"Housing solves it all?

Lessons from informal Roma settlements in Slovakia"

Katarína Smatanová*

(*) Institute of Land Use and Urban Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Slovak University of Technology, Bratislava, Slovak Republic; katarina.smatanova@stuba.sk

Abstract

Issues of informal settlements and low-income neighbourhoods are usually thought as a by-product of turbulent development of urban areas in developing countries. However, in Slovakia, country in the middle of the Europe and since 2004 also member of European Union, one in five cities involves within its wider boundaries an informal settlement, in which the majority of population are of Roma ethnicity. The emergence of an informality boom is closely linked to the turbulent transition processes after the fall of communism regime, when most of the Roma living in the state flats after 1989 lost their homes, and setting up an informal living was for many families the only option available.

Currently, there live more than 300,000 people in informal settlements (8% of country's population), in catastrophic living conditions beyond poverty line, on the edge of social exclusion. It is difficult to classify these settlements as just 'ghettos', or 'slums'. The common denomination of all are high levels of poverty, informality, spatial segregation and ethnic difference to the mainstream Slovak society.

Paper firstly provides brief overview of the situation of informal Roma settlements, taking into account their wider societal implications - negative attitudes that are rooted among the Slovak society towards any help targeting these informal areas. In the second part, paper examines historical development of Roma informal areas, unveiling housing policies that served as tools for 'assimilation'. Paper then moves on by scrutinising interventions that have been put through by governments in last decade in order to address the needs of these areas, in particular state system of municipal rental housing. Finally, paper summarises findings from the qualitative research, comparing delivery of state housing model and non-governmental housing programme, with an aim to provide insights into the process of housing delivery and day-to-day realities and needs of its recipients.

Paper concludes that emergence of informal Roma settlements in Slovakia is the results of long-term state politics of regulating and delivering housing for 'un-wanted' in the outskirts of Slovak towns, where the 'otherness' cannot be seen. Also, there is a threat

that current institutional system reinforces these practices. Research also implies that NGO programme seems to be more successful; being based on empowerment principles, involving also other activities that benefit the whole community, especially in breaking the poverty trap of inhabitants of informal Roma areas in Slovakia.

1. Introduction

Issues of informal settlements and low-income neighbourhoods are usually thought as a by-product of turbulent development of urban areas in developing countries. However, in Slovakia, country in the middle of the Europe and since 2004 also member of European Union, one in five cities involves within its wider boundaries an informal settlement, in which the majority of population are of Roma ethnicity, suffering from high levels of poverty, bad housing stock, lack of access to basic infrastructure.

What makes the situation seriously urgent is the fact that despite EU pressures and government's interests in addressing these problems, especially by provision of new, better housing for their inhabitants people, actual living conditions have been getting worse. Moreover, compared to 2004, the number of segregated areas as well as people living in them has recently significantly increased (UNDP, 2014).

Among public (non-Roma majority) as well as professionals and decision-makers is the situation perceived as "unsolvable". Popularised by media, often delivering 'arguments', in which the housing is used as a tool of stereotyping and stigmatisation of Roma population living in informal areas: among others also (1)"'Roma are ruining new housing delivered to them in informal areas", '(2) "Roma living in informal areas are living together, they want to group and share spaces"; (3) "Roma from informal settlements are unwilling to adapt to mainstream non-Roma living strategies"[1]; thus spreading the idea that these areas and their low status are the consequence of voluntary choice of its inhabitants, of their personal failures and free choices of disobeying norms (see also Loran, 2007).

Another part of the problem is rooted in general negative attitudes of non-Roma majority towards any help targeting Roma, especially when it comes to housing - as many non-Roma are struggling in mortgage market, the delivery of 'social housing' targeting Roma is in general perceived as 'unfair', as non-Roma Slovaks are frustrated by their own economic and social problems (Moravec, 2006). Furthermore, as implied poll from 1995 74% of respondents stated that would welcome restrictions on the state support

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[1] see for instance here: http://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1742424_takto-si-romovia-znicili-byvanie-v-ziline

provided to Roma (GfK, 1995), so there is this 'consensus' within Slovak society that unfavourable Roma situation is the consequence, a punishment for their immorality and disobedience, there is general conviction that Roma do not deserve special help and enormous financial support.

'House' and housing delivery is thus perceived as a tool of injustice and 'inflammatory stimulus' for ethnic conflicts, while day-to-day situation in informal Roma areas is getting worse. We focused our research on firstly on understanding what are the processes that has led to development of these informal 'pockets of poverty', and then, on the extent are government and NGO's programme effective in addressing needs of these areas by providing insights into operation of housing delivery processes and unveiling the issues that lie behind the emergence of these popular 'myths'.

The first part of this paper provides a brief overview of current situation, defining the scope of the problem. In the second part, analysis of the historical policies and strategies that resulted into the current situation, is provided. The third part reveals the findings from the on-site research, in which two municipalities where new housing has been delivered were examined, shedding the light on the main research objectives. In the final part will be discussed the findings from the wider perspectives and outline suggestions for the future research.

2. Methodology

This article is based on the data researched as a part of author's Master Thesis in Newcastle University and consequent PhD study at Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava.

The desk and archive analysis of the historical traits of emergence of these informal settlements and the institutional background is supplemented by qualitative examination of their effectiveness on the 2 municipalities: one, in where state housing was delivered(Nálepkovo), and the other where housing was delivery by NGO organisation

(Rankovce; currently the only one NGO housing programme in Slovakia) via on-site observations and semi-structured interviews.

The main research aim was to answer the question:

To what extent are housing programmes successful in addressing problems and needs of informal Roma communities in Slovakia?

In order to achieve wider perspective on the issue, main question is broken to sub−parts, as follows:

- What are the needs and requirements of informal Roma communities with regard to housing?

- How does current institutional system of housing delivery operate? How does non-governmental system operate?

- To what extent are these programmes effective and appropriate with regard to its targeting group?

Data were collected via on-site observations and number of semi-structured interviews in years 2010-2015 with various stakeholders: Roma families involved in programme, LA members, decision-makers, local non-Roma community, social workers or other relevant stakeholders affected by the process of housing delivery or its results in these areas. Comparison of state housing programme and programme delivered by NGO (ETP Slovakia and Association For Better Life) allows to capture more complex picture and help in better understanding of these informal areas, and nature of interventions that are required ignored to improve living conditions of its inhabitants.

The case studies were selected as follows:

Case study 1: Nálepkovo

Municipality of Nálepkovo seems to be a 'testing ground' for the various housing programmes. First housing of 120 units was delivered in 1990s by international donor organisation. Afterwards, in 2006 and 2009,t here were provided also two more housing

construction via state funded model of municipal rental housing (see Table1), delivering 38 more units.

Table 1: Municipality of Nálepkovo.
LEFT: Nálepkovo and location of informal Roma settlements emerging around provision of state housing. Adopted from Google Earth Maps.
RIGHT: Locality no.4, provision of new housing. By author 10.6.2011

Case study 2: Rankovce

Housing programme in Rankovce is led by NGOs 'For Better Life' and ETP Slovakia, and in 2014 was also awarded European Society Prize. The programme stems on an idea of self-construction of individual family houses (incremental housing) funded via micro-mortgages. Families are involved into the whole process of planning, preparation and constructions, through which they are also delivered social services and informal education. Currently there are 6 houses finished and another 20 houses are in the process of construction (see Table2).

Table 2: Municipality of Rankovce.
LEFT: Rankovce and location of informal Roma settlement. Adopted from Google Earth Maps.

3. Setting the context

Slovakia is a relatively small country of 49,000,000 km^2 located in the middle of the Europe. The current population of the country is 5,500,000 , from which Roma consist around 10%, being thus the main ethnic minority.

In contrast to other EU countries with larger share of nomadic Roma population, the character of the situation in Slovakia is different - the idea of 'proper house' eroded the politics towards Roma already in 18th C. Since then, Roma have been settled down for more than 200 years now.

The most recent territorial mappings of Roma residential patterns published in Atlas of Roma communities (UNDP, 2014) show that 40% of Roma live integrated among the majority of the society. The rest, almost 300,000 people, live in 800 informal segregated Roma concentrations, in 2851 of Slovak towns. Situation has an evolving trend. Comparing data from year 2004 (Jurásková et al. 2004) to the preliminary report from 2013, there has been increase of almost 70% in terms of population, predominantly of Roma ethnicity, living in completely spatially segregated and isolated areas, while number of these areas tripled (UNDP, 2014).

To put it shortly, Hurrle (2006) depicts the overall environment in these informal areas as the 'Third World in the First World'. The physical structure of the fabric in these areas is deteriorated, with very low technical status of building stock, as more than 25% of the residents of such areas (Jurásková, 2004) live in inappropriate illegal dwellings built from mud, soil, wood, or other construction scraps. The living conditions of its residents display all factors of deprivation and social exclusion: poverty, level of unemployment reaching up to 100%, low education level, socio-pathological phenomena (crime, alcohol abuses), and dependency on welfare help (Filadelfiová et al., 2014). Another problem is also the informality of the dwellings and whole areas, and related lack of access to basic infrastructure and services (for instance only 60% have access to water). Facilities and amenities are usually located in non-Roma parts of the urban structures (UNDP, 2014).

Also, most of these areas are located in already marginalised and less-thriving regions of easter Slovakia. Thus, the segregation of Roma is supported by marginalisation of the whole region. Radičová (2001) calls this phenomena 'double marginalisation' and warns that this situation often results into definitive social exclusion of Roma community from overall economic and social life of major population.

Even though there are difference among the settlements, in general, as researchers argue (Vašečka et al., 2003, Mušinka and eds., 2012), the residents of these areas are trapped in multi-generational circles of poverty - neighbourhood effect in these areas is so strong that vertical mobility towards up is in many cases almost impossible. Inability to escape these areas is also supported by fact that Roma communities are in general unable to form their own civic-associations or social movements. Researches (Radičová, 2001) also revealed that in Roma settlements there exist no solidarity, nor the interest on public (common) things, because solidarity and social life are limited to family relations, while individuals families refuse to recognise one authority that would represent the whole settlements. As Marcinčin and Marcinčinová (2009) note, without the initiative of the 'outsiders' - non Roma majority, there does not exist any formal organisations, clubs and civil society enterprises. These facts reflect the enormous heterogeneity inside of (seemingly homogenous) Roma settlements and complete lack of social networks and social capital.

4. Systems of housing provisions as a tool for regulation of Roma communities in Slovakia
History - land tenure as a tool of forced Roma regulation
Laws and policies regulating housing and settling down of Roma community have been in Slovakia intensively issued already since the second half of the 18th Century. However, in most of the cases these regulation were by their very nature assimilative and led to the deepening of spatial and social segregation.

First written mention about Roma in the territory of current Slovakia comes from 15th C, as of travelling communities of artists, musicians and smiths. Nomadic way of life aroused resentment; the Enlightenment rule of Maria Theresa brought the first emergence of the regulation of Roma movements with an aim to settle down all Roma and to involve them into economic life and productive work, completing thus the picture of 'Slovak rural landsacpes'. These regulations have indirect character, such as a law to call Roma 'New-farmers/peasants', as well as direct spatial implications: Law from 1888 by repressive measures allocated nomadic Travellers as well as settled Roma areas on the urban/rural peripheries. At the turn of the 19th C, several laws banning 'lewd vagrancy' of Roma appeared, by limiting issuing travelling documents or, providing financial incentives for starting a businesses. Act. No. 117 from 1927 fill the picture of 'modern and trendy Slovakia' - by total prohibition of access of Roma to municipalities located in the territory of Tatra Mountains, most iconic Slovakia's mountains, and to cities, which had within their boundaries spas.

During 1970s, in order to speed up 'Roma integration' (Barany, 2000), was the main of politics targeting Roma to 'disperse' low−skilled Roma population from the rural settlements to the mainstream population. As a consequence of mere administrative decision, Roma were violently relocated to the urban areas, followed by burning down and liquidation of their previous rural dwellings (Zoon, 2001). Placed into the small flats in new prefabricated panel apartment houses in the Czech Republic, Roma became 'black beast' for the majority urban population (Mušinka and Kolesárová, 2012). First time coming across with the concept of 'paid' housing, and modern equipment, as flash toilets, Roma struggled to survive in modern environment what had reflected on the occasional damages of the new flats (Kostelancik, 1989). As Lajčáková (2010) argues, these experiences laid current negative stereotyping that majority share about Roma as 'maladaptive' and 'retarded'. Furthermore, as Barany (2000:421) recognises, *the cost of Romani integration was high, however, not only in terms of state expenditure and growing interethnic tensions, but also in the lost of traditions'.* In Czech Republic, the number of Roma increased three times, while their main destination were the historic city centres.

In Slovakia these processes meant that more culturally-forwarded Roma left the settlements, but the population of this ethnicity in under-developed and isolated settlements continued to grow (Jurová, 2002:69).

This situation of the Roma population rapidly worsened after the fall of communism regime in 1989. As the paternalistic socialistic state support fragmented, most of the Roma were not able to assert their position in new highly competitive capitalistic society (Radičová, 2001). The low-skilled labour in urban areas was no longer superficially maintained, Roma lost their jobs, incomes and also roof over their heads, as they were not able to pay rent (Hojsík, 2010). With the consequent split of Czechoslovakia in 1992, most of the Roma who were relocated to Czech suddenly came back to their homes in Slovakia (ibid.). The fall of communism also evoked the restitutions and land transformation processes, in order to return nationalized agrarian land, or land at the urban fringes back to its pre-war owners, or current occupiers. However, because of illiteracy and lack of information amongst Roma, land was distributed unequally, by-passing Roma settlements. Many Roma in need found a shelter in the informal over-crowded dwellings with their relatives, or used any available resources to build a dwelling by themselves, often on private property (FRA, 2009).

Thus, at the end of the 1990s, most of the Roma living in Slovakia were found on the fringe of the society. Squatting on private land, segregated and dependent on state support most of the communities became socially excluded (Zoon, 2001).

After 2000s

After 1989, transition of political and economic system brought not only new social, economic and environmental challenges, but also requirements for instruments and methods allowing the integration of all these dimensions and market-based ideology. Thus, pre-occupied with setting up new system, it was not until 2000s, when Slovak Republic also started to deal with the deprivation of Roma communities. This was in particular since becoming an EU member state. As in 2004 started the preparation for Roma Inclusion Decade 2005-2015, the situation of Roma settlements became also on

EU priority list (Mušinka, 2012a) and thus under the pressure of supranational institution, several national strategies have been adopted (Hurrle, 2006).

At the same time, increasing body of researches providing insights into processes of exclusion, discrimination and poverty of Roma on both, micro- and macro-level (see for instance Radičová, 2001, Zoon, 2001, Vašečka et al., 2003)), emerged. Particularly considerable project activity filling the gaps of state disinterest was promoted by the local civic association. A review by the European Union and the Open Society Foundation identified over 900 projects in years 1993-2003, implemented by NGOs, which had been targeted to Roma (www.osf.sk).

Stemming on both of these streams of academic and practical information, the first national strategies occurred. However, in reality, due to lack of financing (depended on external fundings and grant schemes), weak political will, unclear departmental responsibilities, and lack of concrete functioning tools, the programme did not succeed. What have been left are fragmented pieces of projects for social work, employment and housing provision, which were under responsibilities of various state bodies and did not provide any systematic set of instruments. Since that, government has adopted several new conceptions and strategies, re-formulating approach towards interventions for Roma, however, still struggling to put them into practice.

Currently, state-supported housing delivery is the main tool that is available to address the bad living conditions of segregated Roma communities. National provision of housing has been since 1998 covered by "Programme of housing development". Within framework of this program, Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development (MTCRD) provides subsidies for local municipalities for the acquisition of municipal rental apartments. Programme is fore mostly aimed to fill in the deficit in public sector social housing, as due to restitution processes after 1989, only small percentage of housing stock remained in public administration. 'Long-term housing conception of

marginalised society groups' (MTCRD, 2005) obliged the housing programme to provide also solution for addressing bad housing conditions in Roma settlements.

		2001	2004	2006		
COMMON STANDARD HOUSING	state grant - local resources		30% - 70%	**30% - 70%**	25% -75%	20% - 80%
	max floor area		80 m²	50 m²	50-65 m²	65 - 80 m²
	max construction costs per 1 m²		714 eur /m²	750 eur/m²	726 eur /m²	700 eur/m²
	equipment		wall and ceiling finishing (e.g.plaster, wallpaper) flooring (e.g.ceramic tiles, wood or pvc parquets) tube or shower stall bathroom sink flush toliet water taps kitchen unit with gass/electric cooker heating system, heating elements with regulation option windows complying higher-standards insulation requirements safety-fire front doors			

		2001	2004	2006		
LOW STANDARD HOUSING	state grant - local resources	80% - 20%	80% - 20%	80% - 20%	75% - 25%	
	max floor area	1R flat: 40m²; 2R flat: 56m²	60 m²	40 m² max 4 residents	40 - 60 m² max 7 residents	
	max construction costs per 1 m²	233 eur/m²	358 eur/m²	396 eur/m²	376 eur/m²	
	equipment	wall and ceiling plaster finishing flooring - cement layer sink with oil wall coating around water taps for cold water local heating system	indoor wall and ceiling plaster finishing flooring at least in form of cement layer sink with oil wall coating around equipment for prudcing hot water shower stall flush toilet technical opportunity for installation of cooking equipment local heating system	indoor wall and ceiling plaster finishing, and oil coating around the sink flooring at least in form of cement layer connection of flat on the potable water system with techincal option for installation of cooking equipment, hot water generator, and bathroom sanitation sewage system with technical option for installation of flush toilet technical option for instalation of local heating elements		

Table 3: Comparison of development of municipal housing 'standards'; data adopted from related policies.

In 2005 government issued a specific document that attempts to address unsatisfactory living conditions through housing provision in particular - 'Long-term housing conception for marginalised communities' (MTCRD, 2005). Document recommends using instrument of state-funded municipal rental housing programme to address the problems with unsatisfactory housing stock. Document also recommends specific housing typolo-

gies - apartments in 1-2 storey buildings, with individual flats accessible from exterior corridors.

The programme is now governed by Law no. 443/2010 (SR, 2010) on subsidies for housing development and social housing. The Law adjusts subsiding of construction of municipal rental apartments, available to local authorities and selected non-governmental organisations. Two types of apartments are delivered - of normal standard (max flat area up to 80m^2) and of lower standard (max flat area up to 60m^2). Due to the higher state financial subsidies for its construction (80%), this type targets Roma communities (see Table 3). However, this type is not only lower in floor area, but delivers mainly simple, unfurnished flats. Claimed to support participation processes, the rest 20% of the construction costs are intended to be worked off by the future Roma tenants of these apartments.

Critics of the state housing programme

There currently does not exist any systematic research stream focused on Roma housing, although several anthropologist researchers depict the situation in the settlements where the housing delivered in 1990s as a 'ghetto−like' zones and areas of deprivation (Zoon, 2001, Hirt and Jakoubek, 2008). The only evaluation targeting specifically housing programmes was conducted in the form of quantitative questionnaires by Hojsík (2008). The research examined 68 municipalities that have in 2001 to 2006 received subsidies for addressing housing needs of their local Roma communities. The research has its limitation in the absence of qualitative approach, and in the targeting only representatives of LA, and not concerned Roma community. Despite the threat of results being deceptive, the presented findings shed the only light on current practices of LA. This evaluation pointed out that almost 92% of new rental housing 'conserved' or deepened spatial segregation. There have been reported several examples of forced Roma evictions and attempts to prevent Roma from obtaining properties in closer proximities to non-Roma parts. As argued by CRI report (2009), there are some municipalities that actively create ghettos. As the deepening spatial segregation is closely linked to

deepening poverty and overall social and economic exclusion, the question of the purpose of such construction arises.

5. 'Demystification' - on-site findings

From the analysed case studies of Nálepkovo and Rankovce there was collected great amount of data, which will be in this chapter condensed in order to focus on outlining crucial issues that are arising from the processes of housing delivery. The chapter will firstly provide findings 'de-mystifying' popular myths about Roma and housing and then reveal some general issues that arouse from the field research.

MYTH 1: "Roma are ruining new housing delivered to them in informal areas"

It must be noted that especially in area of Nálepkovo there have been found several examples of the housing provided that was despite its young age in catastrophic technical status.

However, physical observation of these new units revealed that most of the flats, especially older as three years, are seriously overcrowded. Traditional Roma family in Nálepkovo occupying a flat comprise from parents and their under aged children, and usually even from grandchildren(the general trend for women is to become mothers in quite early ages, and therefore guardianship of the grandparents is needed). Additionally, as the level of unemployment is high and children do not attend school when they reach 15 years, most of the residents spend at their homes almost all the time. Consequently, the flats as well as whole buildings become damaged as it is almost impossible to preserve their condition while such high occupancy. This finding could be supported by other observation– the flats with lower– occupancy ratio, and with the employed owners, are usually very tidy and nicely furnished. The following picture shows one of such flats – located in almost destroyed building, it is furbished to the best taste and possibilities of its owners, where man is partly employed and household consists only from 6 members. The deterioration of the communal spaces is however significant, what asserts the arguments of bad internal relationships and lack of solidarity in informal settlements, as respondents explained:

'Look, I have cleanness in my flat. When it was new, I tried to keep it clean, but I was the only one, no other woman would do it! So I stopped as well.. '
Roma respondent, Nálepkovo, 4.4.2012

Table 4: Nálepkovo. By author 6.4.2011
LEFT: Interior of selected apartment; clean and nicely furbished.
RIGHT: Photo shows the deterioration of interiors, and the 'average' Roma family sharing one 2‒bedrooms flat.

Also, another explanation for damaging is based elsewhere. As the social workers during informal chat revealed, in the construction processes of the housing in Nálepkovo, extremely cheap materials were used in order to keep construction fees as low as policy for subsidising requires. Then, in order to meet deadlines for the project, houses became occupied even one month earlier what caused that roof structures were not 'dried' and construction not settled down properly. As a consequence, after few months being in use, the roof felt down and Roma inhabitants were blamed for its damaging.

On the other hand, the experience from NGO programme in Rankovce, in which families self-constructed houses , does not show any signs of deterioration or damages. The reasons for this, according to Roma respondents living in the area, is a clear responsibility of the owner of its demarcated spaces:

'Of course I am responsible for my own and for my wife and children.. I don't want to have   nothing in common with someone else... They are not this responsible..'
Roma respondent, Rankovce, 24.4.2014

MYTH 2: "Roma living in informal areas are living together, they want to group and share spaces"

On the idea of providing individual family houses, which offer the space, but also responsibility for it, are based NGO housing programmes in Rankovce. The preliminary researchers among the future clients revealed that the preferable form of housing is an individual family house standing on its own plot of land (see also Mačáková et al., 2014).

'I want to live on my own, I do not want to be under constant control of my family ... I want   my own house with my own garden'
Roma respondent, Rankovce 23.4.2014

This finding was in contrast to the state-distributed model that is based on the idea of an apartment blocks with a shared spaces:

'I would love to have a small house in the centre, for my children... but mostly, I don't want any gypsies there...'
Roma respondent, Nálepkovo, 12.4.2014

All the respondents, especially those directly involved in the housing programme in these area, were answering very positively about this system, usually stating as the main advantage the individual freedom. Also, the fences, element usually absolutely missing in informal Roma areas, started to emerge in Rankovce (see Table 6).

MYTH 3: "Roma from informal settlements do now want to live like us. They prefer to stay in their informal areas, in dirt and mud."

The houses built with the NGO programme in Rankovce, with an assistance of professional architect available for every 'client', have visual and architectural form of 'mainstream' family houses in Slovak towns. The experience from Rankovce also explicitly proved that for most of the Roma families they prefer to live like non-Roma majority. As involved Roma families mentioned:

'They offered us to help us to build a 'green houses', from adobe.. I understand its very cheap and good for environment... But none of the gadje [non-Roma] *live like that in Rankovce today, so why shall we ..?'*
Roma respondent, Rankovce, 11.8.2014

One of the aims of this research was also to examine what are the needs of community in practice. On the question 'What do you need to improve your housing conditions?' different answers were obtained. Several respondents living in settlement stated that they want to live in nice new municipal flats, obviously copying lifestyles of the non-Roma population:

'to live like gadjo [non-Roma person]*, to live in these flats as some relatives do...',*
Roma respondent, Rankove, 9.8.2014

However, different body of opinions expressed willingness to stay living in the settlement, or to provide their housing by themselves, stating

'I can build by myself, look, this is my house now, and I build another for my sister. But we can't improve them, as we can't buy these sites, I tried to do it once, but they didn't let me buy it. I don't know why. And there is no electricity here; we have to

steal from neighbours, because since we don't own the land, company cannot provide connections'

Table 6: Emergence of the element of fences, Rankovce. By author 5.6.2014

Notes on other findings

Firstly and most importantly, state housing model **reinforces Roma dependency trap** and promotes **paternalistic** and controlling approach, as this tool is available only to LA and limited NGOs. The individual residents do not have any accessible tool through which they could improve their situation on their own. The **participation on the construction** does not in fact promote any kind of 'empowerment', as it is not completed by any other assistance or education in this field (Smatanová, 2014). In reality, as was the case in Nálepkovo, due to lack of building skills of future tenants, this work is eventually executed by professional construction company, with an unpredictable result.

Also quantitative researches imply the **low (financial/time) effectiveness of such a mode**l. Regarding the scope of a deprived areas in need, the programme seems to be costly and not very time-efficient. Data show that every year is state delivering approx-

imately only 200 of these flats, while the requirement is altogether for more than 4,000 (MTCRD, 2014).

Another bulk of problems results from the locating of new housing in already **spatially segregated areas.** As was noted before, the quantitative data by Hojsik (2008) show that in 92% municipal housing provision conserves or deepens spatial segregation. Local geographies, and the extent of segregation in particular, has been according to literature identified as probably the most important determinant of situation in these informal settlements. This was the case in Nálepkovo, when in all of the of cases new housing was provided in distance up to several km from the main urban structure (see Table7). Local authority representative reflects on situation as follows:

> *'I don t understand why everybody says that Roma must live spatially closer... they always lived far away...what will it be helpful, if now they live closer?'*
> *non-Roma member of Local Authority, Nálepkovo, 3.4.2013*

Table 7. Municipality Nálepkovo. In the municipality there are located different spatial forms of Roma concentrations (1) separated on the margins of the village, (2) spatially segregated (2), and segregated in distance 2 km (3,4), in which the segregation was supported also by the development of new housing, in socialist period (3), in late 1990s (4), recently as a result of disaster planning (1).
LEFT: Adopted by Google Earth Maps.
RIGHT: By author. June 2011.

However, it must be noted that although in Nálepkovo placed construction of housing for previously informal Roma dwellers out of municipality boundaries, at the same time, from the same housing programme (but in 'common standard') was in 2005 built apartment block for the non−Roma residents, located in the central position. This conflict might imply several implicit intentions, from covert racism, when Roma with their plight were intentionally pushed 'out of the sight'.

It was not possible to provide general evaluation of the impact of the housing deliveries, as housing construction in municipality of Rankovce is not yet fully completed. Apparently, the housing conditions of the people in both of the cases have improved. In case of NGO project in Rankovce, housing delivery seems to have also wider impacts.. Respondents were asked to depict the changes that have taken place in their life since the project started and how do they subjectively evaluate the project success:

> *"..yes, there is no more 'osada' [informal settlement] in Rankovce, everything in here looks like if normal gadje [non-Roma] would lived here... life is way better now.."*
> *Roma respondent, Rankovce, 12.4.2014*

All of the respondents agreed that the project has significantly improved the life for the whole community in the positive way (Smatanová, 2014). Also, the women from families involved in the housing construction became more active, and with the support of local based community association 'Pre Lepší život' that is run by non-Roma, who also provides a social work in the community, established a micro-business with second-hand clothes, located in new houses, while the man have focused on production and sell of 'eco-bricets' (www.ozplz.sk).

The housing project has been also supplemented with activities focusing on public space. The project stem on a premise that once the social infrastructure is built, the (re)construction and problems addressing housing need should be solved out on the basis of mutual help between neighbours. The public spaces therefore served as a main

tool for providing space for such activities to take place, focusing on improvement of recovering public spaces in the areas, in its both, formal and informal part, and, building of playgrounds and amenities for children. The informal interviews with the local inhabitants revealed that new public spaces and playgrounds serve in a way as bridges between Roma and non-Roma community in the area.

6. Discussion

It can be argued that government practices related to housing issues have not dramatically changed since communism era. The way Slovak government has been addressing housing shortage blatantly reminds what UNDP report (2002:12) describes with regard to politics towards Roma in previous regimes as one of the ways of delivering assimilations vision of communist social engineering, and so through *'administrative allocation of housing to Roma from state fund for the socially disadvantaged, without regard to cultural patterns, local conditions, nor individual preferences'*. Although the term "disadvantaged" has been in recent policies substituted by "excluded", the current system of housing provision can be also again assessed as administrative and imposing 'white living style'.

Liégeois's (1994) popular finding that society is trying to accommodate Gypsy at all costs and in conditions, which we expect that suits everybody, is still actual in Slovakia even ten years later. Pre-selected types of living, low−standard apartments, small in size and lacking equipment might serve as 'starting flats' for 'young white family', but they are completely inappropriate for Roma households, even if they were for a short time. Roma communities have usually different patterns of using the flats as non−Roma, in terms of both, use and occupancy ratio (due to size of he family, amount of time spending at home, in situation of long-term unemployment, etc.)

From the different point of view, the assimilation is not the only threat in these processes – as Lajčáková (2010) demonstrates, the constant actions, although unsuccessful, towards one specific group cause its strong stigmatisation. As the research revealed, the overcrowding and amount of time leads to soon deterioration and damaging of the con-

structions. Misunderstanding real reasons for deterioration, and different perceptions of 'a nice house' is then reflected in the common argument against providing new housing for Roma, as if often perceived by majority that 'at the end of the day, Roma will destroy it all'. Exploiting the situation then comes commercial media, eager for dramatic coverage for its non-Roma watchers. Photos evoking the greatest anxiety show usually shabby, deteriorated external appearances of the new housing, but never interiors or positive situations.

Sharp disagreement of majority with special politics targeting socially excluded is rooted in conviction that Roma do not deserve special help because their situation is a consequence of their voluntary choices and bad habits. The life in poverty is therefore appropriate punishment for their immorality− laziness, irresponsibility and exploitation of state welfare system (Hojsík, 2010). Such perception of poverty as subjective failures of individual life−style choices indicates even lack of understanding and knowledge about Roma situation. Stemming from Reis & Moor (2005), it will require redefinition of Roma as from their position of 'undeserving poor' to 'deserving poor' in order to make their problem acceptable for the classes − elites that have the power to make a change on the level of public policies.

7. Conclusions and future research

Thinking about Roma informal areas in Slovakia, Yiftachel's concept of 'gray spaces' (Yiftachel, 2009) seems to be more than appropriate, as for more than two centuries have Roma population in Slovakia been under constant threat of eviction relegated into the marginal, impoverished, environmentally degraded outskirts of Slovak towns and villages, into spatially segregated location, where there 'otherness' cannot be seen (Jurová, 2002). It is also useful to adopt the idea of 'conflicting rationalities', illustrating how deep are the differences between institutional approach in understanding what is 'correct way of housing' and the real needs of poor Roma, translated into the housing programmes of nongovernmental organisation, giving Roma more power and voice when deciding about theirs housing and living preferences.

Our research implies that NGO programme seems to be more successful in addressing housing needs of Roma living in informal settlements; being local based, and involving also other activities, these programmes seem to have more effect of breaking the poverty trap for Roma inhabitants. Also, none of the 'popular statements' deepening stigmatisation ('myths' of Roma ruining their new houses, and others) have not proved to be based on complex arguments. By scrutinising these 'myths', several underlying issues about real day-to-day life and living strategies of the people from informal settlements were revealed, but many of them are still awaiting to undergo deeper and more focused research.

Also, the overarching challenge is that of values and attitudes of the society - is Slovak society both ready, able and willing to address the issues of Roma marginality? As the negative stereotyping among non-Roma in the courtly persist, shall there be taken any institutional action in order to change the attitudes and values of a majority society?

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