

# Roma Colonies in Pécs in the State Socialist Era, 1950–1990

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## Abstract

This study examines the evolution of Roma colonies in Pécs, Hungary, during the state socialist period (1950–1990). It situates these developments within broader historical attempts to address the “Roma question” through resettlement, employment initiatives, and forced assimilation policies. Drawing on archival and oral sources, the research traces the establishment, transformation, and liquidation of Roma settlements, highlighting the persistent instability caused by state interventions and internal migration patterns. It reveals how official policies often exacerbated marginalization and contributed to deteriorating living conditions. Through a micro-historical approach, the study provides insight into the everyday lives of Roma communities, the nature of their housing, employment opportunities, and the contradictory responses of local authorities to their presence. The findings underscore the challenges of reconstructing Roma history from fragmentary and often biased sources.

**Keywords:** Roma history, socialist Hungary, Pécs, Roma settlements, forced assimilation, state policy, marginalization, microhistory

Attempts to deal with the fate of the Roma in Hungary have been made in previous centuries and eras. These attempts are indicated by censuses, resettlement, employment and scattered sources on the way of life, but we must admit, most of the documents relating to the Roma are to be found in the records of the judicial and legal authorities of the time. A slightly more complex picture of the Roma emerges from the 20th century, as it is from this period that we can see the resettlement and employment of larger groups, and closely related to this, the attempts to solve the problems of the persistent

presence of the Roma, the so-called “Roma question”. While in the first half of the 20th century the sources that were available on this issue were also sporadic or of limited value, in the second half of the century, during the socialist era, an increasing number of documents concerning the Roma were produced<sup>1</sup>. All these can be seen in the form of provisions, resolutions and proposals concerning the Roma, which were intensified during the socialist era in various phases and contradictory forms attempting to resolve this so-called Roma question. The state Roma policy of the period can be interpreted as a policy of forced and violent assimilation policy against Roma communities in general.<sup>2</sup>

The central question of this research is how the living conditions of those in Roma settlements evolved under the communist regime as a result of state policies. I examine this issue from a micro-historical perspective, primarily drawing on archival sources, with a focus on the example of Pécs.

## Conditions of establishment

It is for this reason that we can say that this period saw the most measures and almost radical changes in the fate and way of life of the Roma. These changes can be divided into phases of varying intensity over the four decades of the state socialist era. I will therefore describe the provisions and measures of this period and their practical implementation in relation to the settlements inhabited by the Roma and their scattered settlements.<sup>3</sup> This is a difficult task due to the lack of sources or, if there are some, often they have contradictory data and reports. This fact is not only due to the superficial and often approximate reports and measures, especially at the beginning of this period. The almost constant and sudden change in the population of the Roma colonies at the end of the period makes it difficult to obtain a more accurate picture. This is mainly due to the continuous influx of new settlers and the migration between inhabited settlements. Therefore, even the most thorough sociological surveys were only valid for the period of data collection at the time and could become estimates subject to permanent changes. Nevertheless, we already have source material which, despite its inaccuracies, can be used to provide an outline of the Roma colonies in Pécs. But I must emphasise that these data are subject to change in the light of new information and research.

First of all, I must draw attention to several important facts: among others, the formation, location, role and permanent changes of colonies. It is important to note that

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<sup>1</sup> Márfi 1998b.

<sup>2</sup> Majtényi–Majtényi 2016; Varsa 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Füzes–Márfi (ed.) 2003. The study are based primarily on the sources published in this edition, but information from other council bodies (district and county council bodies), referral sources and oral sources also helped in the data collection.

there are several types of Roma settlements, including large colonies of up to 2–300 people, smaller settlements of less than 50–60 people, and occasionally changing smaller groups, even stand-alone buildings and huts. In Pécs, we can find examples of all these types of settlements, and in the period in question, more than 20 such settlements or groups were recorded.<sup>4</sup> But this approximate number is only for the period as a whole, because, as I mentioned, the number of Roma and their settlements is constantly changing. In other words, the migrating Roma moved more and more within a well-defined area, but they practised this limited and specific migration almost continuously. Paradoxically, this was particularly the case in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Roma settlement liquidations were well under way. As only part of the Roma population of the eliminated colonies could be accommodated, new settlements were constantly being created, not on the outskirts of the city districts as before, but in the middle of the districts, including the city centre.<sup>5</sup> The development of Roma colonies in Pécs can be observed well in the 20th century. Their settlement, i.e. the settling factor, can be examined primarily in relation to employment and the provision of jobs. In the first part of the last century, forestry, coal mining and other industries were the main sources of employment for Roma settled in the area around the city. Thus, colonies were built mainly in District 1, close to logging sites in the surrounding forests and in the neighbourhood of the mining operations. Later, from the 1950s onwards, the mining companies were the main employers and also the main factors in settling down. The location and size of the Roma settlements changed accordingly. For this reason, before describing the places inhabited by Roma that developed and changed from the 1950s onwards, I consider it important to talk about the larger colonies between the two World Wars, despite the few surviving sources, mainly based on the accounts of oral sources and referential sources.

## Colonies in the first half of the 20th century

Probably one of the oldest colonies, living mainly from logging, was the Roma settlement on Remete Meadow, with its dug-out huts with pitched roofs.<sup>6</sup> It became depopulated in the 1940s, and its inhabitants moved to nearby Patacs, the Mecsekszentkút area and Kismélyvögy. These small colonies, with the exception of Kismélyvölgy, were still

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<sup>4</sup> Füzes–Márfi (ed.) 2003: 12–174.

<sup>5</sup> HNA BCA [HNA BCA = Hungarian National Archives – Baranya County Archives], XXXV. 9, CP [CP = Council of Pécs as a city with county rights] 1984, Minutes of the meetings of the CP EC [Executive Committee] 1975/2, Minutes of the meetings of the CP EC 1976/4, Minutes of the meetings of the CP EC 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Based on oral communications from the late Györkő Vilmos Tömösközi and Camilo Reuter. I was also fortunate enough to see the photographs of Tömösközi taken in the 1930s. The small photographs depicted the former Roma settlement of Remete Meadow and its inhabitants.

mentioned in the last third of the period under discussion. The largest Roma colony was undoubtedly built in the flat area of József Háza (near István-akna), directly next to the forester's house, sometime in the 1930s under the patronage of the forester Endre Magas. There must have been about 40–50 mud-huts, with an estimated 300 Roma inhabitants. People living here were employed in forestry, the men did woodcutting and woodworking, while women and children were engaged in gathering, occasional market or door-to-door sales. The colony was depopulated after the departure of the forester Endre Magas in the mid-1940s, as the new forester no longer favoured the Roma settlers.<sup>7</sup> The people then moved to the nearby Lantos Valley (near the former Ferenc-akna) in the south, on the border of Mecsekszabolcs, and to the Majális Square colony near Szabolcsbányatelep and György-telep near György-akna. This migration probably ended by the early 1950s. The colony of 20–25 mud-huts in the flat area between the Zsolnay Well and the Rigó Well near the Kozáry Hunting Lodge, supported by the forester Vajda, also dates from this period.<sup>8</sup> Later, these Roma followed the line of the valley and established a new community of mud-huts on the opposite side of the Stadtwald or Nagybányaréti Valley, to the south. In the period between the two World Wars, the aforementioned György-telep colony, was established with about 15 mud-huts and the Lantosvölgy colony with a slightly larger number of huts and inhabitants. Roma men living in both settlements were employed in the surrounding mines. So were the inhabitants of the settlement on Majális Square, which is often mentioned in sources. This colony was established right next to the Komlói Road in the 1940s, and it continued to expand.

On the nearby Árpádtető, next to the central buildings of the forestry company, was the most sophisticated Roma colony of the period. About 20–25 brick houses were given to the Roma who were directly employed by the forestry company, after the renovation of the former servants' quarters. We should also mention the smallest Roma colony, which was located on the border of Istenáldásvölgy, west of Pécsbányatelep, with about 8–10 mud-huts, but in two different locations. The forestry company provided employment for the people living here, as the nearby mines, unlike the other mining companies, were rigidly opposed to the employment of workers of Roma origin. This colony, was closed down in the mid-1970s at the same time as the liquidated mining colonies in Istenáldásvölgy, due to the expansion of opencast coal production. It should also be noted that the Roma settlements of the inter-war period were quite mixed. Not that the mud-huts built in the later decades were any more aesthetically

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<sup>7</sup> Based on oral information provided by Mrs Vendel Márffy, widow. Here I thank my mother for being able to recall her memories of the Roma living close to them on the outskirts of the former mining colony, even after sixty years, and for mentioning the activities of my grandfather, Mihály Balázs, a former mine foreman, and the Social Service of the village of Mecsekszabolcs, who helped the Roma.

<sup>8</sup> Same as above.

pleasing, but the Roma who settled here lived in shacks built with many different methods. The number of mud-brick shacks was smaller, and instead they lived in huts with wooden frames, wickerwork, plastered walls and no foundations. It is probable that these colonies also had huts with wooden frame and mud walls. They also used the above-mentioned dug-out huts with a wooden pitched roof, a more primitive form of dugout huts, and the pitched roof itself.<sup>9</sup> The roofs with wooden frames and wicker filling were plastered with mud inside and out and had windows, chimney openings and doors cut into them. Also, occasionally, they lived in tents and tin huts. Animals were also kept in simple structures, mostly made of planks or sticks. In the larger colonies there was a separate common latrine-like “toilet”, but most of the time they just had a larger pit dug not far from the colony. Water, especially in the case of forest colonies, was obtained from the stream, and although they had draw-wells, they were not cleaned and were very often a source of infection and not of drinking water. In most colonies of this period, communal fireplaces and free-standing baking ovens with wicker frame plastered with mud were in a central position.<sup>10</sup>

## Colonies and Roma settlements of the 1950s

Most of the settlements described here had been depopulated by the 1950s, with residents joining existing colonies or creating new communities, some of which have already been mentioned. The number of settlements or residential areas inhabited by Roma in the period under discussion is much higher and more populated. The first significant mention of the Pécs colonies is a police report from 1953. This document is noteworthy because it does not talk about the Roma issue and Roma policy at the current ideological, or more precisely demagogical, level of the time. The word ‘Gypsy’ itself is avoided, they use synonyms like penniless, the social strata, Traveller People.<sup>11</sup> However, it gives an unvarnished, almost naturalistic picture of the Roma themselves, whatever they are called, and of everyday life in the colonies, briefly giving a sense of what it meant to be a Roma in the period, and to live with the Roma in the 1950s, the years of socialist social development. From the source:

*“...especially in the city of Pécs, we can meet 6–8 such temporary settlements, e.g.: Üszögi Kőbortelep, Füzesdülő, Pécs Állami Gazdaság, Mecsekszabolcs etc. These settlements, being located near the road, greatly affect the beauty of our city, as the small, filthy huts are set up close to the city’s factories and normal construction sites. In general, these*

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<sup>9</sup> Tarján 1984: 82–92.

<sup>10</sup> Based on the oral report of Árpád Márfi.

<sup>11</sup> Márfi 1998a: 86–87.

*temporary settlements are populous with considerable labour force, but they do not take advantage of the employment opportunities, on the contrary they support themselves and their families by vagrancy, begging, stealing, and carrying away animal carcasses. This is also disadvantageous because their (large) families are also taught to beg, evade work and steal. The behaviour of these people is also dangerous because they disturb public peace to a great extent, because while the working class is still working in factories, fields, etc., building socialism in our country, these people are sneaking in and stealing, breaking and entering, etc., and plundering the personal and material assets of honest workers as well as of the socialist sectors.”<sup>12</sup>*

The police report on four Roma settlements in Pécs explains in more detail the negative phenomena mentioned above. The Pécs-Üszögpusztá so-called temporary settlement had the most problems, because the more peaceful and diligent tub-maker Roma who had been living there for several years were joined by stray Kolompár Roma, whose leisurely and frivolous lifestyle spread to the other settlers. The author of the report proposed to settle the employable part of the 18 Roma families living here on the land of the Hetvehely State Farm, while the lumpen elements would be interned, using one of the tried and tested methods of the time. The county-level source considers the Roma settlements around Pécs to be the most dangerous for society due to their unwillingness to work and constant theft issues. There is a marked contrast between the inter-war period and the 1950s in terms of the Roma way of life, their circumstances and opportunities. The main reason for this is that, in the new social order, the Roma were slowly displaced from their traditional areas of livelihood and employment. And they were also excluded from the system of economic and social benefits or opportunities that affected most of the country's social strata, even if at the lowest level. Thus, the Roma inevitably became the most marginalised and the most miserable group of people in the 1950s. These serious problems were highlighted even in this police report, which outlined relatively humane solutions,<sup>13</sup> in addition to internment, but the substantive measures remained at the level of crime prevention and segregation.

<sup>12</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 36. 1.15. Party Archives, Hungarian Working People's Party, Baranya county central leadership documents, 1953. p. u. [p.u. = preservation unit] 125.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. The police officer in charge of preparing the report made the following suggestions:

*“1. In order to integrate them fully into social life, and to enable them to integrate, I consider it most important to penetrate into their educational sphere. The most suitable people for this purpose are those comrades and honest workers who can speak their language and have been raised by the people's democracy in various fields, e.g.: soldier, police officer, council worker, member of the cooperative, factory worker, etc. These workers could, with proper support, penetrate deeper into them and explain them their wrongdoings, then they would give up a life of vagrancy and become useful members of society in building socialism, as many of them are already doing so in great numbers.*

*2. In order to improve their social situation, to get rid of their shackles on the outskirts of populated areas, we must also provide them with human housing in the first place. In the areas of cities, towns, villages, wastelands, farms, etc., where employment opportunities should be provided for them. They must be educated*

## The first substantive resolutions, solutions and proposals

In the second half of the fifties, the increasingly serious nature of the Roma way of life prompted new measures. The first of these was the establishment of the so-called Roma Subcommittee in December 1959,<sup>14</sup> whose operation, or lack of operation, can be described as a “council farce”, according to the epic remark of one of its members, archivist Márton Vörös<sup>15</sup>. Through his criticism and more detailed work programme, he himself became the chairman of the renewed Roma Committee, which was made up primarily of doctors, lawyers, teachers and administrative specialists.<sup>16</sup> The committee carried out detailed, fact-finding surveys and case studies in the colonies around the city. In September 1961, the chairman himself reported on some of his experiences to the city council leadership, not without a few good-sounding twists, as this quote may prove:

*“The basic problem of our Gypsy question is that we have inherited small social communities which today, in the age of space rockets, have retained their medieval character, at least in the form of their settlements, or it is fair to say, in the condition of the four-thousand-year-old Vučedol culture of Nagyárpád. We should not be fooled by the fact that in some Gypsy villages they have bottled milk with bread rolls, or that young people wear nylon shirts. In even starker contrast, these welcomed phenomena highlight the fact that, for example, in the forest settlement enclosed on Majális Square, nearly 120 Gypsies*

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*and provided with appropriate medical treatment, schooling (nursery, school, day-care) and cultural facilities. We must make them realise that they will only be able to secure their social opportunities if they themselves do their share of productive work.*

*3. If, despite all the benefits and job opportunities, some individuals or groups continue to support themselves by stealing and consuming animal carcasses, I propose that the most severe action be taken against them and that this be made known to the rest of the population. I also propose that any person who cannot prove that they are engaged in agricultural work or other employment that involves the use of horse power should have their horse licence revoked. I propose to extend this not only to vagrant persons but also to other persons.*

*4. In the field of work, I propose to provide such persons with a regular work record and to provide them with jobs (factory, mine, cooperative, state farm, etc.). In the field of education and employment, I propose also to provide for the gifted children of each family, they shall be taken to higher schools and given a high-level training, so that through this we may penetrate to their roots and raise them to all fields of civilization. With such opportunities we shall be able to make them despise those who do not work, stray and steal.*

*5. If, even under such opportunities and conditions, a person or group is straying, subsisting by theft and other acts, they shall be ordered by the police authorities to reside in a place and be supervised by the police, in the event that they do not comply with the rules of this supervision, the most severe measures shall be applied. Pécs, 15 April 1953.*

<sup>14</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1959/3.

<sup>15</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat 91/1961. Quoted from the letter of reply written by Márton Vörös to the VB Secretariat: “As can be seen from the investigative study prepared for the Secretariat of the Government, among the comments is the question of the Roma Committee, which was set up in the spring and which has not been convened once since its ambitious establishment, has not met once, and has thus degenerated into a mere parody of the council.”

<sup>16</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat 91/1961. (91–2/1961.)



*live in mud-huts, 8–10 people live in a 3x4-metre-area without a single toilet, and that the father is sexually involved with his 12-year-old daughter. Or, for example, in another place there is a person infected with germs endangering the environment. In one of the Gypsy houses, next to the new, modern István-akna, the children even do their number two inside the room and in the kitchen. During the on-site inspections, we were able to enter the flats with an acrobatic balancing act to avoid damaging our shoes. These difficulties rightly awakened in us a duality of human disgust and compassion and a glowing sense of the urgent need for action in a city where, in Europe's most modern 9-storey clinics, the dreamlike reality of 20th century hygiene proclaims the genius of Hungarian science and the progress of social responsibility. I have recently pointed out the danger of this issue in the light of the fact that in Mecsekszabolcs, in the immediate vicinity of the newly erected modern factory buildings, almost at the foot of the building, there is this Gypsy colony on Majális Square.”<sup>17</sup>*

The committee managed to draw attention to the impossible situation, and in addition to this brisk report, demographic and sociological surveys of the Roma colonies in Pécs were also included. According to these, District I had the highest number of Roma residents, with 539 people in total, living on Zsigmond-telep on Majális Square, Stadtwald and Istenáldásvölgy settlements and in some other locations. No colony was mentioned in District II at that time, and only three families out of 28 lived in shacks, with a total of 111 persons. In District III of the city, there was also no coherent colony, and 6 of the 16 Roma families living there were living in shacks, with a total of 72 persons. Based on these figures, there were four major Roma colonies in Pécs at the time, and based on these and the data of the scattered smaller and larger communities, the city had 722 Roma inhabitants, with 356 children, 194 women and 174 men.<sup>18</sup>

Following the statement and the report, a comprehensive so-called “long-term plan” was drawn up in March 1962 with a resolution of the Executive Committee of the City Council. The most delicate issue was the housing question, the solution of the housing situation, because the majority of the Roma in Pécs, 76 families, i.e. nearly 600 people lived in huts or Roma settlements. Besides the liquidation of the colonies, the larger companies, such as the two mining companies, saw the way out in the form of housing allocations. At the same time, resolutions were taken to improve the social, health and educational situation and to create employment opportunities.<sup>19</sup> If all these had been implemented, after a few years there would have been no more talk of Roma

<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, 1961/2.

<sup>18</sup> Documents from the History of the Roma in Pécs 1959–1990. Op. cit.: 58. HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1962/1.

<sup>19</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC Meeting minutes, 1962/2., EC instruction under No 55/1962, Minutes of the meetings of the CP EC. 1962/3. EC instruction under No 54/1962.



settlements and colonies. However, this very comprehensive and very detailed plan of a long-term solution remained only a draft. There was almost no change in the living conditions of the Roma colonies until the last phase of the 1960s. A report of September 1965 describes the unchanged living conditions of the Roma population in the colonies:<sup>20</sup> The most characteristic details from this report:

*“The social policy groups regularly check the Gypsy settlements in the city of Pécs. According to their findings, the aforementioned distribution of the Gypsy population and the fact that 80% of the Gypsy population lives in District I can be explained by the fact that most of the Gypsy workers are employed by the Mecsek Coal Mining Trust and the State Forestry Company. Thus, the Gypsies working there settled close to their workplaces. (...) Very few families live in decent housing conditions. The huts they have put together themselves lack even the most basic furniture. The majority of women are still dressed in traditional Gypsy costumes, and the children are almost always poorly clothed (...) They do not part with their elderly relatives, who are supported until their death, even if in poor conditions. (...) Three years ago, the Department of Culture established a Gypsy school in István-akna, where they wanted to use special methods to provide education. However, the school had to close after a year of operation due to the low number of students. The work to eradicate illiteracy has not been successful. Only half of the courses organised for this purpose have been completed due to lack of participation (...) There are a good number of dangerous criminals among the adult and juvenile members of Gypsy families living in certain districts of the city, many of whom are under police supervision, but action has had to be taken against several persons, for whom the means of expulsion from the city has been resorted to. (...) It is the theft of crops from social property which requires more attention, and in this area, especially in the case of Gypsies with horses, the necessary measures are constantly being taken. (...) There has been a significant increase in prostitution, i.e. immoral behaviour, among Gypsy women, and in the behaviour of both women and men in public places of entertainment, which in many cases culminates in a fight causing a public scandal.”*<sup>21</sup>

This report already indicates an increase in the Roma population. In addition to the colonies in District I, new Roma settlements have also been reported in the other two districts, despite the propaganda of eradication and housing development. The Roma population continued to grow and by the end of the period it was changing considerably. This is not necessarily due to natural population growth but the continuous influx of new settlers. In the region, the Roma were aware of the activities of the Roma Committee, i.e. the city was supporting the Roma, and they wanted to benefit from

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<sup>20</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1965/3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Report of the Construction and Transport Department VII of the City Council of Pécs, dated 6 September 1965, for the meeting of the City Council of Pécs of 10 September 1965.

these advantages.<sup>22</sup> By the mid-1960s, new colonies had been established in the other districts of the city from previously scattered or island-like blocks: in District II, the residents of three streets, Pipacs, Fűzfa and György Streets, formed a colony of about 25 families.<sup>23</sup> The settlers lived in huts built in the courtyards of their houses. The area was partially served by water and electricity, but no sewerage was installed. Also, in the same district, a new colony was established in the Megyeri Kertvárosi settlement<sup>24</sup> with 8 Roma families, albeit with the help of housing allocated by the council. In District III, a new colony was established in Füzes Lane with 18 families. The area of 6 huts in Kismélyvölgy was also registered, as well as Szentkúti Forest and Patacs, each inhabited by one family. In parallel with these developments, the population of the colonies in District I, already mentioned several times, continued to increase. Zsigmond-telep<sup>25</sup> was the most populous, but also the worst, because its inhabitants were located on the mound of mud between István-akna and Béke-akna, where the huts, which were not stable, were constantly sinking and deteriorating, and they had only one common well and one toilet.<sup>26</sup> In the other settlements, one or two small

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<sup>22</sup> Márfi 1999.

<sup>23</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1965/3. The report notes the following about the new colony:

*“Settlement in Pipacs-Fűzfa-György Street: the majority live in houses built on the basis of building permits. However, some of them live in the courtyards or in huts built for the houses. The area is partly served by public utilities, water and electricity, but no sewerage. Several houses have no toilets. The plots are partly purchased from private owners and partly through the OTP bank. In about 15 cases they were received as a grant. There are about 20–25 families living on the plot, most of them engaged in transport activities. 3–4 horses are kept, but only one is registered. Their monthly income is well above the average income level. They build a relatively large number of unauthorised buildings, mainly outbuildings used as stables. The area is destined to liquidation, the building ban was imposed by the Department of Construction and Transport by Resolution No 19.498/1965 VII of 16 August 1965.”*

<sup>24</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1965/3. The following brief description of the inhabitants of the settlement was published: *“Megyeri, Kertvárosi colony. The area does not form a coherent unit, about 7–8 Roma families live here. They live partly in dwellings built with planning permission and partly in unauthorised buildings. Most of them are engaged in transport.”*

<sup>25</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC Meetings minutes, 1965/3, City Council of Pécs, Building and Transport Department VII, 6 September 1965, report under the title “Assessment of the Roma issue in the city of Pécs in implementation of Resolution 161/1965”. The report indicated the number of people living in Zsigmond-telep as 300.

<sup>26</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1965/3. Excerpt: *“300 people live in 37 huts. The adult males, with the exception of 4, are mine workers. The other four work for various companies. The colony is built on an old waste heap. There is one toilet for 300 people and water is drawn from one well with a bucket on a rope. The well would need further development and at least 2–3 toilets should definitely be built. The inhabitants of the colony live in huts made of different materials. Ground movement causes the huts to sink and crack. The existing toilet is not used. The site is untidy, dirty and in recent months there have been 2 cases of dysentery among the residents.”*

brick houses were built, and some of the newer buildings on the Majális Square,<sup>27</sup> György-telep and Nagybányaréti<sup>28</sup> colonies were partially electrified and provided with public toilets. But three new colonies were also beginning to take shape at the Kisgyőr Street Iskolatelep near Pécsszabolcs, at István-akna and at the Buzaberki Lane in Vasas.

## Colony liquidations, the beginning of a new way of life and related problems

These developments have led the council leadership to accelerate the ideas of the so-called “long term plan”, above all the colony liquidations. In September 1967, they contacted the city administration of Salgótarján, where the colonies of about 1,200 Roma had been liquidated.<sup>29</sup> They drew the attention of Pécs Council to the fact that the liquidation of the settlements and the subsequent construction work had created numerous health, communal, commercial and cultural problems, and therefore they recommended thorough preparation and detailed sociological surveys. The basic data of these surveys are known, i.e. the number of Roma in 89 mud-huts is estimated at 800,<sup>30</sup> but these figures were already changing during the surveys.<sup>31</sup> Finally, in the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. The report gave the following picture of the Roma colony on Majális Square: *“Majális Square (along the Komlói Road, Pécs) is a suburban settlement. There are 18 families with about 135 persons living on the settlement, mostly in mud huts and wooden shacks. There is no toilet or waste container. Water is supplied from the tap in György-akna. The area is otherwise largely kept clean, with electricity connected to one or two buildings. Most of the men living on the site work in the mine. Preliminary measures have been taken by the District I Council’s construction team to clear this site. In the upper settlement of Pécs-Szabolcs, in the area east of the school, in the emerging single-family zone, a site is available suitable for the construction of 6 twin houses, that is 12 plots of about 290 square meters. These plots were sold through OTP bank at a price of 10 HUF/3,6 square meters, subject to a prohibition of alienation and a building obligation.”*

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. The report notes the following about this colony:

*“The settlement of the Nagybányaréti Valley Erdőalja District. The settlement is inhabited by 13 families of about 53 persons, living partly in huts and partly in small houses built in the village, some of which have electricity. They are employed at the mine. There is piped water and three toilets on the site. The site is scheduled for liquidation under Government Resolution No. 1964/2014.”*

<sup>29</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat 654/1967. Information of the Secretary of the Executive Committee of Salgótarján City Council dated 5 September 1967 under the title “Situation of Roma settlements and possibilities of their liquidation”.

<sup>30</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat, 80-4/1969. On the difficulties of liquidating the Roma settlements, the source points out that *“At the present rate, it would take several decades to liquidate the settlements, if the population growth in the meantime is disregarded. The pace of Roma settlement eradication has therefore fallen significantly behind the original projections. It was already foreseeable in 1967 that the task could not be completed within the framework of the 15-year housing development programme. Government Resolution 2047/1967 (VIII.8.) facilitated the borrowing of loans. Further facilitation is needed because many people cannot afford the 10% pre-savings. This is also justified by the significant increase in construction costs.”*

<sup>31</sup> Füzes-Márfi (ed.) 2003: 169; HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat 80-4/1969.

spring of 1969, the liquidation of Roma settlements in the city's districts began:<sup>32</sup> on Majális Square, Zsigmond-telep, Füzes Lane and Pipacs Street. Since the colony on Majális Square was located directly next to the road to Komló, it was the first colony to be demolished, both from an aesthetic and an urban planning point of view. It is little known that the majority of the Roma who were evicted were not given new houses or residential areas, but were relocated to the nearby, already overcrowded Zsigmond-telep and György-telep.<sup>33</sup>

The liquidation process was not smooth because some residents, especially the older ones, refused to leave the colony. Therefore, in the early 1970s, the council apparatus almost constantly asked the police for help<sup>34</sup>, but they were also helpless because they had no authority to carry out forced evictions. Even so, there was a police presence in settlements such as the Üszögpuszta colony, which was considered a hotbed of Roma crime.<sup>35</sup> So, persuasion and personal example remained, but most people left the settlements anyway because they could not bear the slow depopulation of the colonies, which had always been noisy and full of life.

There were also many other problems with the construction of new homes and new buildings at the same time as the liquidations. The government resolution of July 1969 granted Pécs a preferential credit line for the construction of only 35 new dwellings for

<sup>32</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat, 420-2/1968. (80-4/1969).

<sup>33</sup> Füzes-Márfi (ed.) 2003: 20; HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1984. At the council meeting of 18 June 1984, one of the council members spoke specifically about György-telep, in which he also outlined the conditions prevailing in the colony:

*"György-telep has 230 Gypsy families (I should note that this is obviously a typo, because 230 Gypsy families would exceed 1,000 people in the context of the time, so the councillor probably said 230). The teacher has a lot of problems with the violation of the compulsory school attendance law. More effective measures are needed to protect children at risk. More attention should be paid to public safety in the area."*

<sup>34</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting Minutes, 1972/3. Meeting of EC on 31 October 1972.

<sup>35</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meetings, report and proposal of the Pécs City Police Headquarters entitled "The situation of public order and public security in the city of Pécs, in the light of the resolution of the Executive Committee of the MSZMP Pécs City Party of 14 September 1971". Extract from the report:

*"In terms of the rise in the number of offenders and their assessment, it must be noted that the crime rate and participation rate of the Roma population has been on the rise in recent years. As far as the city of Pécs is concerned, the most infected area is the composition and the participation and activity in crime of the inhabitants of the Pécs-Üszög Puszta Gypsy settlement. The situation is even worse if we look at the behaviour and living conditions of the young people and children living there. It is disturbing that Gypsy children and minors beg violently on the streets of the town, if they do not receive the requested amount of money or other material, they use rude and unacceptable language or, many times, they commit occasional theft. These behaviours occur mainly in markets, railway stations, shops or in the street.*

*(...) The danger to public order and public safety of the Pécs-Üszög Gypsy settlement is also demonstrated by the fact that during raids and other checks, most police action is required by the activities of criminal Gypsies who live there and come from other areas. Persons living in the settlement give these criminals accommodation, they can stay both individually and in groups, and they come not only from the district of Pécs but from other districts of the county."*

1970. This number was reduced to thirty, but the biggest problem was that only those Roma families who had been employed for at least two years<sup>36</sup> were eligible for the so-called “C” type construction and purchase loan. 70% of the Roma who were able to work met these conditions,<sup>37</sup> but despite the 30,000 HUF per flat granted by the council, most of them were not financially able to undertake the construction. Also, since the 1970s, there was a lot of financial misuse concerning the constructions. It was common that the high amount of money was wasted, and when no further loans or aid were granted, the building materials that had been given to them as aid were sold.<sup>38</sup> But those, and there were many of them, who took on the construction of the new house reliably, also had to face a great deal of problems.

In addition to the financial difficulties, they had to face the growing prejudice on both sides, Hungarian and Roma. Thus, integration and the creation of a home came with many difficulties. In the second half of the 1970s, as the housing construction campaign was causing many problems, housing allocations were used to alleviate the problems of resettlement during the slow colony liquidation. This was achieved half-heartedly because the Roma had a very low share in the new housing estates, Újmecekalja and Kertváros.<sup>39</sup> They were therefore mainly allocated flats in the terraced or block houses of former mining colonies in District I. From the second half of the 1970s, this process intensified and Roma settlements began to appear among others in Fehérhegy, Meszestelep, Hősök Square in Pécsszabolcs as well as Fejlődés, Felszabadulás and Szabó István Streets.<sup>40</sup>

## In the last phase of the state socialist era

By the mid-1970s, the Roma population had increased nearly fivefold with the continuous influx of new settlers, with 3,500 people making up 2% of the city's population. By the end of the 1970s, their number had reached nearly 5,000.<sup>41</sup> However, as before, the increased Roma population was far from homogeneous, due to their tribal and linguistic differences, and there were differences in their habits and living conditions as well. The integration and interaction of new Roma settlers coming from several places in the region and local Roma was also influenced by the differences in

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<sup>36</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat, 80/1969 (80-4/1969); HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Secretariat 80-2/1969 (80-4/1969).

<sup>37</sup> Füzes-Márfi (ed.) 2003: 114. HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1979/2.

<sup>38</sup> Füzes-Márfi (ed.) 2003: 28–29. HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1984.

<sup>39</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1976/4. Extract of the contents of the meeting held on 30 December 1976.

<sup>40</sup> Füzes-Márfi (ed.) 2003: 105–106; HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1979.

<sup>41</sup> Füzes-Márfi (ed.) 2003: 105. HNL BCL, XXXV. 9, CP EC meeting minutes 1979.

their communities. During this period, the old, the new and the in-between can be observed in terms of housing conditions and lifestyles of Roma communities. The old colonies, consisting mainly of mud-huts, such as the Zsigmond and Majális Square ones, Nagybányarét and Istenáldásvölgyi settlements, had already been liquidated. Only the colony of Üszögpuszta and the Buzaberki Lane can be included here.<sup>42</sup> Council sources divided the colonies with a changed appearance, which were under continuous liquidation, into three categories: 1. Suburban settlements, including the colonies of Buzaberki, Kisgyőri and Üszögi<sup>43</sup>, with a total of 280 people. 2. The number of temporary colonies established in the inner area was much higher, with a total of 400 inhabitants. These were Vasas I. Bányatelep, Felszabadulás, Fejlődés, Szabó István, Pipacs, Fűzfá Streets, the area behind Megyeri Street, Füzes Lane and the end of Kismélyvölgyi Road. 3. Finally, the Tóvári settlement in Kővágószőlős was also included in this category from the immediate vicinity of the city.<sup>44</sup> Most of the other nearly 3,000 Roma inhabitants settled in the residential areas already mentioned and in Budai Külváros, but Roma families were also moved to the then Kossuth Lajos Street. The sources mention sporadic residential communities such as Bokor Street, the area around the Tüskés Lane and the Kapedli Inn. There are far fewer Roma families who were able to acquire housing outside the traditional or then established Roma-inhabited areas, in other words, living in a non-Roma community, in the same area or neighbourhood as the rest of the city. Also, there were examples of some older residents leaving their new homes and building a mud-hut on the site of the demolished former colony where they then lived until their death. By the mid-1980s, it became quite common for people to sell the flats they had been given and move back to their original place or to relatives. And, of course, they came back with new housing needs.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1979. The report of several pages describes the Buzaberki Lane in this way: *"The best results were achieved at the Vasas II. Buzaberki site. The population of the colony has decreased by 60 % in the last year. This is the colony furthest away from the residential area, from which most people voluntarily take the initiative to leave."*

<sup>43</sup> HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meeting minutes, 1979. The following brief reports on the two settlements are given below: *"The settlement of Kisgyőr is close to the city (1 km northeast of Heroes' Square), part of it is consolidated, with brick houses, connected to the electricity network, partially supplied with water, so that the minimum living conditions are given. The situation is similar in the settlement on the road to Nagykozár. It is inhabited by a small number of Gypsies, but most of them do not have a permanent job, so there are even more obstacles to helping them."*

<sup>44</sup> Füzes-Márfi (ed.) 2003: 105–106; HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC, Meetings minutes, 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes of the meetings of the City Council HNA BCA, XXXV. 9, CP EC 1984. Submission of the Deputy Chairman of the City Council of Pécs under the title "The situation of the Roma population in Pécs and its surroundings".



## Conclusions

By the end of the state socialist era, the aforementioned places roughly outlined the main areas of Roma settlements. It can be said that these nearly four decades brought about vital changes in the way of life of the Roma in Pécs. Metaphorically speaking, this path led from mud-huts to emergency housing, to multi-storey and detached houses, to comfortable dwellings. It provided opportunities, despite its limitations and contradictions, but the sudden and radical changes were only effective up to a certain level and only in certain areas, and in many cases the Roma who had been living in poverty for a long time were unable to make use of these opportunities and often misused them. But, of course, it is impossible to generalise, because at the same time, this era gave many people a new meaning and quality of life or at least the possibility of one. However, the history of Roma settlements demonstrates that historical marginalization, social exclusion, and economic inequalities remained the key factors shaping the living conditions of Roma communities during the socialist era. The broader historical context influenced the socio-economic realities experienced by Roma communities at the micro level, resulting in limited access to education, employment, and adequate housing during the communist period. Discriminatory state policies and systemic barriers that restricted social mobility further reinforced the vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion in Roma settlements.

I was able to work on the sources and proposals for solutions from the point of view of the administration, that is, the authorities. It is not known, or at least not mentioned here, how the Roma themselves experienced these changes, expulsions, and liquidations. It is now quite well known that many of the values of the Roma people, their culture, community and traditional Roma occupations disappeared for ever at this time. I myself would consider this article more complete if the former mud-hut residents could speak about their living conditions then and now, about the prejudices that still affect them today and about their experiences of being Roma.

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