

# THE THINGS THAT WORK



ISBN 978-80-89975-04-4



9 788089 975044



FG18



**Alexander Mušinka - Miroslav Pollák**

# **THE THINGS THAT WORK**

Examples of municipalities that  
successfully coexist with the Roma

BEAUTIFUL SPIS Civic Association  
Levoča - Prešov 2020

## With support of the Embassy of Canada



Government  
of Canada

Gouvernement  
du Canada

Embassy  
of Canada

Ambassade  
du Canada

*This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency  
under the contract No. APVV-15-0556*

Authors: Mgr. Alexander Mušinka, PhD. – RNDr. Miroslav Pollák  
Title: The Things That Work. Examples of municipalities that  
successfully coexist with the Roma  
Reviewers: Prof. RNDr. Ivan Bernasovský, DrSc.  
PhDr. Jaroslav Skupnik, PhD.  
Cover: Fero Guldán  
Illustrations: Fero Guldán  
Translation: Translata, spol. s.r.o. from the Slovak original „Darí sa“,  
published by the civic association Beautiful Spis, Levoča -  
Prešov, 2018  
Publisher: BEAUTIFUL SPIS Civic Association, Levoča  
Edition: First, 2020  
Print: VMV Prešov

**ISBN 978-80-89975-04-4**

## **CONTENTS**

1. INTRODUCTION	7
2. A LITTLE THEORY	13
2.1. Planning	13
2.2. Poverty as a Social Phenomenon	16
2.3. On Stereotypes and Facts	22
2.3.1 What is True about the Alleged Abuse of the Slovak Social Welfare System by the Roma	23
2.3.2. The Atlas of Roma Communities 2013	26
3. SPIŠSKÝ HRHOV	29
4. SVERŽOV	46
5. RASLAVICE	59
6. ČIRČ	71
7. CONCLUSION	79
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	81
8. 1. Newspaper Articles	85



# 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2012, a publication entitled *The Things That Worked*<sup>1</sup> was published and, at that time, it was considered as one of a kind. It was concise material that informed the reader about the examples of successful solutions to problems regarding the mutual co-existence of the majority population with the Roma minority in 19 Slovak municipalities. It was not a summary of the BEST projects, but rather an attempt to showcase the entire wide range of quality activities and their variability. Most of the described villages are located in Eastern Slovakia, i.e. the Prešov and Košice Regions. For anyone with at least an elementary knowledge of the geographical distribution of Roma communities, this will not come as a surprise.

*The Things That Worked* purposefully showed positive examples of the variability and various forms of municipal approaches. *The Things that Worked* was written for mayors, members of municipal councils, members of NGOs or active village field social workers, who are sincerely interested in improving the life or co-existence with the Roma minority in their village or who are seeking solutions for the problems at hand. We did not aim to show the best examples or make a TOP or BEST OF list, but rather to direct your attention to the fact that there already are many good examples. It is important that we see them, and it is even more important that we want to see them. The aim of the first publica-

---

1 Mušinka Alexander: *The Things That Worked*. Examples of successful activities on the level of the local administration aimed at improving the situation of the Roma. Prešov Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity, 2012. pp. 216 ISBN 978-80-555-0531-2. Available at <http://www.unipo.sk/cjknm/hlavne-sekcie/urs/publikacna-cinnost/> (link to download the pdf version: <http://www.unipo.sk/public/media/17060/Musinka%20-%20Podarilo%20sa%20-%20SJ.pdf>). The publication is also available in English Alexander Mušinka: *The Things That Worked*. Examples of successful activities on the level of the local administration aimed at improving the situation of the Roma (link to download the PDF version: <http://www.unipo.sk/public/media/17060/Musinka%20-%20Podarilo%20sa%20-%20AJ.pdf>).



tion was to show different forms of good examples on the level of the local administration that work with the Roma and have positive results, and these could bring inspiration and encouragement to other local administrations.

Some of the mentioned local administrations approached the problem comprehensively and tried to manage several activities at the same time. Others focused on only one or two of the most important areas. In some cases, we described organizations that are active in villages – schools, kindergartens, community centres, civic associations and the like.

Despite the fact that these projects in individual local administrations were not interconnected, these separate successful examples in selected villages proved that the conscientious approach of the local administration must be based on having proper knowledge of the community's needs, and the activities it promotes must be mutually interconnected and complement each other. The activities cannot only focus on certain aspects of the lives of the Roma, however important that may be, unless other aspects are also dealt with simultaneously – whether thanks to the activities of the municipalities or the activities of the Roma community itself. Any experienced activist or field worker knows that improving professional qualification and training helps with the job seeking process, subsequent employment guarantees and income which in turn enables them to improve their living conditions, and good living conditions are a prerequisite for a healthy family, as only a healthy person is able to manage the regular demands of schooling in the long term, as it is a never ending circle. Solving one problem helps solve others. If we want to improve the overall state of the Roma community, we need to educate children and also build housing, fix infrastructure, create new jobs, eliminate usury, encourage active community work and the like. In the best case scenario, it should be possible to work actively and comprehensively with the whole community in the long term and such activities should envelop all areas of life. The first chapter

of this book is dedicated to the explanation of the unsatisfactory state of certain Roma communities.

The Things That Worked proved that Slovakia has no lack of positive examples even though the majority of the media do not emphasize this sufficiently. Tabloids are a different story, as it is more or less given that they primarily present the negative examples. We would like to objectively state that, in comparison to the past, nowadays even the media has started presenting the good examples found in the Roma environment significantly more.<sup>2</sup>

To be thorough, we have to note that the success of particular examples in individual villages in the past does not automatically guarantee that the village will adhere to the same approach in the future. The opposite is true as well, a lack of municipal interest or a bad example of solving the Roma community's problems does not have to be permanent and unchanged in the future. One of the parameters that significantly impacts and changes the approach of a village to its own Roma community is the mayor and the municipal council.

- 
- 2 From the plethora of authors and articles, we could subjectively note the articles of Stanislava Harkotová or Rudolf Sivý from [aktuality.sk](https://www.aktuality.sk/): Chudobné deti v škole strácajú to, čo iné poháňa vpred (<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/562899/chudobne-deti-v-skole-stracaju-to-co-ine-pohana-vpred/>); Opustili chatrče, no stále zostávajú tam, kde predtým. V osade (<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/538264/opustili-chatrce-no-stale-zostavaju-tam-kde-predtym-v-osade/>); Rómovia Jehovovi. Na východe svoju misiu berú vážne (<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/565193/romovia-jehovovi-na-vychode-svoju-misiu-beru-vazne/>); Rómsky splnomocnenec: Rasistické krajiny neexistujú (<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/551872/romsky-splnomocnenec-rasisticke-krajiny-neexistuju/>); Ako štát vyrába ľudí závislých od sociálnych dávok (<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/507743/ako-stat-vyraba-ludi-zavislych-na-socialnych-davkach/>) and others. Articles from Vladimír Ledecký published in the Týždeň weekly: Svet hrhovského starostu (<https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/svet-hrhovskeho-starostu/>) but also many Facebook pages, for example the website of the Plenipotentiary of the Government for Roma Communities Ábel Ravasz (<https://www.facebook.com/abelravasz/>), ETP Slovakia (<https://www.facebook.com/etpslovensko/>), Romano nevo ľil (<https://www.facebook.com/Romano-Nevo-%C4%BDil-10150093457790524/>) and many more.

The willingness of the mayor and the council as well as their interest in their own citizens including the Roma is important. Experience shows that the smaller the village is, the more significant their role and authority are, including the irreplaceable importance of the mayor themselves. Having a four-year term of office may help or hurt the coexistence of the majority with the Roma minority as it brings a change, whether good or bad. Sometimes it does not bring change at all, which may also be good or bad depending on the approach and actions of the mayor and council members from the previous term. That is why communal elections are always a threat as well as an opportunity.

Things That Work is a very loose sequel to the aforementioned The Things That Worked and, at the same time, it is the starting point of a much wider project about this topic. It simultaneously has and does not have the same aim. On the one hand, the first edition of the new publication will focus on introducing two villages that we have written about in the past. We would like to introduce their work and activities after a few years have already passed in order to show how the situation in the village changed and what the interested parties' perspective is nowadays.

We would also like to introduce two more villages that were not included in the older original publication, but that have recently decided not to wait for external solutions and "saviours from ministries" (who as we mention later on are not able to solve any problems directly in the field but they can set rules and create possibilities so that the local administrations can start activating) and decided to approach the problems proactively.

As we only had limited time to work on the first version of the new publication, we constrained ourselves to only four examples. For the skeptics and naysayers, we emphasize one thing – these four villages do not represent the complete output of our search, but rather the time constrictions we faced. In other words, we do not present only four villages because there are no other

villages to present, but rather because we did not manage to process more of them.

There are many more good examples that we have not processed yet, and they will be included in the above-mentioned extended version of the new publication. Like the first book, finding good examples was not the biggest problem we encountered; deciding which ones not to present due to our constraints was.

In this publication, we focus on Spišský Hrhov in the Levoča District and Sveržov in the Bardejov District. These are the villages we have written about before. Čirč in the Stará Ľubovňa District and Raslavice in the Bardejov District represent the newly presented villages.

To stay objective, we have already realized that, in the future, it will become necessary to also describe the unsuccessful examples of some villages, something like a The Things That Did Not Work publication. The reason for this is not that we maliciously enjoy the bad results or want to lead a negative campaign. The purpose would be the same as for writing a publication on successful examples. We realize that describing unsuccessful examples can be informative and preventive. Learning about the mistakes of others may help us avoid and not repeat them. And that is worth it.

To comprehensively explain how we processed all the examples of the selected villages, we have to acknowledge the exact and hard data from the Atlas of Roma Communities 2013, which this publication draws on. This fact does not lessen the willingness of the mayors and all of the interested parties who cooperated and gratuitously provided a plethora of useful information that proved invaluable for the processing of the obtained materials and for writing this publication.





## 2. A LITTLE THEORY

When presenting the good examples of solutions of a problem that is generally labelled as the Roma problem, it would help to concisely introduce the theoretical framework we utilize. Understanding the ongoing processes within communities and villages helps to explain the individual ongoing activities better, but it mainly enables local administrations and other interested parties to plan activities that may subsequently lead to the expected results better.

### 2.1. Planning

As we have clearly stated in the previous publication, the **planning process** is one of the primary processes to implement when solving Roma problems. Planning does not mean preparing a formal document (e.g. Municipal Social and Economic Development Plan or a similar document), but rather defining a real vision. In other words, it is necessary to have a clear vision of what we want to achieve. We could compare it to building a house; we should have an idea of what we want to build and why before we even begin. Subsequently, we can create an architectonic vision based on our ideas and start devising construction plans (which we do not necessarily need to have formally written down as long as we are skilled builders) and only then can the building itself commence. When we are building, it is crucial that we are well versed in construction and understand it, we also need the appropriate skills – this way, we can avoid many mistakes, imprecisions and errors. If we partially or completely lack such knowledge and skills, we may substitute them with professionals' help, who know what to do. For example, we are not electricians, so we let an expert do that.

Again, as we have stated many times before and also in the previous publication, there are no fast, universal or cheap solutions to the problems of the Roma or the so-called Roma problem.

*First of all, it is necessary to keep in mind that no universal solution exists. Thus, since Slovak society is inhomogeneous (monolithic) and is divided into many social layers (religious, political and regional groups and the like), the Roma community is also inhomogeneous. This community is in many cases much more stratified than the surrounding majority population. In nearly every Roma community, you'll find specifics and a distinctness which are often a limiting factor for how this community operates externally, how it lives and the kind of relationship it has with the majority and the Roma around it. Therefore, it is not possible to create a single functional model which would apply everywhere. Such a model simply will not work effectively everywhere.*

*Secondly, it is essential to take into consideration that no rapid solutions exist. The not very satisfactory mutual relationship between the Roma and the majority is the result of long-lasting processes, the roots of which are necessary to look at for at least ten years in the past. At the same time, this often involved the implementation of bad solutions derived from mistaken ideas and a misunderstanding of the nature of the situation and the reasons for it.*

*The last limitation is the fact that, in the present situation, no inexpensive solutions exist. In the same breath, however, we can add that not resolving the problems between the Roma and the majority will cost us significantly more.*

*The Things That Worked, 2012, pp. 8-9*

The fact that interested people do not know some of the ongoing societal processes is a common mistake when trying to solve the Roma problem in Slovakia and it poses a significant limit (not only) in this area. Firstly, it is important to realize that in

many particular cases, the differences between the Roma and the surrounding majority stem from social differences rather than ethnic characteristics. It is always necessary to be able to distinguish the substance of the problem from its characteristics. If we want to start solving certain problems in our village, we need to be clear about whether it is an ethnic and cultural problem or a social or economic problem and to what extent. The problem often stems from the difference between the middle class and the lower classes – in other words, it relates to poverty. To illustrate this, we will provide two simple examples again: we take a completely different approach when establishing a Roma folk ensemble that takes into account Roma folk traditions and the best local Roma singers and musicians than when managing the self-help construction of houses on newly allotted plots of land in the village.





## 2.2. Poverty as a Social Phenomenon<sup>3</sup>

The problem of poverty (not only in Slovakia) is not black and white; it is a rather varied and wide area. The problem of poverty can be viewed from many different angles and many perspectives; for our purposes, we will look at it from the perspective of sociology and cultural anthropology.

In every society, it is socioculturally stratified and its individual members create different groups or structures. Depending on our perspective, i.e. the context we use to perceive and interpret them, we can define the classes, castes, professional groups and the like. There are limitless possibilities of how to classify and define individual groups.<sup>4</sup>

Stratification as such is based on the uneven distribution of resources that a particular society has at its disposal. The so-called lowest social classes – underclass – or “the poor” are on one end of this imaginary hierarchy and the elites or so-called higher social classes – high society – or “the rich” can be found on the opposite end of the spectrum. In the middle, we find the so-called “middle class” (note: the grey targets on the left of the diagram shown below). The number of individual classes is basically unlimited, and it only depends on how fine a range we decide to use. Every social layer is characterized by certain sociocultural signs, which are typical for it (note: white targets on the right of the diagram below).

---

3 The stated section is based on our text published in POLLÁK, M., MAČÁKOVÁ, S., MUŠINKA, A., HYBAČKOVÁ, B.: *Z chudoby k sebestačnosti*. Košice: ETP Slovensko – Centrum pre udržateľný rozvoj, 2017, pp. 108, ISBN 978-80-968196-9-0. We have to note that the publication (*Z chudoby k sebestačnosti*) approaches poverty from the socio-economic perspective.

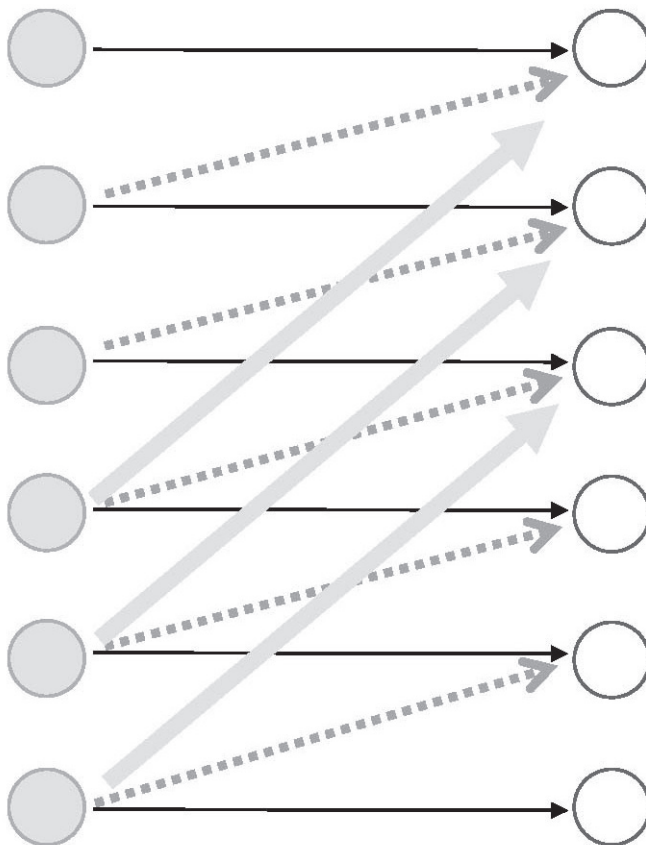
4 For more information, see e.g. a very good summary by Jadwiga Šanderová *Sociální stratifikace. Problém, vybrané teórie, výzkum*. (Praha 2004, Karolínium. pp. 173 ISBN 80-246-0025-0).

Such sociocultural elements include housing, meals, clothes, education, income, utilized knowledge, household equipment, means of transportation, how resources are invested, free time activities, type of holidays and holiday destinations and the like. It is again necessary to emphasize that the list of elements is virtually limitless and the selection you decide to observe depends on the particular case or context. The relationship between the sociocultural layer of a society and its characteristic or typical signs are depicted in the diagram by a black horizontal arrow.

The grey dashed line in the diagram illustrates “the socially acceptable” needs, i.e. it illustrates which statutory elements or signs a member of a specific sociocultural layer/class prefers or tries to attain. Simply put, if a member of a certain sociocultural layer owns a certain element that is characteristic for their position, they would like to get a slightly “better”/“higher” element – for example: if a member of the middle class, for example, has a pre-owned middle class car, they would like to have a new car (even if it was of a lower category). In other words, it is an illustration of effort and social mobility.

The grey full line depicts “the socially unacceptable needs”, i.e. a situation when a member of a sociocultural layer/class uses statutory elements/signs of significantly different socioeconomic layers. Very often in such cases a particular individual who uses such elements/signs becomes unacceptable (or ignored) in their own sociocultural layer and they are also not accepted by the layer for which the element/sign is characteristic. There is a popular folk saying for this: *He is pretending to be a lord but has hay sticking out of his boots...* An example of this would be members of the lower layers who have some luxuries (cars, jewellery, clothes etc.). It would seem strange if a clerk at a municipal office came to work driving a luxury *Rolls-Royce*. In other words, excessive socioeconomic “leaps” “do not work”.

Simultaneously, we have to note that the elements/signs that characterize a certain socioeconomic layer are not unchangeable. They change in time and space – the process is continuous. For example, the middle class in Slovakia, Germany or the UK will most probably be characterized by partially different elements/signs (e.g. the cars they use or household equipment etc.) At the same time, elements that are used to characterize a certain socioeconomic layer in the past are today signs of a completely different class – e.g. compare the use of mobile phones or the consumption of home grown (organic) food.



If we come to realize how the process depicted in the diagram above works, we will notice a few important findings. Attempts to completely eliminate poverty are illusory. It is impossible to eradicate poverty entirely. The poor are not a group of people who can be clearly defined by certain elements and characteristics, but rather a group of people who occupy the imaginary “last/lowest” step on the sociocultural structure. In other words, someone will always come in last. It is impossible to get rid of the last place. However, it is very important to attempt to attain at least two dominant trends within society.

The first trend is the pressure to close the gap between the two extreme points of the socioeconomic scale as much as possible, i.e. to not have an overwhelmingly big gap between the rich and the poor. Big social and economic differences weaken the cohesiveness of society<sup>5</sup>. The bigger the number of people who are influenced by these big gaps there are, the more vulnerable society will be (state). We must remember that, in an extreme scenario, the fall of the middle class could even fatally impact a state’s political stability, as the stability of a democratic system actually leans on the power and civic maturity of the middle class. The other trend is the effort to maintain social mobility within society, so that citizens have the possibility to move within the socio-economic structure. And not only downwards but also upwards.

In this context, the emphasis is on the term **possibility**. This means that results should not be guaranteed for everyone, but the possibility or opportunity should. And not only theoretically but also in practice. A guaranteed possibility does not mean something that may formally exist but is unattainable in reality. Let us give you a hypothetical example, in which a building may be constructed as wheelchair-accessible but the door is only 40 cm wide, while the width of a wheelchair is 60 cm.

---

5 You can read about the growing volume of investments and the simultaneous growth of economic inequality e.g. in: Sme v ére lacných peňazí, drahých chýb a príjmovej nerovnosti, DENNÍK N, 9 August 2017

Or a situation when getting a starter loan for a young family is conditioned by having assets in a value that dramatically exceeds the amount of the loan. Then, the real utility of such a possibility is virtually lost.

All the examples presented in our publication focused on creating such **possibilities**. In some cases, the approach was defined schematically while, in others, it was reached naturally by analysing the real situation, i.e. by using “common sense”.

When creating possibilities, it is also necessary to remember that the provided possibilities should not be too out of reach for the members of the socioeconomic layer for whom these are created (grey full arrow). Such efforts may prove to be dysfunctional. At the same time, it holds true that creating possibilities does not include only statutory elements/signs themselves but also skills/abilities/knowledge about how to use them, which often creates a very complicated and complex “chain” of mutually interconnected activities. Managing them often demands a tremendous effort, which not everyone can or wants to handle. Thus, we repeat that only the possibility to manage them should be guaranteed and we should not guarantee that they will be handled (i.e. guaranteed result).

For example, the ownership of a car is officially bound to passing the driving school course and the subsequent tests at the Traffic Inspectorate, which requires the ability to read and write, i.e. having at least completed basic education. Furthermore, car ownership subsequently requires regular investments into its operation and maintenance, which requires a certain stable income. Ownership of property or other statutory signs/elements is similar. *Owning a luxury yacht, the operation of which requires approximately 20% of its acquisition cost on average, would probably not be of any advantage to a member of the middle class.*

The poverty of the Roma has its separate place in the discussions on poverty in Slovakia. Poverty as such is not character-

ized by ethnicity. Thus, we must unequivocally state that there is no such thing as a specific Roma poverty<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, it is true that certain groups may have a worse position in society, which subsequently pushes them down the sociocultural hierarchy. Such groups may be defined on the basis of ethnic categories (in Slovakia, e.g. the Roma) but also based on gender/sex (e.g. the different positions of men and women or the positions of “blondes” etc.), anthropological signs (e.g. handicapped, obese vs. thin etc.) and many other criteria.



---

6 Within this context, we may say that there are poor Roma just as there are poor Slovaks, but there is no such thing as a specific type of *Roma poverty* just as there is no *Slovak poverty*.

### 2.3. On Stereotypes and Facts

In the previous chapter, we mentioned that poverty is not linked to any ethnicity and, therefore, there is no such thing as Roma poverty. Analogically, we may say that there is no specific Roma criminality and so on. Naturally, we are not naive, and we do not claim that there are no poor Roma or that the Roma cannot be criminals. We can clearly explain our thought processes and statement using a highway accident example. If a Slovak causes an accident, we never label it a Slovak traffic accident. As this publication does not focus separately on Roma traditions, culture and customs, we will not waste time by busting the myths that every Roma man is a musician or an ironmonger, every Roma woman a dancer or a fortune teller, that all of them want to live a nomadic lifestyle and like to make fires even in apartment buildings and the like. Let's go back to the characteristics of the Roma and the prejudices of the majority that may significantly influence the decisions of the order of activities aimed at implementing positive changes in the lives of the Roma in particular villages and towns.

The poverty of the Roma in Slovakia has several particularities and is often interconnected with a variety of stereotypes about this group. These stereotypes pose limits on the real lives of many Roma and, in the end, they are discriminating. The effort to remove such fallacious stereotypes is one of the main tools used to fight discrimination and simultaneously one of the key tools for building social mobility possibilities of the group.

It must be clearly stated that the Roma in Slovakia are generally discriminated against. The fact that none of the non-Roma would nowadays wish to be Roma in Slovakia is "proof" enough. Even though it is still a common belief, the truth is that there are no benefits to being a Roma in Slovakia. Even the Roma who do not live in Roma communities and belong to the so-called middle class are still considered "*just Gypsies*" in their daily interaction with the non-Roma.

### **2.3.1 What is true about the alleged abuse of the Slovak social welfare system by the Roma<sup>7</sup>**

The idea that the Roma exceedingly negatively impact the Slovak social welfare system is one of the fallacious stereotypes. Let's look at it in more detail.

According to the Institute for Economic and Social Studies – INESS, in 2014, each citizen of the Slovak Republic paid a total of EUR 4,811 toward state services (note: in 2017 the amount was EUR 6,157 and in 2018 EUR 6,326). Out of this amount, the contribution toward material need assistance is EUR 51 (note: for 2017 the amount was EUR 39 and in 2018 only EUR 31) which represents 1.06% of the total costs (note: in 2017 it was 0.63% and in 2018 only 0.49%). It is the cheapest part of social policy.

According to the data of Anton Marcinčin and Ľubica Marcinčinová published in their well-known publication *Losses from Roma Exclusion* (Straty z vylúčenia Rómov) published in 2009, the Roma make approximately 30% of all the beneficiaries of material need allowances, i.e. there are approximately 102,000 Roma dependent on material need allowance. Taking into account the estimated number of Roma according to the Atlas 2013 (402,000), we may conclude that approximately 300,000 Roma are not beneficiaries of material need allowances. We repeatedly note that material need allowance is the cheapest benefit in the Slovak social assistance program (approximately 0.49% of the expenditures for all the state services for its citizens in 2018).

In addition to the above-mentioned material need allowances, a bigger share of the Roma are beneficiaries of parental allowance which, however, are not included in the material need allowance, i.e. it is considered income for the purposes of reviewing material needs...

---

7 The subchapter is composed in accordance with Michal Páleník et al.: *Sociálny systém, skutočnosť a vízia*, Inštitút zamestnanosti, Bratislava, 2014, pp. 71 – 75 (abridged)



According to the data of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the state pays an average of 143,288 parental allowances.

If a parent of a child goes on maternity leave and the family has no other income, such a family is not entitled to material need allowance because their income from the parental allowance exceeds the living wage. In such a case, the family is not included in the list of beneficiaries (including jointly assessed persons) of material need assistance.

If we were to use similar criteria as for the beneficiaries of material need allowance (i.e. approximately 30%), approximately 43,000 Roma parents would receive parental allowance, which when including the children, represents approximately 86,000 people.

Thus, more than 200,000 Roma are not included in the system of material need allowance and parental allowance.

According to the estimates of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the structure of beneficiaries of the material need allowance shows that most of it consists of individuals (up to 62%) and that families with over four children represent only 3% of the beneficiaries. Thus, once again it does not hold true that families with multiple children exceedingly abuse material needs allowances and that the Roma exploit the smallest social article of the state services bill.

The old-age pension represents the financially most demanding item of the social system and, in 2014, every Slovak citizen contributed the amount of EUR 885 (note EUR 1,042 in 2017 and EUR 1,096 in 2018). The sum represents 18.4% of total state expenditures (note: 16.92% in 2017 and 17.33% in 2018).

The Roma account for a negligible percentage of old-age pensioners. According to statistics on population health, the life expectancy of the Roma in settlements is 5 to 7 years shorter than for members of the majority population.

This means that men from settlements live on average to the age of 55 and women 59.5 years. As the age of retirement is 62 years for men and 60 for women, the Roma in settlements virtually do not live long enough to get old-age pension.

When talking about the social system in relation to the Roma, we have to conclude that Slovakia still does not have any specific social programs and benefits that would be paid out/provided on a different than citizen-based principle. In other words, Slovakia does not have a “Roma” social system or “Roma” social allowances or benefits.



### 2.3.2. The Atlas of Roma Communities 2013

Certain prejudices and bad estimates regarding the number of Roma in the Slovak Republic are based on incorrect ideas of individuals who base them on their limited personal experience or on official statistics that report official numbers, which are unusable for real and practical planning and fieldwork.

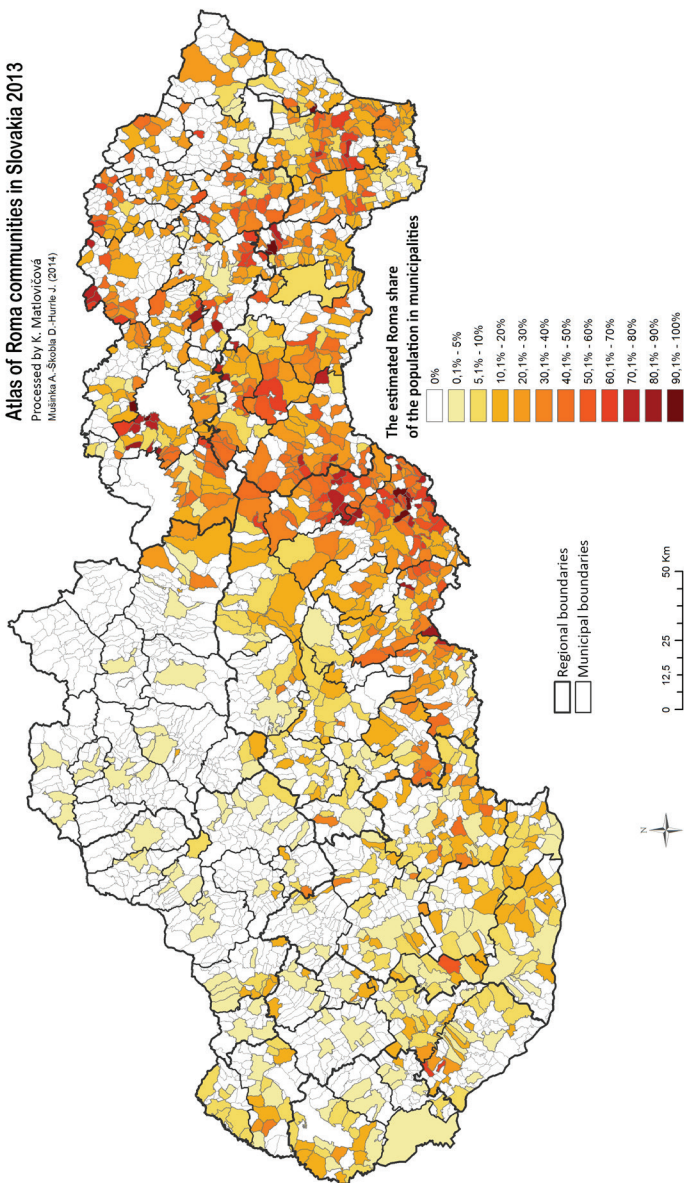
In 2013, a comprehensive mapping of Roma communities, known as the Atlas of the Roma Communities in Slovakia 2013, was carried out (Mušínska 2014). It was a comprehensive mapping of all the towns and villages and it explored the numbers and living conditions of people who are considered to be Roma by their surroundings (represented by village/city councils). The collected data was subsequently used for a detailed questionnaire survey carried out in all the towns and villages with a population of over 30 people who were considered Roma by their surroundings.

Based on the findings, in Slovakia there is an estimated number of at least 402,810 people who are considered Roma by the majority population. In context with the total number of inhabitants of the Slovak Republic as of 31 December 2012 (based on the data by the Statistical Office 5,410,836 inhabitants), the estimated share of the Roma is **7.44%**. The above-mentioned Atlas is freely available in electronic form, but it is suitable that we also repeat some of its basic data here.

The map depicts the territorial distribution of the Roma in Slovakia.

# Atlas of Roma communities in Slovakia 2013

Processed by K. Matlovicova  
 Mušinka A., Štebľa D., Hurie J. (2014)



Based on the fact that the Roma represent 7.44% of the total number of inhabitants of Slovakia, it is natural that there is not any region or district where they would form the majority. In Slovakia, there are three districts with no Roma communities and from a total of 72 districts (the Atlas 2013 considers Bratislava and Košice to be single districts, respectively) and 26 districts have a higher than 7.44% share of the Roma. All these districts can be found in three regions – Prešov (11 districts), Košice (8 districts) and Banská Bystrica (7 districts). The highest Roma population in a single district is 31.54%, which is a small district with a total population that only slightly exceeds 40,000.



### 3. SPIŠSKÝ HRHOV<sup>8</sup>

Spišský Hrhov is a village that has made a very radical comprehensive and a lasting positive change regarding the relationship toward the local Roma community. The village has become “infamous”, so that at first glance an uninitiated observer may get the impression that it is an inimitable unique example of a village favoured by those in power with above-standard financial advantages or a village that the “system” keeps as an example to showcase. None of the above is true. The village is or has been completely “normal” and ordinary, it is not exceptional and has no “political protection”, it does not have any access to above-standard resources or huge funding and the like.

The story of Spišský Hrhov is a story of local change that occurred after November 1989 in Slovakia. While many villages from the Slovak countryside survive in a state of inertia or maintenance and some are even declining, while Spišský Hrhov sees massive de-

---

8 There is a plethora of literature available on the village. There are articles, books, expert publication and the like. Some of them were written by the authors of this publication. In addition to the already mentioned *The Things That Worked*, we also wrote a policy paper on this topic Mušinka Alexander, *Obec Spišský Hrhov – model úspešne fungujúcej obce v procese reformy verejnej správy a v kontexte multikultúrneho spolužitia*. Bratislava, SFPA, 2016, pp. 29, ISBN 978-80-89356-59-1; the article Differentiated the effects brought by the locally implemented solutions of the Roma issue in municipalities Pečovská Nová Ves, Lipany and Ostrovany / Alexander Mušinka, Kvetoslava Matlovičová, Anna Židová; Reviewers: Gábor Kozma, Csaba Patkós. – In: Roma population on the peripheries of the Visegrad countries: integration issues and possible solutions. – Debrecen : DIDAKT KG., 2012. – ISBN 978-615-5212-10-9. – pp. 121-142 and more. Vladimír Ledecký's periodical articles for the Týždeň weekly are available online – Stĺpček Svet hrhovského starostu (<https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/svet-hrhovskeho-starostu/>) and many more that, due to the limitations of this article, we cannot include. We used all of these resources as well as personal interviews and long-term research that were carried out directly in the village when writing this article. Spišský Hrhov website can be found at <http://www.spisskyhrhov.info/>.

velopment. The reason for this is the people themselves and their active local administration. In 2015, the active municipal approach to solving the problems of the Roma community was awarded the Gypsy Spirit Award. In the same year, the village was awarded the title of Village of the Year award for its overall attitude and successes in comprehensively developing the village for the benefit of all the village inhabitants. The village is now internationally renowned. Its successes were mentioned by The New York Times, which published an article on the village and its positive example.<sup>9</sup>

The significant turn occurred in the village after the municipal elections in 1998, when Vladimír Ledecký became the new mayor – a young and hyped up mayor, whose ambition was not to rule or make money but who wanted to change things. As a native of Hrhov with deep roots in the village, he stated a simple fact: *“I am a Hrhov native. I was born here, and I would like to die here in peace. Peace means that people are satisfied and live happy lives. And when I talk of people, I mean everyone. The non-Roma and the Roma. And when I say happy, I mean that there are no above-standards conflicts, no frustration and people feel good in the village. Not only when they come visit their parents, a generation that is slowly dying out, I want them to feel happy enough to want to live and raise their children here.”*<sup>10</sup>

Because of this mindset, among other things, after he got elected the new mayor met with his opponent and they agreed on a joint action and decided to cooperate. His opponent became the deputy mayor and ever since then, party membership has no influence on the management of the village. The members of the municipal council respect this principle as well. It is the 5th term in office for mayor Vladimír Ledecký and deputy mayor Pavol Urda, which enabled them to carry out their visions and ideas in the long term and plan the village activities for longer than a 4-year term in office.

---

9 Rick Lyman, “Slovak Village Prospers in Partnership with Roma Residents It Once Shunned”, the NYT, 9 September 2017, available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/09/world/europe/slovakia-roma-spissky-hrhov-integration.html> (retrieved on 12 March 2018).

10 Personal interview with mayor Vladimír Ledecký (June 2017).

When 20 years ago Vladimír Ledecký and Pavol Urda entered office, Spišský Hrhov had approximately 800 residents, of which approximately 300 were Roma. The village unemployment rate was 30% and unemployment among the Roma was almost 100%. If someone managed to get employed, it was often only a short-term side job, grey economy and the like. The relationships between people were lukewarm and broken. Even the newly elected village leaders considered the economy and economic development of the village to be concerns of the state. That was the unfavourable starting point of the village, which transformed into the situation now, wherein the only unemployed are those who do not want to work and keep refusing to. How did this change happen, which included a municipal firm and green economy?

The first step was a fundamental change in how problems were approached. A problem is not “a stone that pulls you down” but a challenge that has to be overcome. A passive approach, which means waiting for things to solve themselves might be comfortable, but it is not very functional. Geological processes take their time. And that is why activity is crucial. It started with the whole local administration unanimously agreeing on not using the phrase that something is “impossible”. No matter what the problem/request/idea, it only makes sense to talk about **how it is possible**.

If anyone wants to start community development, it is crucial to involve the people themselves in the process. And involving people means that they have to communicate with each other. And not only within their small groups – the religious in church, soccer players at the match, loiterers in the pub etc. – but as many people as possible must intermix. Because everything depends on the relationships between people. That is why the local administration decided to fix these relationships. They realized that nothing can be achieved in the village unless people start meeting.

The first project was to make the village look nicer by installing big statues. This project was the result of a collaboration between the municipality and an NGO with its seat in the village, which re-



ceived a small grant for a “woodcarving course”. The village secured the wood and the NGO brought snacks (goulash and beer). They expected to create one statue. They made 12. Because of good marketing, 550 out of all 800 village inhabitants participated. The event, which was originally planned for a few hours, lasted several days.

This historical first event of the new administration, or the first one that the locals remembered, marked the beginning of the transformation of the village. It showed that things can develop and that there are solutions. It was important to maintain the enthusiasm of the residents and that is why the village started organizing more communal events – both one-time and regular. The annual village cultural event known as “Harhovské čudá a zábaviská” is probably the best known and it is very popular even outside of the region. Since its first year until now, the administration has always considered the event a **village** feast. This means that getting the highest possible number of visitors is not a priority; the municipality wants to include as many people from the village as possible in the planning process and even more importantly it wants them to have fun. It is a feast planned by the people from Hrhov themselves and for themselves. Other visitors are “only” a cherry on top. It is events like these where the Roma and the non-Roma meet and ideas for other events for the village residents spring to mind.

In the context of our publication, we are primarily interested in the village activities as they relate to the local Roma community. Dealing with the bad living conditions of the Roma was one of the first tasks of the municipality. Using “common sense”, the local administration defined what the basic problems of the community are, and these are fully in line with the above-mentioned theoretical approach. *“We wanted the Roma to be considered equal residents, and in order to do that, they have to live just like other ordinary village citizens. This means that they must have housing that is common in the village. No shacks, no illegal buildings, not only flats of the lowest standard and the like. Ordinary housing, ordinary houses means also having ordinary equipment, ordinary infrastructure, including water, sewage system, fences*

*and so on. In order to do this, we first had to settle and legalize the land (so that the Roma could buy and legalize it), legalize the buildings that met the requirements and build new ones. In order for the Roma to do this, they had to get employed. Therefore, land and work were the most pressing issues.”<sup>11</sup>*

The mayor started the hard task of settling the land.<sup>12</sup> Improving the Roma's housing situation became a key point to improve their lives and this rule is still valid for new young families. It was important to act fast and even use atypical work and negotiation methods. One of the prerequisites was to remove the illegal shelters. The mayor bought the land from its original owners at a reasonable price, and subsequently the Roma could buy them. The municipality helped with the complicated bureaucracy, paid the Land Registry fees, financially helped the Roma who were buying land (because of the high bank interest rates at the time) and agreed on a repayment schedule with them. The interest free loans were repaid within five years. Today, there are no shacks or illegal buildings in the village. Most of the Roma live in their own legally built houses that are connected to the water supply and sewage system. Some of them live in standard municipal rental flats, which there are tens of in the village and which became a common housing option for some of the village residents (mostly the young). Only a small portion of the Roma, the socially weakest, took advantage of the lower standard flats, i.e. the so-called social housing. Generally, the village and even the local Roma community considers these to be housing for the poorest. These activities resulted in an improvement of the relationships between the Roma and the non-Roma and the village learned and experienced that atypical problems call for atypical solutions.

---

11 Personal interview with mayor Vladimír Ledecký (June 2017).

12 For more information about the settlement of land see: Vladimír Ledecký, *Postup prác pri vysporiadavaní pozemkov v obci Spišský Hrhov*. In: (Ne)legálne osady : možnosti samospráv a mechanizmy vysporiadania pozemkov v prostredí rómskych osídlení. Prešov, Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 2012, pp. 198, ISBN: 978-80-555-0532-9. Available at <http://www.unipo.sk/cjknm/hlavne-sekcie/urs/publikacna-cinnost/>

Simultaneously with housing, the village started employment activities as well. *“Our beginnings were completely typical for that time and the way these problems were thought about then. Do we have unemployed Roma who are unable to find jobs on the labour market? If we stop thinking about those who do not want to get employed (we do not have those only in the Roma community but in the majority as well), the main reason is probably the fact that the Roma have skills that the labour market is not interested in. That is why we decided to start retraining.”*<sup>13</sup> The first series of Roma focused projects were different courses, trainings and re-training courses. It was important to teach the Roma to wake up in the morning, be on time, be disciplined and follow some rules. When unemployment was high, there was not any big demand for Roma labour and the trained Roma stayed unemployed.

The leadership of the municipality understood that they have “to do things differently”. The village itself must provide work for the Roma. This decision represents a significant change in the way the municipality thinks and approaches its own residents and life in the village in general. It was important to realize that they should build mainly on things that the unemployed already know (and there is no lack of that) and start teaching them new things later – once they or the labour market demand it. Another important finding was that it is important to approach everyone equally. All the Roma and all the non-Roma. We must choose an individual approach. Know everyone’s individual possibilities, abilities, family background, their problems and the reasons behind them, ways to help and the like. All the municipal projects were for both the Roma and the non-Roma. The village perceived them as unemployed who needed a little push and to be offered some opportunities. The participants of these projects found their dignity, self-realization and self-confidence. One problem remained and that was to find proper work.

The question at the time was: how to find a municipal firm which

---

13 Personal interview with mayor Vladimír Ledecký (June 2017).

stays operational in the long term and not only for the two years while it is supported by the state or through a project? It became clear that a firm like that must help the village and the municipality would have to help the firm. Such a clearly defined task had to be planned.

Spišský Hrhov was probably the first Slovak village that prepared a Municipal Economic and Social Development Plan<sup>14</sup>. And it never viewed the plan just as a sheet of paper, but it considered it as a document that reflects the real vision of the village, a document the people will know, identify with and want to fulfill. And naturally also review whether it is being carried out. The plan truly was created by the people after long and often difficult discussions.<sup>15</sup> The Economic and Social Development Plan of Spišský Hrhov became the main binding strategic municipal document that is regularly updated and voted on by the local administration – the last time was at the end of 2017.

All the activities and plans of the municipal firm were and are compliant with the above-mentioned strategic municipal development plan. The municipality knew that if the firm develops for five years in line with the approved plan, it will survive and, at the same time, guarantee village development. Simply put, the municipal firm will become sustainable.

All the external work and contracts for external<sup>16</sup> (not from the village) companies was taken on by the municipality and the municipal firm. Construction work is a good example – building pavements

---

14 Towns and villages are obliged to do this in accordance with Act No. 539/2008 Coll. on the Support of Regional Development.

15 The municipality had the advantage that an amazing visionary and facilitator Michal Smetánka lived in the village at that time, who significantly helped with the whole process. There are many facilitators like that and, if a village does not have one, they can easily be found.

16 External means that they are not from the village and not even from the region. The basic philosophy is that municipal resources stay in the village or at least the region to the furthest extent possible. So that they do not leave to “Bratislava” or possibly “abroad”.

and roads, the sewage system, gas installation, public lighting and the like. And because one day even such work will get finished, they needed to decide their next step. Naturally, the municipality decided to work in construction and help with waste wood processing, i.e. production of woodchips and pellets, which may be helpful in decreasing the costs of the production of heat. The municipal firm was economically independent and profitable from the start and, in addition, it even helped the village save money. Currently, in addition to construction work, the firm also operates the municipal swimming pool, has built and operates municipal buildings, has built and operates the village distillery, cares for public greenery, dries fruit and herbs, operates tidying and cleaning services but also organizes festivals, cultural and social events (e.g. “Harhovské čudá a zábaviska”). The municipal firm also offers the services of its craftsmen to other villages and firms for an agreed reward.

Currently, the municipal firm employs a few tens of people. *“We can say that we have employed all the village unemployed who wanted to get employed. In the times of the biggest activities – mainly during the construction season – we also employ the unemployed (primarily the Roma) from neighbouring villages. I definitely view it as a good step. Nowadays, we are unable to even imagine how the village would manage without the municipal firm. If I was supposed to be a mayor but could not have a municipal firm, I would probably resign.”<sup>17</sup>*

The overall contribution of the municipal firm to the village can be summarized in a few points. The municipal firm does not cost the village anything. It must earn for itself. Of course, it also receives funds from the municipality, but those resources are designated for a particular activity. For example, if the village needs to have its lawns mowed or a road fixed, the approved funding goes to the municipal firm. This way the resources “stay” in the village. The municipal firm does not use any above-standard financial positions. It applies for contributions for employing the unemployed, contributions for vol-

---

17 Personal interview with mayor Vladimír Ledecký (June 2017).

untary activities, so-called graduate practice and the like from state institutions just as any other eligible applicant. Creating new jobs, i.e. decreasing unemployment in the village brings the municipality funds that will manifest directly in the village. If we focus only on the Roma, the resources reflect in an incredible increase of their standard of living. The quality of their housing increased, the houses have infrastructure that is common for the majority in the village (water, bathrooms, central heating, sewage system etc.), visually it comes close to the ordinary village average – e.g. windows are replaced by plastic windows, homes are being insulated, land is fenced, many have flower or vegetable gardens and the like.

Simultaneously, it is advantageous for the municipality to order contracts from the municipal firm. As, in accordance with the law, the municipality may award a contract funded from public resources to a firm which it is a 100% shareholder in directly, it does not waste time and avoids administrative difficulties related to public procurement.

The profit of the municipal firm does not go to the municipal budget directly, but it still stays in the village and it is used and redistributed for the development needs of the firm itself or is directed to other municipal social services. For example, the purchase of technologies for the interior equipment of the above-mentioned distillery. In the near future, the municipal firm will be busy building new municipal apartment buildings, which will bring the village more resources and contracts and new technologies for the firm.

The conflict-free operation of the municipal firm is maintained by a habit that wages are always paid on Fridays after the work shift.

In line with the municipal social program, everyone in the village should have the possibility to work. The municipality complies with the rule by trying to find job opportunities for every job seeker in accordance with their current experience, opportunities and not least also by the above-mentioned cooperation with the Labour Office and their great practical skill to

utilize individual Articles of the Act on Employment Services<sup>18</sup> and the Act on Social Services<sup>19</sup>.

Thanks to the municipal firm and detailed knowledge of everyone's individual situation enabled the municipality to provide the Roma with above-standard aid. When the Roma did not have funds for fees, loans, housing investments, purchases of construction materials and the like, as employees of the municipal firm they could work their debt off.

The firm, however, battles with significant employee fluctuation. However, the fluctuation is not primarily caused by a reluctance to work (even though it exists) but rather by employees leaving for better employment. The quality of the municipal firm's employees is a sufficient guarantee for many employees to employ them. The employment rate (of the Roma and non-Roma) outside the municipal firm is gradually rising, which of course is also connected to the decreasing unemployment rate in Slovakia. The firm views such fluctuation positively and supports it. Even in cases of short-term employment. The municipal firm does not aim to employ everyone, but primarily those who are unable to find work by themselves or who want/need to work in the village (some Roma returned from jobs outside the village back to Spišský Hrhov because they feel better here).

The successes of the municipal firm in Spišský Hrhov and its results in the imaginary category of social economy attracted and still attracts numerous curious and sincere parties interested in such activities on the local municipal level. Naturally, these curious parties are people from similar local authorities in Slovakia. That is one reason why the municipality created a so-called training centre for social economy. The centre aims to provide its theoretical knowledge and practical examples of how they put these ideas into practice directly in the village using its own examples.

---

18 Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services.

19 Act No. 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services.

The method of good examples proved successful. Gradually, the Roma took on more difficult and harder tasks. People could see their results as they build quality municipal flats. Based on their good reputation, people started contracting them when building their own houses. We must state here that in addition to solving the problems of the Roma, the municipality has activities of significant size that are aimed at the overall development of the village. In comparison to the past, the number of residents has almost doubled. In comparison with the above-mentioned number of approximately 800 residents of 20 years ago, currently the village has 1,558 residents with an official permanent address in the village, of which 353 are Roma. There are also a few tens of other residents who live in the village but do not have an official permanent address. They consist of mainly non-Roma as there was a significant increase in housing development. The village prepared and provided building plots at a favourable price, which has been used by the locals but mostly by people from outside of the village.

The municipal firm was also contracted to work on these construction projects. The municipal firm built some turnkey houses, as it was already well versed in securing its own professionals for all of the craft and construction work. It is the municipal firm's philosophy to make no differences between its employees. Everyone has the same advantages and obligations. In addition, the firm also adopted some specific measures. For example, if someone wants to work in the municipal firm, their children must attend school and not ditch it. But the construction in the village is done also with the help of commercial construction companies and self-help construction. We do not even have to emphasize that the construction companies and construction workers use the services of the local Roma for many of their activities. In the village, it is considered normal. Currently, the unemployment rate in the village is only 6%.

The big increase in the number of residents and activities of the local administration has paradoxically also brought some negatives. People are starting to get "spoiled and lazy". The number of residents is high and there is a risk of losing the original countryside feel of the



village and that is why the newest version of the updated Municipal Economic and Social Development plan also states a new motto for our residents: “If I want to live in Spišský Hrhov, I must do something for it.” The future will bring new opportunities and chances for the village.

One of these challenges and chances is education. The improvement of housing and the social standing of the Roma created a natural increase of the pressure for quality education. A village, which not that long ago had a significant share of Roma children end up in special-needs classrooms (it is important to note that this was often unwarranted and only based on “administrative decisions”), now has several Roma university students. High school has become a standard requirement for most of the Roma. A significant share (if not a majority) of the Roma do not decide whether to go or not go to high school. Now, they decide which high school to pick – which school offers quality and is worth studying at.

The local government realized that too. It supports its local elementary school to such an extent that it has become one of the best schools in the Prešov Region, despite the fact that, out of the 300 children who attend, 52% are Roma, which also includes the children from the Roškovice settlement, which administratively belongs to the neighbouring Doľany. To guarantee a better-quality education, Spišský Hrhov created a 1st grade class for the Roma children in Roškovice that enables the parents to be in close contact and teaches the children basic hygiene, discipline and practical knowledge of the Slovak language. After such a preparatory class, they can seamlessly join the 2nd and 3rd grade at the elementary school in Spišský Hrhov.

Like with the local administration, the change in the elementary school happened because they changed their approach to problems/challenges. Peter Strážik, became the director of the elementary school in Spišský Hrhov over 10 years ago, and he started many activities and motivated all the teachers and pupils. We must praise him for managing to keep up his spirit. His approach at the school is similar to Vladimír Ledecký’s in the municipality.

They work together well. The elementary school in Spišský Hrhov focuses on ecology and tries to focus primarily on expanding the pupils' knowledge and on their relationship to the environment, nature, natural resources and their protection and sustainability.

Nine years ago, the elementary school at Spišský Hrhov was the first school with an inclusive educational program in Eastern Slovakia. It implemented cultural specifics of the Roma in their program and included the parents of Roma pupils in education. It includes an all-day educational system which starts in the morning and ends at 5 p.m., so that the pupils also have after-school activities and are chaperoned by the teachers.

Like the local administration, the elementary school also looks for and successfully utilizes all the possible alternative forms of funding. In the past eight years, they devised projects supported from EU funds and non-EU funds in an amount exceeding EUR 800,000. Every year, the elementary school pursues three to four projects. However, we must add that fundraising is not an end in itself. The aim is not to find as many funds as possible but rather to find funds to realize a goal and vision. Money is not the goal; it is a tool to achieve it. The school knows what it wants, how it wants to achieve it and looks for resources. Not only financial.

Taking into account the location of the school (agricultural countryside), the school is interested in encouraging its pupils to farm and helping them maintain a connection with their soil and nature. The pupils know 80 herbs that are grown on school property, learn beekeeping and learn more about environmental protection and the protection of all living things. The school cooperates with the Department of Landscape Architecture at the Mendel University in Brno, who helped them with the architecture of the school environment including a greenhouse, a pond, bakery for homemade bread, water catcher, etc. The original yard lawn is now intensely used for practical purposes.

These sorts of activities are not only a part of education but have some secondary impacts as well. One of them is financial but

the most important impact is in informal education, improving the pupils' skills, experience and contacts etc. The school organizes educational stays (all-day trips) for children from Slovakia and other European countries. In the past three years, more than 5,000 pupils and students from Slovakia, Germany, Poland and Turkey came to visit as part of the "Comenius Programme" exchange. In the previous school year, the number of visitors reached almost 3,000, which is slowly approaching the school's capacities. Pupils sell their own products, e.g. beeswax, dried herbs or fruits, which creates further resources for the school, its pupils and, therefore, for the village itself.

The elementary school has special classrooms, e.g. for processing and tasting herbs (every pupil has their own cup for drinking tea). There are insect hotels in the yard, and they are a good tool for teaching about not using chemical sprays. Starting in 5th grade, the school teaches its pupils the history and geography of their village in English, so that they are able to guide foreign tourists.

These are not all of the activities and we could keep naming more for quite some time. Generally, we conclude that Spišský Hrhov, its municipal firm, elementary school, village institutions and the like are a good example of a thrifty, well thought out and wise usage of internal resources of the village and its residents so that each of its residents may want to and is able to realize their dreams and ideas for their benefit and the benefit of the whole village. And to become forever more sustainable.



***We have asked the mayor Vladimír Ledecký to write down some general recommendations for other interested parties. We will not state them in order of importance but rather in the order they “occurred” to the mayor.***

1. We take our planning documents seriously (e.g. the Municipal Economic and Social Development Plan). “My election program is based on the content of these documents. Why should I come up with something else?”
2. We want everyone in the village to feel satisfied. The municipal office door is always open. We are here to help realize every idea that our residents bring to us.
3. We do public polls on the opinions of our residents.
4. According to a regional survey, up to 99% of the mayors from Spiš said that the unemployment of their residents is their biggest concern. At the same time, they did not set aside any money for this because they believe that it is the state’s responsibility. Their attitude and behaviour show that they are actually not bothered by this. But in Spišský Hrhov, we really care about this issue.
5. A village should budget well. Every mayor likes to boast about how old their village is. It is proof that people have been living there and they managed to survive. That is why we should use internal village resources even today – whether human, natural, cultural, historic or economic. E.g. we realized at the beginning that a busy road through the village is our first resource, so we built a village shop that sells cheese and sausages by the road.
6. At the beginning, we founded the municipal firm to support employment in the village. Later, we used it to develop the village in general.
7. The village cooperates with NGOs. Crafty citizens (some employed in the municipal firm, others from NGOs) won a competition at an international event for European folk crafts in Kežmarok. They were visited by the Queen of England and the Japanese Prince.
8. Mayors from other villages envy us and say: “It is easy for you; you have good people.” But good people are everywhere. It is important that they want to and are able to make use of their

*potential. Each year we organize approximately 20 regular activities. This year, there is a new one called “Ulicovice”. It just means that each street has to do something for the village as a whole and for all of its residents.*

- 9. The State Pedagogical Psychological Centre kept sending Roma children to special-needs schools. In the village, we helped found a private Center of Educational and Psychological Counselling. We did not have to do that. It is not the municipality’s obligation. Now, parents and teachers from the wide surrounding area use its services. And Roma children go to normal schools.*
- 10. We get involved in all the problems that relate to our residents. We start when we see a problem. The Centre for Education and Psychology is a good example. Other mayors think it is the state’s obligation. But we think: People with these problems live in our village and, therefore, it is our problem.*
- 11. We work on every idea that someone brings to us. We can see if it was a good idea later. The same is true for crazy ideas. The march for the rights of goats and sheep is a great example of a crazy idea. We realize all the ideas because 1) it activates the village residents and 2) it motivates them. The idea to read fairy tales to kids in the evenings seemed uninteresting. In the end, it was so successful that we did it for seven or eight years.*
- 12. We built our own water supply and sewage system so that the money circulates in the village before it floats away.*
- 13. We built 90 new municipal flats. As they are new, they are also a small source of income for the municipality.*
- 14. We are trying to create a system that supports tourism in the village. In cooperation with the elementary school and civic associations, we welcome approximately 3,000 pupils from other towns and villages at our local schools to attend extracurricular eco activities.*
- 15. We need to “change the people’s minds”. I keep saying: “Start coming up with ideas and work from down there, where you live. No one else will do it for you/us.” A great example of this is the cleaning of the forests. You can manage it in a way so that it breaks even. If you use allowances from the Labour Office that you are entitled to in accor-*

*dance with some Article, that particular allowance may be of benefit for the whole village. I do not understand why other villages do not do that.*

16. *I understand that this advice and these ideas are not universal, and I realize that it is very hard to push through in underdeveloped regions (e.g. in the least developed districts). It may be because mayors are still not motivated and there is no one to coordinate them suitably. However, there is enough money and human resources. The underdeveloped regions are underdeveloped because the most skilled people have left."*



## 4. SVERŽOV<sup>20</sup>

The second village that was introduced in the first edition of *The Things That Worked* was Sveržov. We introduced it together with another village and their approach was similar in many aspects but there were also some differences. They also differed from Spišský Hrhov. These were Sveržov and Pečovská Nová Ves. To better understand the current situation, we should first describe the situation six or seven years ago, when we were preparing the first publication.

For Sveržov, we pointed out some facts, including these <sup>21</sup>:

*[...] If we had to very briefly describe what the presented approach consisted of, it would be the very similar level of priorities as in the case of Spišský Hrhov – a complex approach to the local Roma community and the strong personality of the mayor, who actively entered into this entire process. [...] Both mayors belong among the longest serving mayors in the region and also belong near the top of the Slovakia-wide imaginary table. [...] have been executing their function since 1994.*

*If in the case of Spišský Hrhov a complex approach was built on precise analyses based on a nearly academic approach, in these two villages a complex approach is built on “healthy common sense”, “steadfastness” of the mayors and their colleagues and the conviction that the Roma problem in their villages simply MUST be resolved. Pavol Celuch spoke very eloquently in regard to this when he evaluated the whole problem as follows: “It’s illusory to think that the Roma will one day be Gádžos or whites. They won’t be. And we won’t be Roma. But we are*

---

20 Sveržov website can be found at <https://www.sverzov.sk/>.

21 We state the important excerpts from the first publication relating to Sveržov, published on pp. 27-38. As in the first publication, we presented two villages in one chapter simultaneously, so some statements are in the plural.

*here together and here together we must live. They are not going anywhere, and neither are we. Therefore, it's necessary to look for solutions that will allow us to live HERE, live TOGETHER, and live without problems."*

*[...]*

*The basic approach is the offering of REAL opportunities for local Roma so that they can change their situation with their own activities. Neither Jaroslav Bañas nor Pavol Celuch had it easy at the beginning – neither the majority nor the Roma themselves at that point were "accustomed" to such an approach.*

*[...]*

*They began to convince people (the majority and the Roma), to look for collaborators, resources and possibilities. They had perhaps most of the problems paradoxically with "persuading" the majority.*

*[...]*

*A second common attribute of both villages was the fact that in both villages, large "investment" projects were beginning – in both villages everything possible was being built, repaired, developed and changed. Utility networks were being built or rebuilt as well as roads, sports grounds, the village office, school facilities, the culture house, the cemetery and the like. Both villages had begun to visibly change. And if the village is developing and people have the feeling that it is headed in the right direction, they are willing to "accept" such "new items" like helping the Roma. Sometimes with difficulty, but in the end, they understood and joined in.*

*In both villages, many activities aimed at improving the situation of the Roma were carried out, but two were in both cases predominant – housing and work. Each at the same time took on these problems a little bit differently – in their own way.*

*[...] Sveržov [...] a small village in Bardejov District (Prešov Region). As of 31 December 2010, it had 554 residents (264 men and 290 women), more than 80 of whom made up the local Roma community.*

*[...] There is a nursery school located in the village which is attended by approximately 19 pupils – both Roma and non-Roma (three Roma children and 16 non-Roma) –*



*and a first degree primary school which has 30 pupils (11 Roma and 19 non-Roma). For the second degree of primary school, the pupils attend school in the neighbouring village of Gaboltov. Despite the lack of numbers, the village is fairly well equipped with utility networks and civic equipment. In addition to the electricity connections, the village has a public water system and a gas connection. Thus far, only public sewerage is missing in the village. In the village is a cultural centre, two grocery stores, a bar, a community centre and an active volunteer fire brigade. Building firms do business here [...], a maker and sewer of household accessories is based here, as are the village enterprise SVEPOS s.r.o. and a number of trade licence holders.*

*[...]*

*There are two churches in the village. A classicist Roman Catholic church from the year 1828, which was repaired in 1903 and again in 1950 as a building monument, and the Lutheran church.*

*Just as Sveržov is not a large village, the local Roma community is not very large either. Overall, about 83 Roma live in the community and they are totally concentrated in the northeast part of the village, which is called Osada ("the settlement"). If we wish to objectively characterize this community, we would have to go back to before the year 2006. At that time, there were 11 wooden cabins, or shacks, located here in which the entire community was cooped up. Not one of these houses, or shacks, even had building permission, an address number, running water or even toilets. Their users had debts for village fees and the like.*

*The year 2006 saw radical changes take place. In this year, the village handed over 12 new lower standard flats for use, into which moved the entire Roma community. This didn't involve a simple event which just "fell from heaven" into the community. This was the result of the village trying for many years to obtain a grant from the Slovak Ministry of Construction and Regional Development. Pavol Celúch today remembers that day when the Slovak Ministry of Construction and Regional Development announced the approval of the grant:*

*"This was in 2005, right at the time we had the big cel-*

*ebation of the 650th anniversary of the first written record of the village, and the day before a now-deceased employee of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, Ing. Šteffek, had called me late in the day to tell me that we had been assigned to the program for the construction of flats, but that we must complete them by the end of 2006. I felt completely joyous when I announced this at the village celebration, and I was convinced that this will be the highlight of the entire program – such a wonderful gift for people and that everyone would be happy. Well – I ruined the entire celebration. I could hardly walk among the people normally – everyone asked me if I'd gone mad, building for the Roma... At the same time, no one had said anything against it beforehand, and about the fact that we are requesting a grant for the entire village. Then, if someone were to come to the village and say that he was stopping the construction, he'd become the mayor."*

*This activity, however, was only one of the many which were already to be carried out in the village on behalf of the Roma community. In view of the possibilities, the village was until then orientated in the field of education and employment. At the time, Pavol Celuch could show off the fact that the unemployment of the Roma dropped in the village by more than half. At the time, there were 60 Roma registered in the village, most of whom were children and youths. Only a few more than 25 were of working age. The local private business then employed six Roma from the village, the village office had jobs for five Roma and two others worked in the community centre as assistants. Overall, at that time, 13 Roma were employed in the village.*

*The educational level of the Roma in the village was and continues to be a disadvantage. Not one of the local Roma has even a secondary school education. Most pupils finish primary school in the sixth or seventh year. At present, one Roma girl is studying in a secondary school. The mayor has personally taken an interest in her future and attendance because if she is able to complete secondary school successfully, he would like to employ her in the village office or in the community centre. It is the community centre, which at pres-*

ent is operated by the civic association People in Need Slovakia, which the mayor is maximally satisfied with. Thanks to the community centre and its workers, communication between the village and the community has significantly improved. In 2006, in an article for the Roma Press Agency (RPA) Pavol Celúch expressed himself clearly:

*"I recommend to each local administration which still does not have such workers, and which wants to really solve the problems of the citizens of Roma origin, that they do not hesitate to organize such jobs. This has clearly helped us in further cooperation. When I began 12 years ago to work as the village mayor, we registered 21 official declarations for the Roma. If we did not solve the so-called Roma problem or continued to put it aside, after a few years it would grow perhaps to an unmanageable size. Therefore, we built decent new housing in housing units of lower standard for them and, at the same time, we tried to provide or find employment for them. We often write letters of reference and recommendations for potential employers. In the end result, we help the village because I believe that if we help the weaker now, later there will be returns."*

And he would change nothing about this statement still today. But what is unique about the lower standard flats in Sveržov? In our opinion, it is the fact that the village, given its size, decided to resolve housing for **the entire** community. But the solution doesn't mean that it comes by itself, immediately and that it "falls from heaven into the lap" of all the interested parties. It involves a long-lasting process which begins with the willingness to change the current state, with detailed knowledge of the community, by building mutual trust and the like.

With construction, the village probably decided to take the most difficult path it could have taken for such activities. It didn't use any companies and brokers, but it built on its own resources and the capacity of the Roma themselves. It organised its own village company SVEPOS (Sveržov service undertaking), which carried out the entire building process. The fact that it mainly employed Roma is not even necessary to emphasize. Literally and to the letter,

*the Roma built all of the houses themselves. [...] The old settlement was destroyed, the shacks taken down and the site was cleared. The new settlement at the same time is located some 50 metres from the original location and perhaps 200 metres from the village office. On this occasion, Pavol Celuch remarked:*

*I noticed that the local Roma didn't take any property from the old shacks to the new flats, except for new technology (TV, radio, refrigerator). It was as if they wanted to take leave of their old life for good and begin everything anew."*

*And they built really lovely houses. The fact that they worked off significantly more than the required 20% and the fact that the village handled this in its own administration saved the village resources for the Roma themselves, which they invested into increasing the standard of the housing. In place of the requested empty flats, these were equipped with kitchen units, a stove, heating tiles, floors, completely furnished bathrooms with a WC, bath and hot water. And how does Pavol Celuch perceive these activities today? Clearly positively. He doesn't have even one illegal building now; he doesn't have even one cent unpaid on the part of the Roma toward the village. The local majority has begun to perceive the settlement as an integrated part of the village.*

*"Until then, there was Sveržov **here** and the settlement **there**. Now, if they say Sveržov, they automatically include the settlement. Ultimately, I recall," – says Pavol Celuch – "that not long ago an older woman on the street said to me: Mr. Mayor, have you seen what's going on in the settlement? The Gypsies in these new houses walk around in slippers normally just like we do. The mentality of the village is gradually changing."*

*The village company subsequently carried out additional activities not only in the village, but also in the wider surroundings. It built a new building for the village office, a rental housing block for small families in the village and a sports ground; it also reconstructed the cultural centre, flats of lower standard in the neighbouring village of Kurov and a nursery and primary school.*

*[...]*

If we went to Sveržov today, we probably would not see any big differences. At least not in regard to their work with the local Roma community. That poses the question as to why we are introducing this village. In this context, the absence of change is the less interesting part.

While Spišský Hrhov is a village that keeps “coming up with new ideas, does the work and changes things” and the like (even with regard to the Roma). Sveržov took a different route. As we have mentioned hereinabove, the village made one fundamental and decisive change in regard to their Roma community almost 12 years ago. It was a radical change – getting rid of the old settlement and building new housing for the whole Roma community – which was not accepted joyfully by the local residents. That is why, in the subsequent years, the village focused on maintaining this change. In other words, the village aimed to maintain the activities that focus on work with the local Roma community as they were 5-10 years ago and mainly not to let the things they built to get destroyed or become dysfunctional.

Nowadays, it looks like this. From the originally constructed 12 flats or so-called lower standard flats, all of them are standing, fully functional and well maintained. It is true that when asked whether the council flats are “lived in”, mayor Pavel Cel'uch replied: *“They definitely are. But that does not mean that they are in a terrible state or unusable. It is not like that. All of them are functional and maintained, it must be said that the Roma take very good care of them within their possibilities. Some families do better than others, but I cannot say that any of them destroyed their housing. When I say “lived in” I have two things in mind. It is obvious that the flats have been used for almost 12 years. For example, the doors need changing, the flats need painting and so on, but I consider that common maintenance. It is true that the majority who have been living in other municipal rental flats for approximately the same time take better care of them. They do lots of the repairs and handiwork themselves.”*

The description above needs to be explained. If we compared the inhabitants of lower standard flats – i.e. the local Roma in Sveržov and the inhabitants of municipal rental flats – the non-Roma majority in Sveržov, we would notice a big difference. While the Roma experienced a significant social shift in regard to housing, the majority of the inhabitants have been and are members of the middle class. 12 years ago, when the Roma significantly changed the quality of their housing, they were members of lower social layers (underclass). Their current housing moved them from the lowest social layers upwards, but it would be rash to describe them as members of the middle class yet. Change in social status takes a much longer time and happens much more slowly. It may even take one or two generations. In regard to housing, the middle class has already had a completely different standard of living, but also different experience and skills on how to utilize and maintain it.

If we have a closer look at how the surrounding majority experienced social status change, we see that it also did not happen quickly. To put it simply, we could say that the living conditions in the village after the Second World War, just like in the surrounding area, were very low. People lived in wooden cottages with straw roofs, the number of people in a single household was high and the utility networks and hygienic standards were very low. The gradual changes that happened in the region from the 1950s to the 1970s saw the straw roofs disappear completely, wooden cottages became a rarity and hygienic standards were only gradually introduced.

The way the village looks now, i.e. middle class living standards, is the result of gradual change that took several decades. To put it simply, it is impossible to skip natural development. The local administration understands this process and mayor Pavol Cel'uch comments on the gradual but visible change like this: *“When I look at the changes that happened in these houses and flats, I definitely see a positive change. Almost all the Roma decorate their houses with pictures, use decorative glasses, doilies, curtains and the like. They buy carpets for their floors and most of them take their shoes*

*off and use slippers. It reminds me of the processes that I remember from my childhood from the 1960s and 1970s of the 20th century. That is when we started to decorate our houses, started buying carpets, living room cabinets, decorative sofas and people started to take their shoes off indoors. That is actually disappearing nowadays, and it is getting more common not to take your shoes off when you visit someone, people do not have carpets everywhere anymore and decorations are getting simpler. I believe that the Roma are slowly reaching that standard and their lifestyle will start resembling the ordinary village lifestyle more and more. But it will take some time. And it would probably have never happened if we did not make that radical change 12 years ago.”*

The behaviour of the Roma is slowly changing in other aspects of life as well, not only in regard to housing. Employment rates increased significantly and not only because of the so-called municipal activation work, which are used less and less. Being employed is starting to become the norm for many families and those with regular employment are not seen as defectors or weirdoes, but rather as successful people who are trying to make it work. The Roma are employed in the local agriculture coop and they also work for construction companies and one family, a married couple, has found work in Western Slovakia in a regular manufacturing company.

Compared to the past, SVEPOS s.r.o, the municipal firm does not operate anymore. The village does not do any bigger investment construction works anymore, which the municipal firm was responsible for, but the local administration and the mayor have chosen a different approach and thus the firm ceased to exist. The local administration and the mayor believe that villages should not get involved in the process of creating jobs for the unemployed. They believe that it is up to the market and the government to create good working conditions. They see the role of the municipality differently than Spišský Hrhov or Raslavice (see below). Even if it may seem that these two approaches are mutually exclusive, the opposite is true. Looking at things from other perspectives is not mutually exclusive, but comple-

mentary. In other words, we can look at employment both ways and both approaches are right and fully legitimate. We could compare it to a motorists' discussion on the suitability of petrol and diesel engines. We cannot say which one is better and which one is worse. Both types are legitimate. A municipal enterprise or municipal firm is not a universal or necessary solution for all local administrations. The same is true for social economy. Sveržov just decided not to use this tool as a means to deal with its unemployment issue, i.e. mainly the local Roma community. The local administration leaves employment to the labour market and its contribution to support and develop the lives of the Roma community focuses on changing the housing quality and conditions, improving the level of education and community work. If the local administration and village as a whole keep this up in the long term, work sincerely and not only formally, it is more than probable that they will see positive results.

The village still has a kindergarten, but the attending Roma children did not impact it significantly – partially also because, in comparison to the past, their number is gradually decreasing.

While discussing numbers, in 2010, Sveržov had 554 residents, of which 83 were Roma and, nowadays, there are 604 residents, of which 108 are Roma.

For the record, we will mention the current age distribution of the local Roma community and how it compares to 2005:

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>0-6 years</b>	33	28
<b>7-15 years</b>	20	27
<b>16-25 years</b>	14	21
<b>26-60 years</b>	31	32
<b>Total</b>	98	108

The village still has a community centre that is operated by the People in Need civic association. Currently, it employs two commu-



nity workers – community centre guarantor Jaroslava Krukárová and expert employee Marián Dudra. The centre is funded from a national project from the Human Resources Operational Program. The community centre, like in many other cases, has a wide range of activities<sup>22</sup> that focus mostly on pre-school activities with little children and extracurricular activities. They have a very active youth choir with an accompanying band, which regularly performs in surrounding villages, retirement homes and the like. There are several volunteers who work in the village, often from abroad. They help with growing, plant vegetables, herbs and flowers with the local community, they even planted a fruit orchard where the old settlement was and so on.

The activities of the community centre have already been awarded several times. In addition to the most important awards for the employees – civic awards, being thanked by the people and local administrations for performances and help – the People in Need civic association as a whole also received the Gypsy Spirit award in 2010. The same year, they got the Euroguidance Centre main award for their Career Counseling to the Youth from Excluded communities and an honorary mention from the Prešov volunteer centre for including university students in the DoT program – individual tutoring for children. A year before they received the first place in the “Krajské srdce na dlani” (2009) competition.

The communal centre is also very active at the church, together with local priests and missionaries they focus primarily on evangelism.

It is very positive that, in addition to the Roma themselves, the local majority is starting to use the centre more too. The indi-

---

22 More details at the community centre's website <https://www.facebook.com/kcsvervov/> or information from the media, e.g. article from SME Vo Sveržove funguje komunitné centrum už osem rokov (available from at <https://presov.korzar.sme.sk/c/20637272/v-obci-sverzov-funguje-komunitne-centrum-uz-osem-rokov.html>), information available at <https://www.socialnaspolocnost.sk/komunitne-centrum-sverzov/> or from the website of the organizer, i.e. People in Need – <https://clovekvochrozeni.sk/aktuality/?typ=programy-socialnej-integracie&krajina=slovensko> etc.

vidual activities are now blending together, and it is possible that in the near future they will be open for everyone without any differences (not only formally). This future is now becoming a reality.

The village has an elementary school with the first elementary school stage, with two classrooms for the pupils of the 1st to 4th grade. The number of Roma and majority pupils is approximately the same. Out of 30 pupils, 17 are Roma and 15 are non-Roma. There is nothing extraordinary about the fact that teacher and headmistress Kristína Hnatková says that there is a huge difference between the Roma pupils who attended kindergarten or at least regularly attended activities in the community centre. *“It is obvious that the pupils who went to kindergarten learn much faster. But I have to say that the number of Roma kids whose parents are actively involved in their children’s education is increasing. “They push them, check homework, want their children to learn and to have good results. I cannot personally compare it with the situation from 10-15 years ago because I have only been here for five years, but the older teachers say that the change is obvious.”* The quality of education improved when in 2017 the municipality completely reconstructed the school building, which was over 100 years old, replaced all the interiors, social facilities, utility networks and the like. The elementary school has a very active after-school club, which the Roma pupils also attend. After finishing the first stage, most pupils continue their mandatory schooling in a fully organized elementary school in the neighbouring Gaboltov, which is the designated school for other villages with big Roma communities – Petrova, Cigelfka, Kurov, Nižný Tvarožec.<sup>23</sup>

Mayor Pavol Celúch said: *“We want to insulate the whole building and if we get enough funding, we would like to build a*

23 Gaboltov is 4 km away from Sveržov. It is interesting that Gaboltov, which is known for being a pilgrimage site, organizes the biggest Roma religious pilgrimage. Košice archbishop Alojz Tkáč decided to make Gaboltov a designated pilgrimage site for Roma believers, who go on their pilgrimage on the first Sunday in August (this year it will celebrate its 25th anniversary). But it is interesting that Gaboltov does not have its own Roma community.

*shared gym for the kindergarten and the elementary school. We lack that. Having an elementary school for 30 kids is “barely” sustainable. It is a pity that not all the parents have their children attending our school. But I fully understand and do not mind. If they work in Bardejov, it is not a problem for them to drive the kids there and back. But from my perspective, the village loses some funding with each kid who goes to another school. If we had 2-3 more kids, the village would have money for a playground, but we have to invest that into general school maintenance. The village would not make it without the school.”*

And the village keeps growing. Not as significantly as Spišský Hrhov, but every year new houses appear. “We noticed people moving in who do not have any family roots in Sveržov. The village prepared a few plots of land for them and built a new bridge over the river, it also considers building new rental flats and the like. “We have one problem with this and that is the locals’ attitude to their soil. The locals really do not like selling their soil. They do not consider it only an investment; for them, it is emotional. I do not criticize it one bit. I do not mind. Nowadays, when everyone gets rid of their fields and land, even selling them underpriced, this attitude is rare. However, the village does not have much of its own land, so we can only use what we’ve got.” We are adapting some unused plots near the river, we move dirt and soil to elevate them from the flood zone, we are cultivating the former rubbish dump next to the settlement and so on,” explains Pavol Čelúch.



## 5. RASLAVICE<sup>24</sup>

The first of the two newly introduced villages is Raslavice, which is located in the Northeast Slovakia in Bardejov District. The village has a very specific standing in upper Šariš, where it belongs ethnographically. It is one of the biggest villages in the district. If we exclude Bardejov (district town), there is only Zborov which has more residents. Historically, it originally consisted of two separate villages – Vyšné Raslavice and Nižné Raslavice – that merged only in 1971. These originally separate villages used to have a slightly different national composition, which in the past played a vital role in their mutual relations, but nowadays the only connotation that remains is historic. In the past, Vyšné Raslavice (until 1950) were called Slovenské Raslavice and Nižné Raslavice were Uhorské Raslavice. However, in the last Census, there were no Hungarian nationals in the village.<sup>25</sup>

In the past, the village was of importance within the region, as evidenced by the two historic chateaus. There is the Baroque chateau (so-called upper chateau) from the middle of the 17th century (used to be called squire chateau), which today houses the Monastery of St. Joseph. The classicist lower chateau was built in the middle of the 19th century and, in 1996, a national cultural memorial was announced. In 1814, the Russian emperor Alexander I was supposed to have slept there on his journey from the Vienna Congress.

Still, Raslavice are known in the area for its strong folk movement, which manifests by a strong presence of the Raslavičan ensemble and Raslavinčanik children's folk ensemble, the regularly

---

24 Raslavice website can be found at <http://www.raslavice.sk/>. Unless noted otherwise, we have used this source for the individual statistical and historic information on the village.

25 Juhaščíková, Ivana – Škápik, Pavol – Štukovská, Zuzana: Basic data from the Population and Housing Census 2011 – Citizens by nationality. Bratislava, Štatistický úrad SR, 2012. 92 pp. ISBN 978-80-8121-206-2

held Šarišské slávnosti piesní a tancov, (50th year in 2018), several music bands and the like, including Sabrosa an all-girl Roma trio famous and popular throughout Slovakia.

As of 1 January 2017, Raslavice had a total of 2,720 residents, of which 423 were Roma, i.e. residents who are considered and perceived to be Roma by the surrounding majority. Only 148 residents registered as Roma in the last Population Census. The data from the same Census shows that 359 residents declared the Romani language as their native language.<sup>26</sup>

Seniors represent a significant minority of the disadvantaged population. The demographic structure of the population in this context is merciless. According to the data from the Statistical Office from the last population Census of 2011, Raslavice had a total of 2,688 residents, of which 185 were up to 6 years old (6.88% of the total), 359 residents were 6-14 years old (13.36%), 104 residents were 15-18 years old (3.87%), 1,626 residents were in the productive age of 18-59 years (60.49%) and 414 residents of Raslavice were in the post-productive age of over 60 (15.4%).<sup>27</sup>

The current local administration and the mayor himself is deeply interested in the situation and problems of these two target groups. In relation to the areas that we pursue, we are primarily interested in these issues.

The village mayor Marek Rakoš was elected in 2014, so this is his first term in office. The current local administration has realized that the social and economic situation of the village must be dealt with comprehensively and that it is necessary to have a long-term plan that extends past one term in office.<sup>28</sup> This plan includes

---

26 Juhaščíková, Ivana – Škápik, Pavol – Štukovská, Zuzana: Basic data from the Population and Housing Census 2011 – Citizens by mother tongue. Bratislava, Štatistický úrad SR, 2012. pp. 98 ISBN 978-80-8121-212-3

27 Source: SO SR, Population and Housing Census 2011.

28 Viktor Guman, who worked at the Labour Office in Bardejov on various positions, including the deputy director post, for 17 years stresses the

activities related to green economy, some of which have already been successfully kick-started and some are being prepared.

Activities focused on these target groups have been done in the village in the past, but only a few of them survived in the long-term. The only activities that remained from the past are the primary ones, e.g. a community centre, field social work and the like that until the present day fulfill their purpose. There are several reasons why many of these activities did not establish themselves and each of them had its impact. However, we believe that the key problem lies in the unavoidable fact that these activities were not truly interconnected with the vision of the future of the village and the target group in it. We are not criticizing the former leadership of the village; we are only stating a fact. In the past, the municipality probably had different priorities and aims, and it is not always possible to do everything a village may need at the same time. The local administration does not always agree with all the aims and visions. We believe that is what happened in this village too. The former local administrations did not ignore the issue and they were definitely not opposed to it, but they approached it more formally rather than sincerely. Even in the past, they were seeking and getting external resources, but they mostly responded to current possibilities (calls for grants) instead of incorporating them into a wider more comprehensive and long-term plan and vision on how to solve the municipal problems. The successful construction and operation of the village compost site in cooperation with the Friends of the Earth NGO is an example of this.

---

importance of the mayor's role. He witnessed first-hand how the state and mayors approach employing the Roma. He was getting overwhelmed by not being able to truly help these people and even the experience with mayors who were trying to use or maybe even overuse EU funds purposefully did not help anymore. When Guman met the mayor of Raslavice Marek Rakoš who introduced him to his vision on work with the Roma, he left the office and started helping the mayor. Today, he is responsible for the Raslavice community centre. "The problem of Roma settlements will not be solved by the state or NGOs but by a good mayor," says the former deputy director of the Labour Office in Bardejov Viktor Guman.

The current village leadership is planning to restore this useful function and purposefully incorporate it within the chain of village services, which we will mention below.

One of the key priorities that the new local administration has set in this regard is employment and the creation of jobs. They decided to direct their attention in this way because the municipality had the relevant issues – housing and education “partially” resolved. In other words, these two issues (housing and education) are not in dire crisis. According to the Atlas of Roma Communities of 2013, there is a total of 39 dwellings, of which 32 are legal brick buildings (houses) registered in the Land Registry and seven brick houses that were not legalized in the Roma settlement. There are no shacks or other sub-standard housing.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding education, the village has two kindergartens with a capacity of over 100 pupils.<sup>30</sup> Approximately 15 pupils from the local Roma community attend the local kindergarten.<sup>31</sup> The village also has a fully organized elementary school with almost 500 pupils. In the school year of 2015/2016, it was exactly 468 pupils, of which 135 attended the first stage and 306 the second stage and 27 attended special needs classrooms.<sup>32</sup> There is also an elementary art school.

For our purposes, it is important to note that, since 2006, field social work has been operational in the village and since 2014 they have had a newly reconstructed community centre.

---

29 Source: Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia 2013.

30 Source: Raslavice Municipality Office: Community Plan for Social Services for 2017-2022. Raslavice 2016. pp 34 Available at: [http://www.raslavice.sk/e\\_download.php?file=data/editor/202sk\\_1.pdf&original=KPSS+2017+-+2022.pdf](http://www.raslavice.sk/e_download.php?file=data/editor/202sk_1.pdf&original=KPSS+2017+-+2022.pdf)

31 Source: Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia 2013.

32 Source: Report on Education Activities and Results and Conditions at the Raslavice Elementary School in 2015/2016. Available at the village website [https://zsraslavice.edupage.org/files/1\\_Hodnotiaca\\_sprava\\_2015-2016.pptx.pptx](https://zsraslavice.edupage.org/files/1_Hodnotiaca_sprava_2015-2016.pptx.pptx)

*The reconstruction of the community centre<sup>33</sup> was part of the following project: “Reconstruction of a multifunctional centre”, which also included the reconstruction of the attic of the municipality building, which was used for the community centre and as of 1 January 2015 it had a total of 6 expert employees. The project was supported and funded using the Regional Operational Program in the amount of EUR 150,099.24 in the form of a non-repayable loan. After the completion of the project, the community centre remained opened to provide community work and the municipality employed 2 people. Today, the centre has 3 employees under the new national project: Community Centres in Towns and Villages with a Roma Community Minority – Stage 1”. The community centre provides possibilities for leisure activities, joint intergenerational activities as well as education and help with schooling for children who do not have a supportive environment at home to children from the Roma minority, but also other groups threatened by social exclusion.*

*Raslavice has been providing long-term field social work. The projects are aimed at improving the social situation of people threatened by social exclusion by providing them with field social work in cooperation with field social workers and field workers. Three jobs were created and maintained for these projects. Expert activities were performed continually utilizing field social work projects by demand (from 2006 to 2012) and later the TSP IA ZaSI national project (from October 2012 to October 2015).<sup>34</sup>*

Currently, the village has active field work through the TSP Stage 1 national program organized by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities. This project employs a total of three employees – (one field social worker and two field workers).

---

33 More information on the activities of the Lienka Community Centre in Raslavice is available on their FB profile [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Komunitne-centrum-Lienka-Raslavice-1606408552909285/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Komunitne-centrum-Lienka-Raslavice-1606408552909285/about/?ref=page_internal)

34 Source: Community Plan for Social Services for 2017-2022, p. 22



The above described situation was one of the key factors why the village decided to focus its next activities also on creating jobs. After the election, the village had 270 unemployed and thus the creation of jobs became the mayor's first key task. From 2015 to 2017, the village created 90 new jobs, of which 40 employed the Roma. The Mayor has realized that the social activities that had been done so far would not improve the residents' situation. Unless a resident or a family work, they will not be able to create and cumulate resources. This would only worsen the housing situation, as the family would not have the resources to maintain the necessary housing standard and it definitely would not improve. Simultaneously, residents would not have the opportunity to use the skills acquired in school, the community centre or gained through field social work. The best-case scenario would bring stagnation or even frustration and a social drop. Therefore, the mayor decided to look for new opportunities and significantly improved the cooperation with the District Labour Office in Bardejov.

Mayor Marek Rakoš's philosophy to improve the lives of all of his village's residents can be condensed in these three principles:

1) **Self-help** – the village must learn to do as much as possible by themselves and for cheaper. It is basically an identical principle to what we have described in the chapter about Spišský Hrhov – accumulate and keep as many resources as possible in the village and the region.

2) **Do not compete** – do not push the existing activities of successful private contractors and companies out, but focus the village activities on areas that are not commercially interesting but that may bring a secondary social and economic effect for the village, the local administration and last but not least the residents themselves.

3) **Do things that are not working and that are necessary** – do activities that are lacking but would be beneficial, useful and necessary for the village. Beneficial, useful and necessary does not have to mean profitable.

If these principles are based on a comprehensive approach, long-term perseverance, logical order and mutual interconnectedness and continuity of activities, success is highly probable. But that is not just the success of the mayor but of all the residents of Raslavice.

The way good ideas are realized can be illustrated by the way the village takes care of its senior residents (including the Roma). The village founded a day-care centre (5 new jobs) for this numerous socially disadvantaged group and also provides the retired with transport there. Later, a care service was established (18 new jobs), which also delivers lunches cooked in the village kitchen (3 new jobs). The kitchen prepares meals for 100 people a day. The village kitchen, which also serves the kindergarten and municipality employees, gets its vegetables from a local farm, which is a part of the municipal social firm (31 new jobs). In the near future, the village plans to create or actually restart the village compost site (2 new jobs), which will close the biological circle of social services because its production will be used at the farm and the greenhouse that is already being built. The village will also help its residents by founding a village laundry. This example describes the social approach to solving problems and difficulties of disadvantages residents but also how the village gets involved in the green economy for the benefits of its residents.

Another example is the approach to the village's Roma residents and the way help is being provided, i.e. it is not just a gift while it does not belittle anyone. From the total of 423 Roma in the village, only four have finished high school. At a first glance, it could seem that it is not a lot (in reality it really is not) and that there is not much that can be done with these individuals. However, even in this case, the village approaches the problem inclusively with its comprehensive vision and tries to have these four people bring a synergy to the whole village and to help solve the problems of the local community. All four of them work as teaching assistants at the elementary school. This way, the first Roma high school students become good examples not only for the Roma pupils who

have problems studying but for the entire Roma community as a whole. It can be said that these are the first four who have worked in jobs that are considered to be “gádžo”: and at the same time they work in a clean and warm environment. In other words, they have jobs with a high social status. The majority views it similarly, as these assistants have become a part of their work space that for a long time belonged “solely to the majority” – “all a Roma can do in a school is clean up”, but being a part of the education process was something new. That is how one of the basic elements of a successful intercultural communication is starting to get built – middle class. If the middle class represents a dominant part of the village’s majority, for communication to work, the Roma community needs to offer a partner from the same social layer.

This step has another highly positive impact, employing the Roma in education brings a significantly higher amount of objective information about the education institution to the local Roma community. If they do not get this information, such an institution (in this case the school) becomes a space that the community does not understand and, therefore, does not accept it. From the opposite perspective, it means that the community misunderstands what is going on and misinterprets common things (common for the middle class) and the like.<sup>35</sup>

The local administration aims to ensure that the education works in a way that will enable the Roma youth to gain high school and subsequently also university education. In other words, the aim is to start educating a generation of the Roma who will become a part of the middle class and will be able to take care of themselves by themselves.

---

35 Another example to illustrate the above-mentioned. “The middle class” knows about the existence of stock exchanges and currency exchanges. But this is not an environment meant primarily for “the middle class”, they do not move here, do not use its possibilities and, therefore, this social group views it as something strange, foreign and misunderstood. We do not need to stress the fact that the middle class has distorted ideas of how stock exchanges work. Stock brokers could tell many stories about that.

The village tries to create jobs for the adult Roma in the social enterprise and within activities for the local economy, e.g. in the construction and production of paving stones (4 jobs). The waste transfer facility collects and separates waste for 20 surrounding villages (11 jobs). The village helped settle building plots in the Roma settlement and nearby, which is a prerequisite for them to start building new houses by themselves. The local authority does not rely solely on the activities that the Roma community initiates but actively cooperates with the non-governmental sector. In this case, they cooperate with the ETP Slovakia non-profit organization<sup>36</sup>, which is one of the most significant Slovak organizations active in self-help construction and probably has the most comprehensive experience in this area. The municipal social workers in cooperation with the field social workers provide comprehensive individual services in relation to the loans and debts of the Roma residents. This care helps to prevent personal insolvencies and family crises. Between 2015 and 2017, debts to the village decreased by EUR 10,000. Zdravé regióny is an organization that provides preventive health aid in the Roma settlement. It employs one Roma health assistant and the village employs two other Roma health employees to raise health awareness.<sup>37</sup> Some of the village's work which is aimed at the benefit of the Roma community in the village also includes green economy activities.

A key activity that brought change to the village (in addition to electing an enthusiastic mayor and local administration) was the decision to establish a municipality enterprise which performs economic activities for the benefit of the village and provides selected social services for the residents directly in the village.

The Raslavice social municipal enterprise was officially estab-

---

36 More information on the activities of ETP Slovakia is available at: <http://etp.sk/>. Some other significant non-profit organizations that we would like to mention, e.g. Projekt DOM.ov (<https://projektrodomov.sk/>) or Architekti v osade group (<https://www.facebook.com/architektivosade/>) and many others.

37 More information available at: <http://zdraveregion.eu/>.

lished on 15 May 2015. Its main scope is divided into three areas: agriculture (13 employees), construction (15 employees) and bus transportation (1 employee). In addition, the municipal enterprise employs two people as administrative workers. The municipal enterprise is a limited liability company and its full name is Obecné služby Raslavice, s.r.o. Of the total of 31 employees, 13 are Roma. In agriculture, the enterprise focuses on growing vegetables. They grow potatoes, carrots, parsley, onions, garlic, beetroot and kohlrabi on a rented space of 10 ha. The municipal enterprise secures the sales of its product over several channels. In addition to local (municipal) customers like the village kitchen in Raslavice and local elementary school and kindergarten, they also cater to restaurants and kitchens in Bardejov and Prešov regions, Bardejov Spa, social facilities in Bardejov and Prešov Region and the like. Raslavice residents can purchase the vegetables from the municipal firm directly in the village at the village market-hall. As there is only a limited number of commercial vegetable growers in the region and the significantly undersupplied demand is balanced out primarily by importing Polish production (or distant countries by the transnational shopping chain networks), such municipal activity does not negatively impact the local economy. On the contrary, just as with the municipal firm in Spišský Hrhov, it creates and maintains the resources in their village and the region.

The municipal enterprise operates with a profit. In 2015, it was a profit of EUR 18,855, and in 2016, a profit in the amount of EUR 14,959 was achieved.

At the same time, in the period between 2015 and 2017 the municipal enterprise contributed a total of EUR 47,600 to the municipal budget for renting municipal facilities, which it uses for its business activities and a total amount of EUR 67,000 for the down payment and leasing of the village bus.

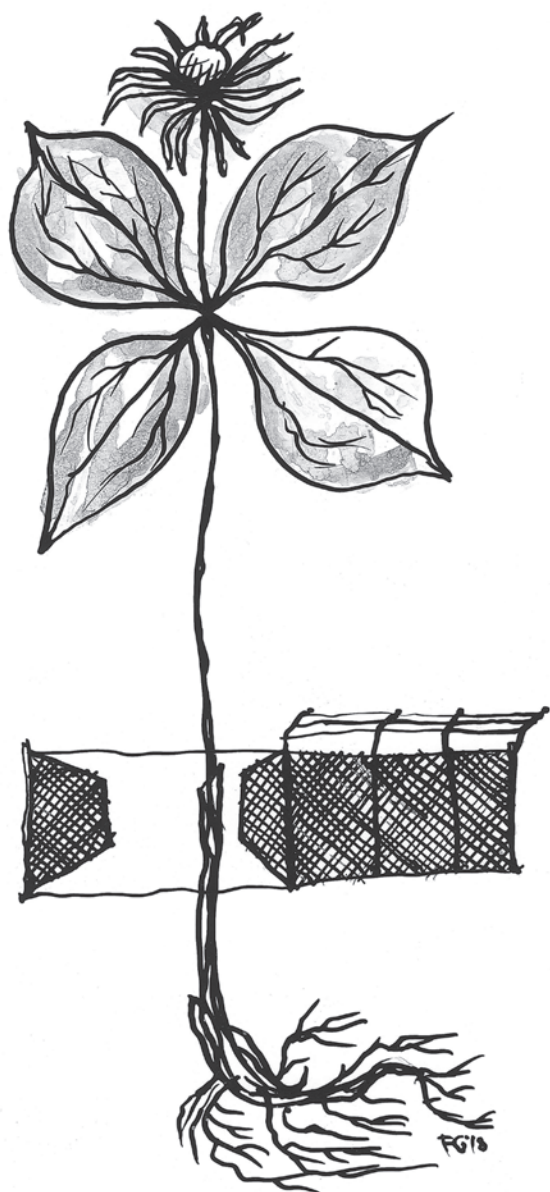
In addition to the above-mentioned growing, the municipality is also active in the green economy and collection and separation of communal waste.

They perform this activity not only for the village itself but for a wider region. In total they serve 21 villages (including Raslavice).

In the near future, the village plans or has already started the preparatory works to build a greenhouse for growing vegetables, building a municipal compost site and is laying the ground work to be able to process wood waste and produce pellets or briquets, which will subsequently be used to heat the municipal facilities.

Primary aim of all of the village's activities, including its green economy, is to create social and integration benefits. Such benefits can be attained by looking for possibilities to employ the long-term unemployed residents, by changing the social status of the disadvantaged job seekers to employed residents, building work ethic and developing new skills, abilities and knowledge of employees and improving their standard of living. The municipal enterprise and municipal activities offer typical employment contracts, i.e. employee status, which also brings a change in the social standing of these employees. The middle class, i.e. the ordinary village residents, no longer view them as unemployed, for whom "we are creating activities for, so that they do not sit at home or draw financial allowances for nothing", they become fully-fledged employees who provide in demand, necessary and socially legitimate activities for the village. It is true for the Roma as well (or maybe primarily for them). If the members of the Roma community keep actively participating in the municipal development activities, the majority will see them as equal partners who contribute to the development of society and not only as its passive components.

The local administration and mayor Marek Rakoš are convinced that if Raslavice residents have work, their standard of living improves, families strengthen, the education of the young generation improves and it will result in a better coexistence of all of the village's residents. And they are right!



## 6. ČIRČ<sup>38</sup>

The last village that we would like to introduce in our publication is the singular Čirč. It is a Rusyn village located directly at the language border of Slovak and Rusyn dialects. It is located in North-east Slovakia at the border with Poland in Stará Ľubovňa District.

The village itself, like Raslavice, is one of the bigger ones in the district. Currently with 1,270 residents, the village is the 13th biggest village of the 45 in the district. According to the data from the Statistical Office, there were 1,240 residents registered in the Population and Housing Census 2011, of which 547 residents registered as Rusyn and 43 as Roma.<sup>39</sup> However, when analyzing the village based on the native language, the picture of the ethnic distribution of resident is completely different. Up to 692 residents stated their native language was Rusyn and 252 stated it was Romani in the above-mentioned Census.<sup>40</sup>

In regard to religion, the village is strongly Greek Orthodox. According to the Census, 1,084 residents reported belonging to this religion in 2011. This is not surprising as the village is also a major pilgrimage site for the Greek Orthodox church in Slovakia.

The village also houses the Greek Orthodox Parish Museum of ThDr. Myron Podhájecký<sup>41</sup>, which opened on 2 September 2006.

38 Čirč website can be found at <http://www.obeccirc.sk/>

39 Juhaščíková, Ivana – Škápik, Pavol – Štukovská, Zuzana: Basic data from the Population and Housing Census 2011 – Citizens by nationality. Bratislava, Štatistický úrad SR, 2012. 92 pp. ISBN 978-80-8121-206-2

40 Juhaščíková, Ivana – Škápik, Pavol – Štukovská, Zuzana: Basic data from the Population and Housing Census 2011 – Citizens by mother tongue. Bratislava, Štatistický úrad SR, 2012. pp. 98 ISBN 978-80-8121-212-3

41 Myron Podhájecký (\* 16 June 1911, Brusnica – † 3rd September 1995, Klenov) was a Slovak Greek Orthodox priest ordained in communism as a secret bishop, for which he was persecuted and imprisoned.



The frequented border crossing Čirč – Ľubotín (PL) is located close to the village. It is still plentifully used for cross-border economy. The village is a member of the Association of Minčol Microregion Municipalities with its registered office in Ľubotín. Čirč is also known for its significant cultural activities in the wider region. In addition to the Čirčanka village folk ensemble, there are several active bands in the village, with Rolland, Medium, Select, Juno, Extrém and others standing out.

According to the Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia, in 2013 there were 267 resident who were considered Roma by their surroundings and the whole Roma community lives in a separate segregated part of the village. The same source states that the whole Roma settlement which consists of 41 dwellings (11 brick houses not registered in the Land Registry, 27 shacks and 3 containers) is located entirely on the land of known owners, who do not live in the settlement. In other words, Atlas 2013 considers the whole settlement as an illegal one built on land that belongs to somebody else.

This is not true anymore. Čirč, its local administration and mayor Michal Didik decided to make a radical change. They did not choose a comprehensive approach and planning as in Spišský Hrhov but unwittingly the local administration started at the right end.

The illegal Roma settlement and illegal individual dwellings create many more problems for the municipality than it may seem at first glance. In order to legalize buildings, one also has to own the land on which the building was built or have the owner's consent. Illegal buildings cannot get official house numbers, they cannot be connected to utility networks and it is impossible to provide them with infrastructure, roads, the village basically does not have tools to prevent the building of new illegal buildings and the like. The process gets extremely complicated if there is no communication with the owners and, in practice, it becomes dysfunctional. That is why the Čirč local administration decided to take a radical and quite atypical step. It attempted to settle all of the plots on which the Roma settlement was built for the benefit of a single owner. Which was the municipality.

The first step was to identify the status at that time, i.e. the mayor had to identify the official owners of land in the particular location at the Land Registry. He admits that: *“The final number of 152 owners took me slightly aback. It was a significantly larger number than I expected. But once we started, we had to try to finish. Together with our municipal lawyer, I prepared all the administrative documents, contracts, cadastral drafts and the like. Then, I took that pile of papers and started talking to all the individual owners. The basic principle was very simple. I explained to everyone that they are basically unable to use the land under the Roma settlement as we call it here, and that they will never be able to benefit from it. Even more so, if the person was just a co-proprietor and their share was only a few metres or a few tens of square metres. I suggested that they gift the land to the municipality and I promised that we would start taking care of the area. I was born in the village, I know everyone and I have been raised here. As a mayor in my second term in office, I knew well whom to approach first. Logically, I started with those who I was sure would agree. I tried to win as many people over as I could. I believed that the others would give in to the majority in the end. And it was like that. I was visiting people, mostly during weekends and over holidays, when they were home and I could talk with them. At the end, after more than a year and a half of going door to door, I managed to convince everyone. Even those last three people with the biggest shares of land in the area who had opposed this idea for a long time. “The pressure of the majority” or fear of what the others may say can sometimes bear good fruit.”*<sup>42</sup>

Currently, the municipality is the sole owner of the land on which the Roma settlement is built. As a result, being the sole owner enables the municipality to deal directly with the owners of the buildings. The second step was to create a detailed geometric plan of the whole location, with all the buildings – residential and technical – exactly plotted.<sup>43</sup> As a sole owner, the village knew how to identify the owner of

42 Personal interview with mayor Michal Didik (March 2018).

43 The above-mentioned geometrical plan of the settlement is available at: [http://www.obeccirc.sk/resources/File/osada\\_v\\_a1.pdf](http://www.obeccirc.sk/resources/File/osada_v_a1.pdf)

the building and its surface area without a doubt. If someone tried to conceal being an owner of a building, a building without an owner could be immediately demolished without any legal issues. Simply put, a building without an owner is logically not inhabited and, therefore, the demolition would not harm anyone's rights. It did not come to that in Čirč. All the buildings were identified. The fact that the municipality is the sole owner of the land on which Roma houses are built has another advantage that needs to be openly mentioned. The mayor had known about it since the beginning of the process of settling the ownership or having the plots of land gifted to the municipality. It is the certainty that ownership is permanent and it helps prevent complications that could arise in the future, should the land under the "Roma settlement" belong to the Roma themselves. Why such worries? The answer is very simple – many Roma are subject to execution proceedings and they could easily lose their land. Thus, the mayor acted on behalf of the Roma in a preventive capacity from the beginning.

Subsequently, the municipality within the letter of a generally binding regulation effective for the whole village, decided on a rent for using municipal property for each of the owners. It was the same amount as for the other residents. It was a more or less symbolic amount, approximately 25 cents for a square metre per year. Based on the price calculations for individual dwellings, the annual rent is in the range of a few euros to approximately EUR 45 per year because the stated owner after reaching an agreement with the municipality also rents a part of the land next to their property to use as a garden.

It was the first time for the Roma to start paying the municipality for housing. At the beginning, the situation was not met with unequivocal acceptance of all the residents, which was misused by the tabloid media. However, the overall experience has been very positive. As of today, there are no significant unpaid balances, most of the Roma are very satisfied with the status as it is and they have started to significantly invest in their housing. Like the majority a few decades ago, they started with their roofs

– the most skilled ones have already replaced their roofs, many houses have been repainted, they are putting in plastic framed windows and some are starting to insulate.

The village definitely benefits from this. As Michal Didik says: *“We do not consider it a means to an income for the municipal budget for the rent of property. The amount we raise this way is actually very small, almost negligible. Annually it is only a few hundred euros. It is also not about the sensationalized illegal buildings. Since we became the owner of the land, no new ones have been built. However, we understand that it is impossible to halt construction completely. People are being born, they will need to build new buildings and new houses. As with the majority, whose numbers are increasing year on year, we will also have to deal with this for the Roma. However, we want the Roma to approach construction just like the majority. So that they build on a legal basis, legal land with a construction permit and the like. At the same time as a sole owner of the land, we can start requesting resources to improve the quality of housing in this location. We are preparing a project to install a public water supply and sewage system in the location, build a tarmac access road and the like. However, these are considered ordinary and standard for everyone. If members of the majority may live like this, the Roma should have the same possibilities.*

Unwittingly, in the above-mentioned quote Michal Didik, confirmed what we have mentioned before in the theoretical introduction and later when presenting Sveržov. In Slovakia, housing is considered one of the principal statutory elements necessary to start the social mobility process. If a village consists predominantly of members of the middle class primarily from the non-Roma majority, we need to create a middle class in the Roma community as well to increase the integration process. In other words, if a village wants their Roma to integrate to the maximum extent in the village as equal partners, they need to rise to the level of the middle class. And housing is one of the principal indicators of social status.

Čirč has a bigger potential to start the process than it may seem. Even though the Roma community has not reached the

housing standard prevalent in the village, there are many other spheres where the Roma have already integrated. As we have mentioned, the village is considerably religious. The Roma are actively involved in the village religious life. They not only attend the services but also serve as acolytes. They started getting significantly more active after 2016, when the local clergymen started dedicating more of their time to them. The Roma participate as musicians in the folk movement. The most noticeable are those playing soccer for the local soccer teams – pupil, youth and adult team. Currently, over 30 Roma players are registered in the village.

The village also has an active elementary school with kindergarten which provides preschool and first grade elementary education. Pupils from higher grades go to the neighbouring Orlov. As of 1 October 2012, the village started participating in the Field Social Work in Villages national project (NP TSP) that is funded by the European Social Fund from the Employment and Social Inclusion Operational Programme. Currently, the municipality employs three employees for field social work.

Employment in the village is quite high. Not only for the majority but also for the Roma community. Most adult Roma are employed.<sup>44</sup> Those few who are registered at the Labour Office are utilized by the municipality.

In 2008, a flood in the village destroyed the unfinished local stream regulation, destroyed houses, embankments and the like. It had tragic consequences and two local residents lost their lives in the flood. The municipality started eliminating the damage caused by the flood and it performed most of the work (mostly field work) with the help of so-called activation workers. It was not a large number of people. *“The number of registered unemployed from the whole village keeps changing but it has not exceeded 100. And the Roma represent at most 30 to 40 of all the unemployed,”* says the mayor. The municipality does the seasonal maintenance of its

---

44 Employment rates for women are still very low – the village will have to wait to see a change in this area.

public spaces, mowing, construction work and the extension of the municipal water supply and the like by itself. All these activities are visible and the whole village views them positively.

Because the church, soccer and folklore are the predominant social activities in the village and the Roma participate in all of them, it significantly changes the way the majority perceives them. They are no longer an impersonal mass but people are getting to know them personally too – “by name”. The mayor says that the imaginary walls between people are slowly crumbling. *“I am convinced that when the Roma get to a level comparable to the local majority, it will no longer be a problem to accept them anymore. I will give you an example. Miroslav Miko, an amazing Roma musician, who finished the Conservatory, grew up in our village. He even has a great band here, Médium and some of our Roma and non-Roma play with him to this day. The band performed in the US, took part in the Zem spieva TV program and they have released maybe 10 albums. He married a non-Roma and currently they live in Lipany. If he wanted to return and live in the village, I do not think our majority residents would be opposed.”* This is also one of the results of what has been and is being done in the village.

In the future, the village plans to start actively creating standard jobs, whether in the municipal firm or the social enterprise.





## 7. CONCLUSION

We realize that the policymakers in Slovakia have different rights, responsibilities, positions, tasks, competencies and standing and, therefore, different means to impact and change residents' lives positively or negatively. The position of national institutions and their representatives differs from the position of local municipalities. This publication appeals to the community participants who are not indifferent toward their villages and their communal life. In comparison to the government, the possibilities at the local levels are limited and significantly smaller, which may seem as a determining disadvantage. That is true but the position of the underdog also has its advantages. Real ideas and victories come from people at the frontline.

We know that no one is a better expert on their own lives than the citizens themselves. And citizens live in villages not in the government. So where is the original potential for true wisdom? Is it in the village or the government? This wisdom kicks-off ideas for improving one's own life and the communal life, including the residents of Roma communities. Because we are not alone in the village, we are the village, because the village belongs to us all. The village should serve us but only if we can and want to do something for it in return. If we are not interested, the village is not either because we gave up on it and, therefore, it stops being our village and why should it try to prefer strangers even though they might be living in it? The publication is proof that it strongly depends on us, on what we want to do and how to improve the village life and with that also for the improvement of our coexistence with the Roma. There are no excuses; we are either in or out. And it impacts them and us too.

We know many examples and different approaches. In this publication, we describe four different villages and four different examples. For the reader, the examples present a basic offer. They may but do not have to pick, and they may but do not have to get inspired.

What is more, they can mix it up or find their own way. Maybe the situation in their village is completely different and actually requires a different approach. Knowing one's own situation is cru-

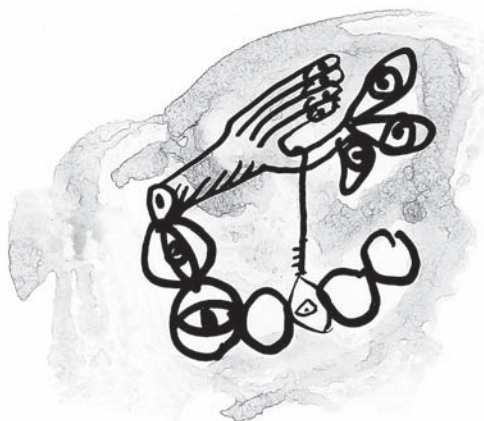


cial as well as the ability to decide. However, it is important to be willing, to start and to persevere.

We are convinced that the task that lays before the elected members of councils and mayors is essential and of the utmost importance for the topic of looking for possibilities on how to improve the coexistence of the majority with the Roma minority. On the one hand, the pressure of importance may feel like a burden but, on the other hand, it is an opportunity to attain positive results. And such a chance could be a real authentic challenge for mayors and members of local administrations.

We wish the reader courage and plenty of ideas when coming up with and implementing activities that help to solve the problems of the residents of Roma communities and their development in such a way that a dignified life in such communities is no longer an exception but a norm and, therefore, natural for the whole village and all of its residents.

That is the village the authors of this publication believe in.



## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

BODNÁROVÁ, Bernardína; DŽAMBAZOVIČ, Roman; GERBERY, Daniel; FILADELFIOVÁ, Jarmila; HOLUBOVÁ, Barbora; PORUBANOVÁ, Sylvia (2005). *Medzigeneračná reprodukcia chudoby*. Bratislava, Stredisko pre štúdium práce a rodiny. 102 str.

DŽAMBAZOVIČ, Roman (2007). *Chudoba na Slovensku. Diskurz, rozsah a profil chudoby*. Bratislava, Univerzita Komenského. 232 str. ISBN 978-80-223-2428-1

DŽAMBAZOVIČ, Roman; GERBERY, Daniel (2005). *Od chudoby k sociálnemu vylúčeniu*. In. Sociológia, č. 2, str. 143–176. Bratislava, Sociologický ústav SAV. ISSN 0049-1225.

DŽAMBAZOVIČ, Roman; GERBERY, Daniel; PORUBANOVÁ, Sylvia; REPKOVÁ, Kvetoslava (2004). *Chudoba a sociálna exklúzia/inklúzia: Skupiny najviac ohrozené sociálnou exklúziou a námety na riešenie/prevenciu*. Bratislava, Stredisko pre štúdium práce a rodiny. 114 str.

FILADELFIOVÁ, Jarmila; GERBERY, Daniel; ŠKOBLA, Daniel (2006). *Správa o životných podmienkach rómskych domácností na Slovensku*. Bratislava, UNDP. 99 str.

FILADELFIOVÁ, Jarmila; GERBERY, Daniel; VITTEK, Ján; ŠKOBLA, Daniel (2013). *Správa o životných podmienkach rómskych domácností na Slovensku 2010*. Bratislava, UNDP. 223 str. ISBN 978-80-89263-10-3.

GERBERY, Daniel; LESAY, Ivan; ŠKOBLA, Daniel (2007). *Kniha o chudobe: Spoločenské súvislosti a verejné politiky*. Bratislava, Priatelia Zeme – CEPA. 144 str. ISBN 978-80-968918-9-4.

JUHAŠČÍKOVÁ, Ivana; ŠKÁPIK, Pavol; ŠTUKOVSKÁ, Zuzana (2012): *Základné údaje zo Sčítania obyvateľov, domov a bytov*

2011 – *Obyvateľstvo podľa národnosti*. Bratislava, Štatistický úrad SR. 92 str. ISBN 978–80–8121–206–2.

JUHAŠČÍKOVÁ, Ivana; ŠKÁPIK, Pavol; ŠTUKOVSKÁ, Zuzana (2012): *Základné údaje zo Sčítania obyvateľov, domov a bytov 2011 – Obyvateľstvo podľa materinského jazyka*. Bratislava, Štatistický úrad SR, 2012. 98 str. ISBN 978–80–8121–212–3.

KOVÁČOVÁ, Yvona; VLAČUHA, Róbert (2014). *EU SILC 2013 – Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia*. Bratislava, štatistický úrad SR. 44 str. ISBN 978–80–8121–314–4

KOVÁČOVÁ, Yvona; VLAČUHA, Róbert (2017). *EU SILC 2016 Zisťovanie o príjmoch a životných podmienkach domácnosti v SR*. Bratislava, štatistický úrad SR. 86 str. ISBN 978–80–8121–556–8

KUSÁ, Zuzana; DŽAMBAZOVIČ, Roman (ed.) (2006). *Chudoba v slovenskej spoločnosti a vzťah slovenskej spoločnosti k chudobe*. Bratislava, Národný komitét UNESCO NK MOST, Sociologický ústav SAV. 301 str. ISBN 80–85544–43–1

KUSÁ, Zuzana (2013). *Tieňová správa o chudobe a sociálnom vylúčení v Slovenskej republike za rok 2013*. Bratislava, Slo-venská sieť proti chudobe. 69 str. ISBN 978–80–89149–34–6.

LEDECKÝ, Vladimír (2012): *Postup prác pri vysporiadavaní pozemkov v obci Spišský Hrhov*. In: (Ne)legálne osady : možnosti samospráv a mechanizmy vysporiadania pozemkov v prostredí rómskych osídlení. Prešov, Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove. 198 s., ISBN: 978–80–555–0532–9.

MUŠINKA, Alexander (2012). *Podarilo sa. Príklady úspešných aktivít na úrovni samospráv smerujúcich k zlepšeniu situácie Rómov*. Prešov, Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity. 216 str. ISBN 978–80–555–0531–2.

MUŠINKA, Alexander (2012). *The Things That Worked. Examples of successful activities on the level of local*

*administration aimed at improving the situation of the Roma.*  
Prešov, Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity. 216 str. ISBN  
978-80-555-0531-2.

MUŠINKA, Alexander; MATLOVIČOVÁ, Kvetoslava;  
ŽIDOVÁ, Anna (2012): *Differentiated effects brought by locally  
implemented solutions of the Roma issue in municipalities  
Pečovská Nová Ves, Lipany and Ostrovany.* In: Roma population  
on the peripheries of the Visegrad countries : integration issues  
and possible solutions. – Debrecen : DIDAKT KG., 2012. – ISBN  
978-615-5212-10-9. – S. 121-142.

MUŠINKA, Alexander; ŠKOBLA, Daniel; HURRLE, John;  
MATLOVIČOVÁ, Kvetoslava; KLING, Jaroslav (2014). *Atlas  
rómskych komún na Slovensku 2013.* Bratislava, UNDP. 120 str.  
ISBN: 978-80-89263-18-9

MUŠINKA, Alexander (2016). *Obec Spišský Hrhov – model  
úspešne fungujúcej obce v procese reformy verejnej správy a v  
kontexte multikultúrneho spoluzitia.* Bratislava, SFPA. 29 str., ISBN  
978-80-89356-59-1.

PÁLENÍK, Michal a kol. (2014). *Sociálny systém, skutočnosť  
a vízia.* Bratislava, Inštitút zamestnanosti. 107 str. ISBN  
978-80-970204-5-3

POLLÁK, Miroslav ; MAČÁKOVÁ, Slávka ; MUŠINKA,  
Alexander; HYBAČKOVÁ, Beáta (2017). *Z chudoby k sebestačnosti.*  
Košice, ETP Slovensko – Centrum pre udržateľný rozvoj. 108 str.,  
ISBN 978-80-968196-9-0.

RADIČOVÁ, Iveta (2001a). *Hic sunt Romales.* Bratislava,  
S.P.A.C.E. 318 str. ISBN 80-88991-13-7.

RADIČOVÁ, Iveta (2001b). *Chudoba Rómov vo vzťahu k  
trhu práce v Slovenskej republike.* In Sociológia, č. 5, s. 439-456.  
Bratislava, Sociologický ústav SAV. ISSN 0049-1225.

RADIČOVÁ, Iveta; NAVRÁTILOVÁ, Ľubica (2014). *Vývoj riešenia hmotnej núdze medzi rokmi 2004 až 2014*. Bratislava : Ekonomický ústav SAV. 174 s. ISBN 978-80-7144-230-1.

SOPÓCI, Ján a kol., (2011). *Sociálne nerovnosti na Slovensku*. Bratislava, STIMUL. 201 str. ISBN 978-80-8127-036-9.

ŠANDEROVÁ, Jadwiga (2004). *Sociální stratifikace. Problém, vybrané teórie, výzkum*. Praha, Karolínium. 173 str. ISBN 80-246-0025-0.



## 8. 1. Newspaper articles

GAGLIARDI, Mattia: *Sme v ére lacných peňazí, drahých chýb a príjmovej nerovnosti*. In. DennikN.sk, 08.08.2017. Dostupné online: <https://dennikn.sk/846214/era-lacnych-penazi-drahych-chyb-a-prijmovej-nerovnosti/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

HARKOTOVÁ, Stanislava: *Chudobné deti v škole strácajú to, čo iné poháňa vpred*. In. Aktuality.sk, 27.02.2018. Dostupné online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/562899/chudobne-deti-v-skole-stracaju-to-co-ine-pohana-vpred/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

HARKOTOVÁ, Stanislava: *Opustili chatrče, no stále zostávajú tam, kde predtým. V osade*. In. Aktuality.sk, 23.11.2017. Dostupné online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/538264/opustili-chatrce-no-stale-zostavaju-tam-kde-predtym-v-osade/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

HARKOTOVÁ, Stanislava: *Rómovia Jehovovi. Na východe svoju misiu berú vážne*. In. Aktuality.sk, 05.03.2018. Dostupné online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/565193/romovia-jehovovi-na-vychode-svoju-misiu-beru-vazne/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

LYMAN, Rick: *Slovak Village Prospers in Partnership with Roma Residents It Once Shunned*. In.: The NYT, 9.september 2017. Dostupné online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/09/world/europe/slovakia-roma-spissky-hrhov-integration.html> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

KUSÁ, Zuzana: *Mládencom expertným súcim na slovo*. In. Pravda 27.10.2017. Dostupné online: <https://nazory.pravda.sk/analyzy-a-postrehy/clanok/446209-mladencom-expertnym-sucim-na-slovo/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

LEDECKÝ, Vladimír: *Svet hrhovského starostu*. In: Týždeň. Dostupné online: <https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/svet-hrhovskeho-starostu/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

SITA: *Počet ľudí na Slovensku ohrozených chudobou stúpol*. In Pravda 27.04.2017. Dostupné online: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/427849-pocet-ludi-na-slovensku-ohrozenych-chudobou-stupol/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

SIVÝ, Rudolf: *Ako štát vyrába ľudí závislých od sociálnych dávok*. Aktuality.sk, 01.08.2017. Dostupné online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/507743/ako-stat-vyraba-ludi-zavislych-na-socialnych-davkach/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

SIVÝ, Rudolf: *Rómsky splnomocnenec: Rasistické krajiny neexistujú*. Aktuality.sk, 11.01.2018. Dostupné online: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/551872/romsky-splnomocnenec-rasisticke-krajiny-neexistuju/> (navštívené 12.3.2018).

TASR: *Vo Sveržove funguje komunitné centrum už osem rokov*. Sme.sk, 29.08.2017. <https://presov.korzar.sme.sk/c/20637272/v-obci-sverzov-funguje-komunitne-centrum-uz-osem-rokov.html> (navštívené 12.3.2018).









Authors: Mgr. Alexander Mušinka, PhD. – RNDr. Miroslav Pollák  
Title: The Things That Work. Examples of municipalities that successfully coexist with the Roma  
Reviewers: Prof. RNDr. Ivan Bernasovský, DrSc.  
PhDr. Jaroslav Skupnik, PhD.  
Cover: Fero Guldán  
Illustrations: Fero Guldán  
Translation: Translata, spol. s.r.o. from the Slovak original „Darí sa“, published by the civic association Beautiful Spis, Levoča - Prešov, 2018  
Publisher: BEAUTIFUL SPIS Civic Association, Levoča  
Edition: First, 2020  
Print: VMV Prešov

**ISBN 978-80-89975-04-4**