use the term “pockets of poverty” (see, for example, Mareš 1999). Life in disadvantaged communities positioned in spatially marginalized localities often leads to poverty and social exclusion. This kind of poverty is obviously inherited intergenerationally and opportunities to escape the poverty trap are very limited in this case.

The rural environment, typical for most of the Roma communities, seems to reinforce the disadvantage factors, too. While most of Slovakia’s population reside in the urban environment (in the beginning of the 1990s it was 58%, today it is 55%), most of the Roma minority still live in rural settlements (Vašečka and Džambazovič 2000), although some isolated and segregated (spatially as well as socially) areas resided by the Roma may be found in both rural and urban environments.

The spatial marginalization of Roma is an ambiguous process. On the one hand, we observe an “expansion” of ethnically homogeneous communities due to migration (we should rather say re-migration) of the Roma from former dispersed communities within Slovak and Czech towns and cities. On the other hand, the formation of such monoethnic areas is widely supported by the process of the majority’s escape from areas with a high concentration of the Roma. The formation of ethnically homogeneous areas brings a shift in the comprehension of the so-called Roma issue, as it clearly gains not only social, but also ethnic patterns. The majority population tends to avoid such areas, the inner cohesion within the community becomes more intensive and the whole community starts to isolate itself from the rest of society (Vašečka et al. 2002). The segregation rate very often indicates the Roma population’s stratification rate. Other Roma residents who live either concentrated or dispersed within the majori-

ty population tend to keep away from the Roma living in segregated communities, naming them *Cigáni* (Gypsies) and strongly dissociating from them. The status of the Roma segregated in marginalized regions clearly indicates the ethnic nature of poverty in its absolute form (Kol. Autorov 2002).

As previously mentioned, social exclusion is manifested in many areas of life. There have been numerous studies on school segregation (Rafael 2001; Rosinský 2009; Klein 2012; Huttová et al. 2012; Cerešňíková et al. 2017) helping professionals report unfair approaches in hospitals (e.g., creating Roma rooms in nursing departments) over the past ten years and there are several examples of creating segregated urban ghettos for the poorest Roma and examples of municipalities/towns where walls of the “Roma section” were built by the majority.

4. Segregation, social exclusion and livelihood in Roma settlements

In the following part of the text, Slovakia’s Roma segregated communities will be shown and results of several qualitative surveys will be presented to describe the possible effects of their segregation on the formation and selection of livelihood strategies observable in Roma communities. These surveys were based mostly on ethnographic approaches including observations and interviews. The interviews, as the main source of valuable information, were carried out by social workers, community-centre employees, Roma activists and mainly with Roma communities’ residents.

The theory of assets presented by Michael Burawoy et al. (2000) was utilized for the purposes of the analysis of segregation effects. This theory distinguishes four different types of assets. Material assets (1) represent a very important part of household livelihood and embrace, among other things, dwellings, cars, plots and other material sources which facilitate home production. Skill assets (2) include education, professional position, physical abilities applicable in the labour market as well as in home production. Social assets (3) refer to family and social ties with family members and friends who might be helpful for households and

individuals. Citizenship assets (4) together with social ties facilitate exchange and redistribution and are usually guaranteed by the state (such as benefits for retired persons, children’s allowance, etc.). Livelihood strategies that a household chooses to apply are obviously limited by the available assets which are consequently decisive for a household’s risk of poverty (Pahl and Wallace 1985; Bridger and Pine 1998; Brown and Kulcsar 2001; Stenning et al. 2010; Rochovská 2011).

4.1. Roma settlements

Although no perfect definition of “Roma settlement” exists, we can state that it represents an ethnically homogeneous settlement which is segregated in terms of both space and society. The most frequent attributes of these settlements include constrained access to the elementary services and rights, such as education, housing, health, labour opportunities, basic services and adequate income (Vašečka and Džambazovič 2000; Vaňo and Mészáros 2004; Radičová et al. 2004; Filadelfiová et al. 2006; Kráľovská 2006 etc.). Well-known problems reported by residents of segregated Roma settlements include poor housing conditions, usually exacerbated by unclear land ownership, poor health state (compared to majority), poor education and low skills, and in many of the settlements also poor access to basic infrastructure (drinking water, for instance).

Rusnáková (2009) explains that social exclusion amplified by spatial isolation generates inner and outer barriers that can hardly be overcome by the residents of segregated Roma settlements. This leads to formation of “two worlds” that are separated by space and other barriers. Residents of the isolated settlements have only limited opportunities to enter “the other” world, which is especially true for the youth. This young generation’s isolation process is frequently supported by occurrence of a shop, community-centre, special elementary school or social workers in the isolated community. The extremely poor environment of the community then tends to become a frame of reference for its residents, the extreme poverty impacts or limits their future plans and ambitions which are then reduced merely to solutions to everyday obstacles.

The Atlas of Roma Communities (Mušíinka et al. 2014) identified 233 segregated Roma settlements with 73,920 residents (i.e. 18.4% of the total Roma population in Slovakia) residing in 9,756 dwellings. An average distance to the municipality core reaches 900 m, the most distant settlement is 7 km away from the core. The distribution of such communities within Slovakia's territory is fairly uneven, with main concentrations in eastern and south-eastern regions (Table 3).

Households located in the segregated communities tend to compare themselves with the families in their neighbourhood, therefore their interpretations are biased by the local community's living standards. The more segregated the community, the poorer their knowledge on living standards outside the community. Every respondent can name someone who "is even worse off". "We are neither poor, nor rich" is a typical response. The Roma residents living within the majority population are also not able to make a competent judgement and compare their living conditions with non-Roma households appropriately. "Our parents lived in a colony and had nothing, they were forced to start from scratch. The others (note: non-Roma) inherited houses, money, fields, forests. They could afford schools and took care of nobody but themselves..." (Rusnáková et al. 2015).

4.2. Lack of material assets

When discussing the so-called "Roma issue", housing seems to be one of the most delicate problems. Undoubtedly, housing is one of the most important practical and juridical questions concerning Roma community's life (Radičová 2001).

Roma inhabitants who have been integrated into the majority population usually live in poor but brick-built houses with relatively large floorage and frequently with a plot and small garden appropriate for home production. On the other hand, Roma households in segregated communities generally do not own the dwellings and plots which they occupy. Numerous segregated communities lie on a doubtful land with small dwellings built from wood or other unstable materials and with no access to infrastructure (Table 3).

"I do not live well, but what can you do, I have to be happy with what I have ..." a woman from a

segregated community stated and continued: "Those Roma who live among white ones in the village, they have better houses, they are already there for a long time, so they are also used to... and we are separated from everything so it is... nothing, we do not have water, the water pump is broken five times in a month, we have to wait hours to fill the pail, we do not have electricity. How one can live without water, without electricity, it's still good that we manage to live like this..." "We know how to do it, we can look after ourselves, because we would look like wild people..." another woman added.

Obviously, housing quality is primarily dependent on individual efforts of the residents and the investments they do to upgrade their housing standard. Incomes of households in Slovakia's Roma communities are usually low, especially if segregated communities are considered. Sirovátka (2004) claims that "the higher the unemployment of the Roma, the lower the housing standard". This is the reason why Roma dwellers are forced to build their dwellings from simple materials which undoubtedly devaluates housing quality (Rochovská and Ciglianický 2009).

Housing obviously involves public infrastructure, too, which is usually very poor in the segregated settlements. Fourteen out of them have no access to infrastructure, i.e. to electricity, public water supply, sewage system and gas supply. Only 56.2% of all segregated settlements are equipped with public water supply networks (drinking water pipe system) accessible for 45.2% of the dwellings, while 23.1% of the dwellings utilize other sources of water (such as public water-wells, rivers, etc.) and 11.1% have no access to water at all (Mušíinka et al. 2014). It is also important to say that the presence of a public water supply network in the settlement does not necessarily mean that residents have access to water. They are very often disconnected for non-payment, so there can be a gap between the coverage of the water supply and the actual use. Approximately 90 settlements are referred to a public well or another source of water (stream, a forest well, a fire hydrant, etc.), uncontrolled sources of water according the source mentioned above. Nearly all of the 90 settlements have some households that use an uncontrolled source of water (the most common are households that are so distant from a public well that they choose to take water from a stream). An-

Table 3. Number of flats and residents in segregated Roma communities

	Number of dwellings	Number of residents	Average number of residents per flat
Flats	3 226	24 568	7.6
Legal bricked houses	1 505	12 993	8.6
Legal wooden houses	107	568	5.3
Bricked houses before house approval	337	1 809	5.4
Non-registered bricked houses	1 417	13 194	9.3
Wooden houses	303	1 786	5.9
Shacks	2 484	17 004	6.8
Modular homes	319	1 517	4.8
Caravan dwellings	30	159	5.3
Non-residential spaces	26	316	12.2
Non-defined dwellings	2	6	3.0
Total	9 756	73 920	

Source: Mušinka et al. (2014)

other problem is that usually there is only one well in a settlement, so it is not only very overextended but also very far for some households (sometimes even 700 meters). Also, the water in it is not regularly tested; therefore, many wells are polluted.

Segregation and distant location from the municipality core usually mean poor access to kindergartens and elementary schools, labour opportunities, health care (Hornák and Rochovská 2014), which consequently results in low education levels, unemployment and poor health of the population. The following outcomes of the 2010 survey carried out by Filadelfiová and Gerbery (2012) illustrate the abovementioned statements:

- There is a substantially higher incidence rate of chronic diseases within a segregated community's population (compared to the majority population), diseases occur such that are quite rare (or never occur) outside the segregated communities.
- Special elementary schools (schools with reduced curriculum content drastically inhibiting any further study ambitions and labour market success) are attended mostly by Roma children residing in the segregated settlements.
- The residents of the segregated Roma settlements represent the highest percentage of those who cannot afford doctor-recommended medications due to lack of finances.
- And again, the residents of the segregated communities form the highest percentage of

the respondents reporting heavy or even extreme difficulties with covering the expenses on their children's schooling.

4.3. Limited social networks

Family generates the primary and often the only resource of support, help and social contacts. The assistance of family members and relatives represents the elementary strategy to cope with difficult situations in Roma communities. Radičová (2001b) considers mutual assistance within families and intensive social incorporation as highly successful strategies. Rochovská et al. (2014) emphasize that social networks are of a high importance in Slovak rural households' livelihood strategies. This research proves that many poor households would not be capable of overcoming social difficulties without the assistance of their neighbours, friends and family members. Households with poor social networks become isolated quite easily and have to struggle very hard to sustain a prosperous livelihood. A lack of social networks usually leads to the employment of other, often less convenient sources of assistance.

The role of the social networks was the focus of one of the qualitative researches giving evidence on neighbourhood and friendship networks in Roma communities. The respondents reported no (or minimum) co-worker networks as they rarely had an opportunity to work in a working team and thus create wider relationships or friendships that might

have possibly become a source of social assistance. Professional assistance was reported as negligible. None of the respondents was found socially isolated, as they had built social networks of various origins, which seems to be a positive finding of the survey. Assistance from various public aid sources, such as financial benefits or material supplies, was considered as the most preferable way of obtaining support by the respondents.

Contacts with non-Roma population constitute a matter of special attention. Numerous respondents reported the importance of friendship with non-Roma residents. Without non-Roma friends or citizens, it is very difficult to find a job. Friendship with non-Roma persons brings various benefits, while contrarily, isolation from non-Roma community generates disadvantages. For many, “*living with non-Roma*” or “*meeting non-Roma*” represent key sources of experience or knowledge and bring opportunities to gain skills or language competences. Good and friendly ties with the majority community members may represent an essential link to the labour market. Respondents usually claim that such friendships are often more decisive than education and skills. One of the social workers also considers social networks as crucial. “*...However, connections are decisive. Our parents came from a Roma colony or have their roots there. Their friends come from colonies...Then there was nobody who might help our children get to a good school, nobody to help them practice or advise in job-seeking. Better opportunities are always taken through friendships. This is what we inherited...*”. Most of the respondents residing in segregated settlements are not active in sustaining or seeking friendships with non-Roma residents. Some women living all their lives in segregation very often said they did not need acquaintances, nor could they imagine how they could use them. “*I do not know important people and I do not want to know them, because important or wealthy people are supercilious...*”. “*I do not know if such people could be useful to me...*”, “*The rich are talking with the rich and the poor with the poor*”.

Though social networks between the majority and the segregated Roma were rare, if any, the importance of these inter-ethnic relations was highlighted by most of the Roma respondents. “*It’s good to know the white ones. No one ever knows when the white can help. And they sometimes give you work,*

hew the wood, work in the garden, throw away the snow.” or “*...because they have better contacts and when they recall things, it’s easier.*” (a Roma from segregation)

The capability to create social networks and sustain any relationship with the non-Roma community is considered an important competence facilitating access to various assets (especially the labour market) and assisting in the process of social inclusion (Rusnáková 2011).

On the other hand, social networks within segregated communities were very strong. Almost all respondents from a segregated environment asked for help with manual work, clothes, food, or care within the community. “*We help in everything, e.g. dresses or shoes when someone is small, so move my friend. Or food for cooking, if someone is lacking, so whoever has it, will give it.*” Interestingly, if they had a need for financial assistance, they turned to relatives or acquaintances outside of segregation. “*They do not have... to help me financially... There is one Roma in the village who helps me. I borrow money or food for cooking.*”

4.4. Work, skills, education

The Roma population is generally afflicted with a high unemployment rate. Filčák and Škobla (2013) present two main reasons of the Roma communities’ exclusion from the labour market. The shrinkage of traditional agricultural production and mining, the introduction of new technologies and machinery in agriculture and forestry sectors accounted for the disappearance of low-skilled jobs (usually occupied by Roma workers until 1989). Discrimination is the second reason, as Roma employees were those who first lost their jobs as a consequence of economy transformation processes, and thus lost one of the arguments guaranteeing certain tolerance by the society.

Another explanation of the high unemployment rate of the Roma compared to the majority population lies in their low education level and lack of skills. Poor living conditions act as a barrier to access to advanced skills and good jobs. This is how a Roma interview participant (social worker) operating in a segregated Roma community explains Romanies’ low chances in the labour market due to the

lack of competences necessary to orientate themselves in the labour market and job-seeking: “So they do not search for jobs the way I would do it, for example. What I would do is send an application and a copy of my CV and everything that is necessary, but they don’t do it this way because they are not able to write a CV or fill in an application form...”.

The common problem remains a high level of unemployment at the national level which affects the Roma the most, even though they are willing to work. “So, they would work if they had a place. Everybody was employed before ‘89. And we have enough of those who would like to work now. There are some people working in a sawmill or in a social enterprise. But there are a lot of them and there is no place to employ them all”.

Based on interviews with Roma residents focused on livelihood strategies and public aid, several conclusions can be made. The following conclusions prove that this category of assets (such as work, skills, education) is often missing in segregated communities, which brings obstacles in their struggle with poverty:

- Poor education and qualification, as most of the Roma population have no completed level of education or qualifications.
- Ethnicity and skin colour which result in labour discrimination: “if an employer is to choose between a white and a Roma applicant, the white one will be preferably chosen...”.
- Lack of connections in the labour market environment – non-Roma people have connections and help one another in seeking jobs (see more details in the text above).
- Lack of jobs in the contemporary society: “... everybody had a job then, there were a lot of jobs everywhere”.

The segregation of Roma communities is often amplified by poor accessibility of transport infrastructure and public transport networks, which makes it very difficult or nearly impossible to commute to work. The same problem is connected with access to education and starts already in pre-primary education. A teacher from school said: “If we have a settlement, for example, 3 km from the village and there is only a kindergarten in the village, there is a real problem with accessibility, especially in the winter months... in short, the children do not even

have clothes to be able to walk in the winter so far.” A school director from another school connected with a segregated community adds: “They do not have the motivation, they have no reason to learn when they do not have a single book in their home from which they could read. They are from a socially disadvantaged environment because the environment is really bad. Not only because they do not know the words, they do not know Slovak well. They have it far, the settlement... when it rains, they do not have umbrellas, they do not have shoes ...”.

The deep poverty in childhood is very often the cause of bad results at school, which affects the rest of the adult life. “When children do not go to school, they cannot find a job, they cannot get into life, they do not work in a team and people do not know them because they are not active, they do not have friendships, and nobody knows them” (a woman living in a Roma settlement).

The advantages of an official job are often disputable, too. Most of the segregated communities lie in poor regions with high unemployment rates and low wages, where working is not always worth it. If a household member accepts a poorly paid job with a minimum wage, the household becomes entitled to receive some of the social benefits and hence the travel-to-work expenses and the low wage result in the downsizing of the family’s monthly budget. Therefore, for many households’ unemployment is far more beneficial than seeking a job. However, this strategy results in long-term poverty, social dependency and loss of work habits, which in turn severely hampers any reattempts to return to the labour market. This has also been argued by Sirovátka (2003) who shows that a considerable part of the Roma population is permanently dependent on both secondary and informal labour markets and social benefits.

4.5. Citizenship assets

The abovementioned qualitative surveys have proved that public aid provided by central or local authorities and private companies, respectively (such as benefits, services, etc.) often represent the only income of households in segregated communities. If infrastructure networks (water supply, sewerage, electricity) are considered as public assets

obviously available in all Slovakia's municipalities, this is certainly not true for the segregated communities.

Social transfers represent a considerable part of household incomes. Occasional work incomes are rarely reported by respondents, as these are essentially dependent on existing social networking with the majority population missing in most of the segregated communities. Most of the respondents declare that a major part of their incomes is spent on monthly regular bills and food. Numerous households have become indebted due to risky cash loans from non-banks, which is self-explanatory because commercial banks are reluctant to offer loans to low-income families (Rusnáková 2011).

Hornák and Rochovská (2014) point to the so-called transport disadvantage as a specific segregation-related attribute of Roma communities. The lack of public assets (access to public transport networks, access roads) may cause difficulties especially for the very poor households that cannot afford their own passenger car. These households have, therefore, miserable access to main livelihood sources (work) and services (education, health-care, shops, etc.). As a consequence of the transport disadvantage, the very poor households may easily become socially excluded or marginalized.

During the interviews with the inhabitants of segregated communities that focused on public help from various stakeholders, many respondents noticed various necessities among which the following were repeated: *“for children, something for them to do, they have no place to play, repair the nursery, contribute to the aids”, “social apartments”, “financial assistance”, “probably in education”, “better living and water”, “that someone would offer them a job”*. An interesting point was highlighted by one respondent: *“I cannot tell you, everyone needs or wants something else.”* This emphasizes the importance of the directness of this kind of help. There are many specific needs within communities, and when the state provides assistance in a general manner, it may happen that people will take such help as inappropriate, unadjusted.

5. Conclusion

The withdrawal from central planning has led to unprecedented changes in the social conditions of Central and Eastern Europe. While new opportunities have arisen for some, others have fallen into poverty. By now, it is widely appreciated that the Roma are among those that have lost out the most during the transformation process. At the outset of the transition, most Roma were poorly positioned to take advantage of employment and education prospects in the market economy. Relative to others in society, the Roma were undereducated and overrepresented in low-skilled jobs. As a result, Roma workers were frequently among the first to lose their jobs at the outset of the restructuring (Ringold 2000).

Today, twenty-five years after the transformation onset, we find most of the Roma population among the poorest in terms of unemployment, housing conditions, education and other social indicators. Discussing the poor in a wealthy society, we tend to speak about what is called relative poverty. As defined by Mareš (2000), the relative poverty concept is always based on a comparison of different standards of those who are poor and those who are not. Resources available for poverty-stricken individuals, families or social groups are significantly substandard within society which excludes them from conventions and activities obvious for that society. Therefore, the poor are unlikely to reach the living conditions generally accepted by most of the society. The availability of assets significantly predetermines the selection of livelihood strategies by households, which consequently affects those households' future trajectory towards welfare and prosperity or poverty and social exclusion, respectively. All Roma communities are characterized by high unemployment rates and poor economic conditions compared to the majority population. The Roma themselves try to explain this by insufficient education and qualification, shortage of social networks and connections, unfairness of employers, general lack of labour opportunities in the regions and municipalities resided by the Roma, and finally poor interest of the Roma themselves in job seeking or their incompetence to search for a job.

The most miserable conditions are certainly observed in the segregated Roma communities. Lacking elementary infrastructure in the segregated settlements and spatial isolation of the Roma from the majority are exacerbated by their political, economic and cultural isolation. Households in the segregated Roma communities have poor access to basic assets, which reinforces their poverty and social exclusion. Strategies that they apply usually fail to sustain the household stability. The lack of one of the assets may often hamper access to other assets. For instance, the loss of a job is followed by insufficient material assets, fading social networks and dependence on public aid.

Mechanisms developed by the Roma to adapt to poverty and social exclusion are often mistaken as a life-style typical for all Roma. Their ethnicity, therefore, exacerbates their disadvantages. As Toušek (2006) denotes, the exclusion also has a symbolic dimension as certain groups of the society are frequently labelled as deviant or abnormal. Prejudices and stereotypes generate a negative image of the excluded social groups which are thus stigmatized and discriminated.

Life in the segregated settlements heavily impacts various aspects of a household's existence. All signs of social exclusion named above in the text are frequently observed in the segregated communities, including missing or very poor material assets of the households, limited access to the labour market and education, dependence on the public aid system, weak social networks. Often it is social networks that play an essential role in possible social inclusion or, conversely, may contribute to social exclusion.

The selection of the "proper" livelihood strategies possibly leading to sustainable livelihood is not a matter of an individual's will or ambition. Many households have very poor opportunities to plan their strategies themselves, their decisions usually respond to their everyday survival demands (Rusnáková 2011).

Despite the facts noted above, most of the requested respondents declared general satisfaction with their life and living conditions in the segregated communities (Rusnáková et al. 2015). Discontent is frequently reported with respect to housing (quality, floorage, location and household equipment) and repeatedly occurring household cash deficits

(at times lack of money for basic foodstuff). Such situations are reported as annoying but "*manageable problems*", as the respondents usually succeed to survive some way ("*we will cope with it somehow*"). Those who live close to the majority population, usually with better living standards, seem to show rather critical attitudes. Similarly, Roma respondents having permanent jobs express their discontent, as they repeatedly cope with indebtedness and deficiencies regardless of their efforts. This might be explained by their ability to get "used to shortage". Most of the Roma respondents have lived in the same place for a long time, their lives are rarely exposed to major changes (neither do they expect substantial changes in future), and so they have had enough time to adopt to living conditions perceived as "unmanageable" by the interviewers.

Acknowledgment

The article could not have been accomplished without the generous support from the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (project VEGA-1/0206/13, VEGA-1/0596/10 a VEGA-2/0089/15).

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