

Socialist era and the development of kindergartens in Czechoslovakia: A comparative study of the Czech and Slovak Republics

Daniel Gurnák¹, Angelika Švecová^{1*}

¹ Department of Regional Geography and Regional Development Faculty of Natural Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia, daniel.gurnak@uniba.sk, angelika.svecova@uniba.sk

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Kindergartens are a key component of preschool facilities and lay the foundation of the educational system of a developed society. The development of kindergartens in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War was influenced by various political and economic factors, which were reflected in the differences between the regions in the Czech and Slovak Republics. The study analyses these trends based on a comparative analysis of temporal and spatial data from the period 1945–1989 and focuses on general indicators. We analysed the development of kindergartens based on four main stages, during which the development of kindergartens had a specific character. The dynamics of this development also reflect economic and ideological changes in society. Research on historical trends in the development and spatial distribution of kindergartens provides policymakers with valuable insights for identifying gaps, strategic planning, efficient resource allocation, and creating inclusive policies that take into account past trends and future needs of early childhood education.

Key words:

kindergartens,
Czechoslovakia, socialism,
comparative analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

Kindergartens as a part of preschool facilities¹ are an important part of a developed society and the foundation of the school network system. The current network of preschool facilities follows on from the development of the past, which often did not proceed linearly in time and homogeneously in space. On the contrary, different factors either slowed or accelerated the development of the preschool network and eased or deepened regional differences. Understanding these past trends can help plan pre-primary education now and in the future. This is also why the intention of the authors is to assess the development of kindergartens in the Czechoslovak (Socialist) Republic after the Second World War on the basis of a temporal and spatial comparison of two regions: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

After 1945, the current Czech and Slovak Republics were part of a single state – the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) and from 1960 the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR). They thus followed on the combined state (Czechoslovak Republic) from 1918–1938/1939, which was divided by the events after Munich 1938. Economic and social development after the Second World War was significantly influenced by the year 1948 (the ascent of the Communist Party to power), when a rapid and targeted liquidation of the private sector and its nationalisation occurred in favour of state enterprises established on the basis of confiscated nationalised assets and consumer cooperatives (Križan et al., 2024), which was also manifested in education

(Križan et al., 2022). Centralized state control was established, which was also reflected in education for the purpose of ideological control of education (Tesar, 2018; Kudláčová, 2022, 2023a). The development trends in the education system after World War II in Czechoslovakia were heavily affected by the political, economic and social conditions of the time.

Demographic changes and the associated total fertility rate and birth rate are key factors influencing the provision and organisation of education, resulting in changes in the number of children entering preschool (Kučerová et al., 2015). The demographic behaviour of the population during the socialist period was shaped by several factors. After 1945, there was a significant increase in natural population growth, closely linked to rising marriage and birth rates – a phenomenon that can be viewed as compensation for the wartime period that preceded it. In 1950, the birth rate was 28.8‰ in Slovakia and 21.4‰ in the Czech lands (Jurčová, 2001). Following a brief resurgence in fertility, a further decline occurred, driven by factors such as the young age of spouses, high divorce and abortion rates, and the state's employment policy aimed at integrating as many women as possible into the workforce. Another fertility revival occurred at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, resulting from the adoption of pronatalist measures within social and family policy. These measures aimed to stimulate reproduction, increase the population, improve the socio-economic position of families with children and reduce the employment

of mothers, which during the normalisation period was perceived as undesirably high (Škorvanková & Džambazovič, 2024; Šprocha et al., 2018). Following the initial increase in births, a gradual and permanent decline began in the second half of the 1970s.

The ethnic composition of the population is also an important factor, as it may affect the rate of children's participation in pre-primary education and thus indirectly impact the network of preschool facilities.

A factor influencing the spatial organisation of preschool education during the socialist period was centrally managed socialist construction, which was implemented through five-year economic plans. These plans precisely defined the location and construction of new industrial plants and housing developments, as well as the corresponding need for kindergartens, which was perceived as undesirably high (Škorvanková & Džambazovič, 2024; Šprocha et al., 2018). Following the initial increase in births, a gradual and permanent decline began in the second half of the 1970s.

Given the centrally planned economy and a certain amount of international political isolation, one can get the impression of the unification of education during the era of socialism. Upon a more detailed examination, however, several specifics of the development of education and its transformation in time and space can be revealed. And it is the identification of these specifics and a comparison of them in the contemporary Czech and Slovak Republic that are the primary goals of this paper. A comparative approach to the history of education (Crook & McCulloch, 2002) in these two countries enables the similarities and differences to be identified and the reasons behind particular changes to be assessed. This study is focused on an analysis of the development and a comparison of education in both countries at the national level in the period of 1945–1989², that is, during the period referred to as “real Socialism” in the sense of a set of social, political and educational ideals (Mincu, 2016). The task of the authors is to look for answers to the following research questions:

Q1: What trends can be identified in the availability of early childhood education (ECE) in the present-day Czech and Slovak Republics, particularly with regard to the development of the number of kindergartens, their capacity and the provision of human resources?

Q2: To what extent did the developmental trends in the pre-primary education network within the former Czechoslovakia align with the regime's officially proclaimed objective of reducing regional disparities, particularly between Slovakia and the Czech lands?

The paper is divided into three sections. After a description of the methods and data used, a section follows focusing on the brief development of preschool facilities in the studied area before the Second World War, based on broader historical contexts. In the next section is an identification of the phases of the development of kindergartens during the examined period and a description of them. This is a temporal and spatial analysis of the development of kindergartens in both republics. In the final section, we summarise the findings and discuss the limits of the research and its future direction.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Concepts and methods of comparative analysis of education are used in the paper (Crook & McCulloch, 2002). Comparative education as a field of study is, among others, also explicitly expressed using time

and space (Cowen, 2002). In the age of globalisation, a significant resource for national Early Childhood Education (ECE) system development can be knowledge gained from international comparisons (Józsa et al., 2018). The development of the kindergarten network was analysed based on data from statistical yearbooks (Statistická ročenka republiky Československé 1948, 1957, 1959; Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1961, 1965, 1971, 1975, 1980, 1989, 1990), with attention paid to the number of kindergartens, the number of classes in kindergartens, and the number of teachers, as well as to basic demographic data on the population with regard to the child population.

Two indices were also used: the density of the school network and enrolment. The school network density index was calculated as the number of kindergarten classes per 1,000 inhabitants. The enrolment index was established in relation to the number of children attending kindergartens per population cohort aged 3–5 years (Křížan et al., 2022). For the purposes of this study, the regional divisions from the years 1960–1989 (the so-called ‘large regions’) were chosen as the observational units, as their boundaries remained practically unchanged during this period (with the exception of the separation of the territory of Slovakia's capital, Bratislava, from the Western Slovak Region in 1968). The data were visualised using geographic information systems (ArcGIS), and regional differences were compared within their historical contexts, with selected years determined by data availability.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Notes regarding the development of preschool facilities before the Second World War

The first preschool facilities (nurseries) in the researched area were already established in the first half of the 19th century. Based on legislation, they were established in Bohemia and Moravia from 1872 and in Slovakia from 1891 (Apanasewicz & Rosen, 1963). In line with the legislative norm, there were two types of facilities: day nurseries and year-round children's shelters (Gabzdilová, 2021).

Social care for children ran into several problems in Czechoslovakia in the state's beginnings. First of all, in 1918 the newly formed state took over social legislation from Austria-Hungary³, which in many cases did not reflect its current economic and social conditions. Secondly, preschool education was not a priority in solving societal and social problems (Šuhajdová, 2024). In interwar Czechoslovakia, public kindergartens could be established by the state, municipalities, the church, as well as private entities. Their low number reflected the understanding of the position of women and wives in society at that time, for whom taking care of the family, children and household was considered as their primary task (Kudláčková, 2023a).

Stages of the development of kindergartens in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

When assessing the development of kindergartens, it is important to be aware that the era of communist Czechoslovakia was not a homogeneous period lasting four decades, but a dynamic period of diverse political decisions in the context of economic development and population trends (Švecová & Tolmáči, 2025). The significant dynamics are confirmed by the extreme increases in the number of kindergartens or the number of children attending kindergartens between 1945 and 1989, at a level of more than 1,000% (Fig. 1). In the following analysis, we start from the proposed

chronological view through the prism of four main sub-stages (Mincu, 2016):

- I. the advent of communism (1945–1953), also known as the Stalinist period, was associated with radical changes in society and the economy;
- II. the crisis (1954–1963), which led to a “thaw” or “revisionism”;
- III. the re-launch (1964–1979);
- IV. consolidation (after 1980).

The advent of communism (1945–1953)

Developmental trends in the education system after World War II were significantly influenced by political, as well as economic and social conditions. In comparison with advanced European economies, education in the CSSR was insufficiently developed and in many aspects critically assessed (Gabzdilová, 2021; Križan et al., 2022; Pupala et al., 2022).

The density of the school network, particularly in Slovakia, was very low and many regions were without basic school facilities.

The capacity of the school network was not sufficient for the dynamic population development, which led to low values of the rate of children's schooling.

The unfavourable conditions for the development of kindergartens at the regional level conditioned the emergence of disparities in education which continue to the present.

After World War II, there were significant economic disparities between the Czech and Slovak lands. During this period, Slovakia was predominantly agrarian and lagged the Czech lands, particularly in terms of industrial production. Another important factor was the differing levels of urbanisation: while 54% of the population of the Czech lands were living in urban areas in 1950, this figure was only 44% in Slovakia (with municipalities exceeding 2,000 inhabitants being considered towns at that time). The regional disparity was also evident in the provision of pre-primary education. In 1945, Slovakia had only 335 kindergartens compared to 2,175 in Bohemia (Tab. 1). Nevertheless, this period saw substantial

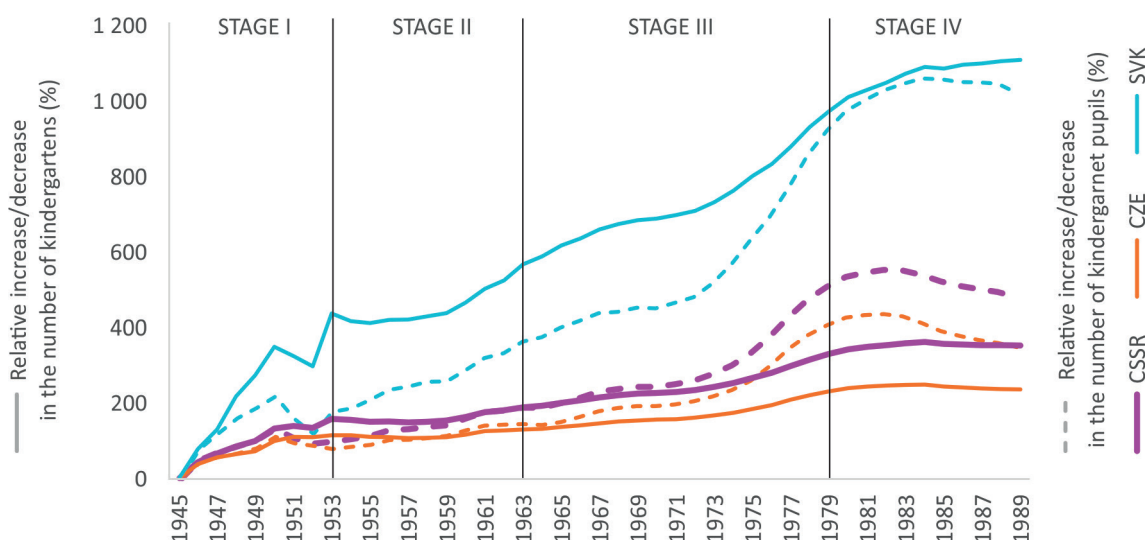


Fig. 1. Stages of kindergarten development in the CSSR in the period 1945–1989

Note: year 1945 = 100%

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1961, 1965, 1971, 1975, 1980, 1989, 1990)

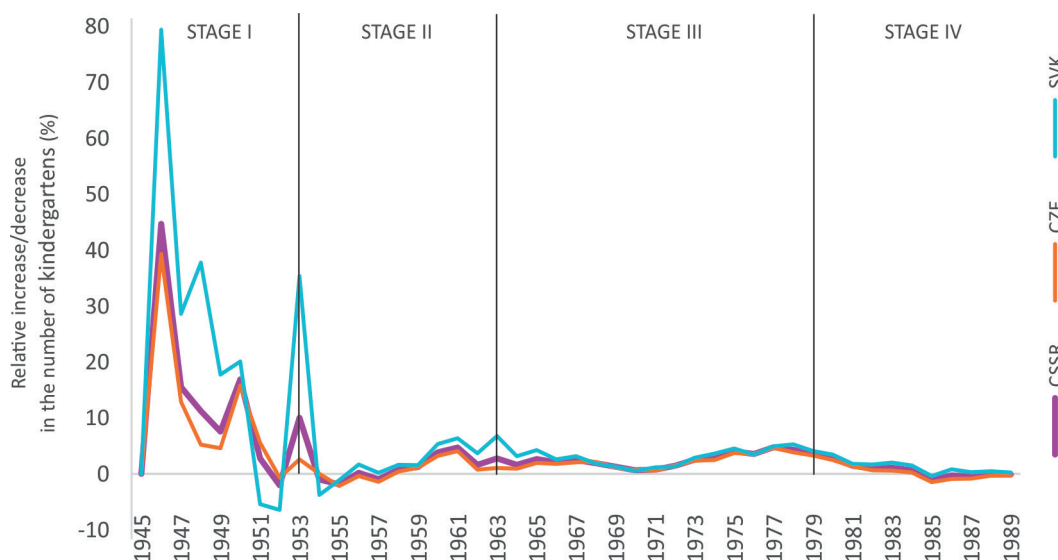


Fig. 2. Kindergarten development in the CSSR in the period 1945–1989

Note: increase/decrease compared to the previous year

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1961, 1965, 1971, 1975, 1980, 1989, 1990)

Tab. 1. Development of selected indicators between 1945 and 1953

	General fertility rate (‰)			New housing units per 1,000 inhabitants			Employment rate – women (15–54) (%)		
	1947	1953	%	1947	1953	%	1947	1953	%
CSR	88.3	84.9	96.2	0.30	3.02	1015.7	34.5	65.4	189.7
CZE	85.7	75.8	88.5	0.24	2.55	1079.4	38.6	67.7	175.7
SVK	95.1	107.1	112.6	0.45	4.22	928.1	23.5	59.7	253.3

Source: Statistická ročenka republiky Československé (1948, 1957)

Tab. 2. Development of selected indicators of ECE between 1945 and 1953

	Kindergartens			Children			Teachers		
	1945	1953	%	1945	1953	%	1949	1953	%
CSR	2,509	6,497	158.9	109,241	219,324	100.8	8,515	13,748	61.5
CZE	2,174	4,693	115.9	87,713	159,124	81.4	5,795	10,585	82.7
SVK	335	1,804	438.5	21,528	60,200	179.6	2,720	3,163	16.3

Source: Statistická ročenka republiky Československé (1948, 1957)

progress in preschool education for Slovak children (Fig. 1, 2). Immediately after the war, kindergartens were established across nearly all municipalities where there was local initiative and understanding for the given matter, but particularly where suitable buildings or rooms were available. In this period, the construction of new buildings for the purposes of kindergartens was not carried out (Gabzdilová, 2021).

Dynamic changes in the development of kindergartens took place mainly after 1948, as a reaction to the economic policy of the communist government of Czechoslovakia aimed at the development of industrial production and the related increase in the workforce, including women. The entry of mothers of young children into employment (female employment roughly doubled during this period) conditioned the dynamic increase in the number of kindergartens during this period (Fig. 2). These social transformations were particularly intense in Slovakia due to its significant initial lag. However, regional disparities between the two countries persisted (Tab. 1).

In 1948, the so-called Education Act (Act No. 95/1948) was adopted, and it legally, organisationally and ideologically unified education and enacted the principle of establishing only state schools. The name “detské opatrovne” (“day care centres”) was changed to “materské školy” (“kindergartens” or “nursery schools”), which, in accordance with this law, were supposed to provide educational care, health and social protection to children from the age of three until the time they started attending national school, in close cooperation with the family. Kindergartens were established by the School Administration Office in the municipality or at the plant⁴. Based on the Education Act, kindergartens for the first time became part of the unified education system (Gabzdilová, 2021; Pajdlhauserová, 2009), which conditioned a dynamic increase in the number of facilities (Fig. 2). Czechoslovak society after 1948 was shaped on the Soviet model, which was reflected in education as well as in other areas. Changes in education were extensive and rapid (Andic, 1953) and led to the nationalisation of education, including kindergartens, in socialist states (Millei & Imre, 2013).

During the first stage of development, 3,988 kindergartens, 110,083 children and 5,233 teachers were added in Czechoslovakia⁵. This development was not uniform in time (Fig. 2) and space (Tab. 2). The development of kindergartens in Slovakia significantly exceeded (+438.5%) the average values for the two countries (158.9%). The growth in the number of kindergartens is connected with the increase in the

number of children in kindergartens. The increase in the number of children in kindergartens, however, was more intense in Slovakia (+179.6%), which was also related to its worse initial condition. It is also necessary to point out the lack of qualified personnel in the form of teachers, which has grown only slowly in Slovakia. However, there was still a reserve in Slovakia compared to the Czech Republic, since in 1949, there were 23 children per teacher in Slovakia and 28 in the Czech Republic. The situation then changed in 1953 to Slovakia's disadvantage (15 children per teacher in the Czech Republic and 19 children per teacher in Slovakia).

The crisis (1954–1963)

The Education Act of 1953 defined preschool facilities based on levels and types of nurseries and kindergartens. The crèches cared for children from 3 months to 3 years, while kindergartens admitted children from 3 to 5 years old. The slowdown in kindergarten expansion during the second half of the 1950s was closely linked to stabilising demographic trends and the sharp decline in fertility following the adoption of abortion laws at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s (Jurčová et al., 2001). A comprehensive review of the existing kindergarten network also led to proposals to close schools and classes that could not be justified by economic demand. This stagnation was further reinforced by Czechoslovakia's broader economic development. At the turn of the decade, the economic crisis of the centrally planned economy became fully apparent, culminating in the failure of the third five-year plan and prompting discussions on economic reforms that would incorporate more pragmatic and rational approaches to management and planning. One of the important tasks of the review was to determine the effectiveness and eligibility of kindergartens, especially in small, rural villages with a small number of employed mothers. The children of unemployed mothers could not attend kindergarten, and in some localities, facilities with a small number of children were closed. The review also found that in several agricultural settlements, there were schools with all-day care that did not provide meals for the children (Gabzdilová, 2021). This, too, led to the closure of many facilities and thus to a reduction in the number of kindergartens in both states (Fig. 2).

In the second stage, development slowed down, with 823 kindergartens added in Czechoslovakia, 61% of which were in Slovakia. Between 1954 and 1963, the number of children attending kindergartens increased by 90,421 and the number of teachers by

Tab. 3. Development of selected indicators between 1954 and 1963

	General fertility rate (‰)			New housing units per 1,000 inhabitants			Employment rate – women (15–54) (%)		
	1954	1963	%	1954	1963	%	1954	1963	%
CSSR	83.7	72.4	86.5	2.93	5.91	201.6	68.8	74.3	109.5
CZE	74.5	65.6	88.1	2.26	5.05	223.3	69.3	80.9	116.8
SVK	105.8	87.7	82.9	4.62	7.86	169.9	64.2	58.7	91.4

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1965)

Tab. 4. Development of selected indicators of ECE between 1954 and 1963

	Kindergartens			Children			Teachers		
	1954	1963	%	1954	1963	%	1954	1963	%
CSSR ⁶	6,431	7,254	12.8	226,784	317,205	39.9	14,464	21,502	48.7
CZE	4,695	5,016	6.8	164,584	217,132	31.9	11,358	15,358	37.2
SVK	1,736	2,238	28.9	62,200	100,073	60.9	3,106	5,914	90.4

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1965)

more than 7,000. The dynamics of the development of the analysed indicators were also more pronounced in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic during the second stage of development (Tab. 3). The rising number of teachers in Slovakia reduced the differences compared to the Czech Republic in the number of children per teacher indicator. In 1954, there were 15 children per teacher in the Czech Republic and 20 in the Slovak Republic; in 1963, there were 14 children/teacher in the Czech Republic and 17 in the Slovak Republic. However, the reduction in social and economic disparities between Slovakia and the Czech lands did not proceed at the same pace in all sectors during this period. In Slovakia, intensive housing construction was linked to more dynamic demographic development. However, female employment declined in Slovakia, in contrast to trends observed in the Czech lands (Tab. 4).

The re-launch (1964–1979)

The third stage of development is characterised by positive demographic development (Rychtaříková, 2018; Šprocha et al., 2018) and economic development (Korda & Moravcik, 1980; Pavlínek, 1995), which led to growth in the number of kindergartens (Fig. 2) and associated indicators (Križan et al., 2022), especially from the 1970s onward. The generations of this period were influenced by the combined impact of a large number of women of reproductive age (post-war baby boomers) and the pro-natalist policies of the communist government. The state introduced measures such as child allowances, loans for newlyweds, an extension of maternity leave to two years, and increases in both child and parental benefits (Tišliar et al., 2019). The children born during this period are often referred to as “Husák’s children”, a term derived from the name of Gustáv Husák, the leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia at the time (Bleha, 2019). The pace of housing construction and other socially beneficial measures peaked. Economic and social disparities between the Czech and Slovak parts of the now federal state continued to decline significantly. During the period under review, while the gross fertility rate was still rising in the Czech lands, it had already begun to decline in Slovakia. Despite this downward trend, fertility levels in Slovakia remained considerably higher compared to the Czech lands (Tab. 5).

In 1964, there were 7,372 kindergartens with 12,133 classes in the CSSR, with 317,728 children attending kindergartens and taught by 22,357 teachers. Between 1964 and 1979, 3,443 kindergartens were added, with the growth rate increasing particularly

in the second half of the 1970s (Fig. 2). This growth can also be connected to the massive development of housing construction and the founding of many housing estates. One component of such estates was the building of preschool infrastructure (Križan et al., 2022). The rate of increase in the number of children in kindergartens surpassed 100% in both countries (Tab. 6), and the intensity of the increase in teachers was more dynamic in Slovakia. While kindergartens in Slovakia saw a decrease in the number of children per teacher (16 → 14) between 1964 and 1979, the Czech Republic recorded an increase in this indicator (13 → 15).

The consolidation (after 1980)

The upper culmination of the development of the network of kindergartens occurred during the 1980s (Figs. 1 and 2). In the 1980s, the growth rate of the number of kindergartens gradually declined (Fig. 2), which corresponded to demographic developments. The number of kindergartens peaked in 1984 both at the national level and in the Czech Republic. In Slovakia, the situation was different, as the number of kindergartens (aside from 1985) continuously increased (Fig. 2). The reason was the more positive situation of population development in Slovakia (Kučera, 1994).

Negative values of the analysed indicators are also characteristic of the final analysed stage. Even though the total number of kindergartens in the CSSR increased by 261 between 1980–1989, there was actually a significant decrease in the Czech Republic (Tab. 7). This period was characterised by the falling off of pronatal measures from the previous period and a related significant decline in the birth rate, which was also reflected in the fall in the number of children attending kindergarten by more than 68,000 (14.8%, Tab. 8). Given the decreasing trend of the number of children in kindergartens as well as the increase in the number of teachers, the number of children per teacher was reduced from 15 to 12 in the Czech Republic and from 14 to 13 in Slovakia. On the one hand, these trends can be considered positive, as they have improved access to pre-primary education, with capacity effectively exceeding demand. Staffing levels in kindergartens also reached more favourable levels. On the other hand, however, the question of the economic sustainability of the entire system came to the fore — a concern that would only become fully apparent after the fall of the communist regime under fundamentally changed conditions.

Tab. 5. Development of selected indicators between 1964 and 1979

	General fertility rate (‰)			New housing units per 1,000 inhabitants			Employment rate – women (15–54) (%)		
	1964	1979	%	1964	1979	%	1964	1979	%
CSSR	73.4	74.5	101.5	5.52	8.03	145.5	75.6	79.3	104.9
CZE	67.6	70.8	104.7	4.85	7.47	154.0	82.3	83.3	101.3
SVK	86.6	82.0	94.7	7.02	9.20	130.9	59.9	71.1	118.6

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1965, 1980)

Tab. 6. Development of selected indicators of ECE between 1964 and 1979

	Kindergartens			Children			Teachers		
	1964	1979	%	1964	1979	%	1964	1979	%
CSSR	7,372	10,815	46.7	317,728	666,048	109.6	22,357	44,972	101.2
CZE	5,063	7,216	42.5	215,108	446,053	107.4	15,983	29,748	86.1
SVK	2,309	3,599	55.9	102,620	219,995	114.4	6,374	15,224	138.8

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1965, 1980)

Development of the density of the kindergarten network and the enrolment rate

Between 1960 and 1989, the number of kindergartens almost doubled (a 1.7-fold increase), while the population grew by 1.1-fold. The trend in the CSSR was a thickening of the network of kindergartens, which had regional specifics. For the first year examined (1960), a lower density of the network of kindergartens in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic is characteristic (Fig. 3). While the Czech Republic had 0.7471 classes in kindergartens per 1,000 inhabitants, in Slovakia this was 0.6481. The significantly lower density values in the capital cities (Prague and Bratislava), which were less than half of the national average, need to be pointed out. Significantly low values are typical for Prague, where in 1960 there were only 0.4505 classes in kindergartens per 1,000 residents. Despite the intensive concentration of the population by migration to the cities, in the post-war period, Prague showed the lowest population growth (including children)⁷. This value doubled over the course of two decades but always remained below average.

Regional differences in the density of the network of kindergartens gradually narrowed, becoming evident in the Czech Republic in 1980 (Fig. 3), with undersized Prague and the Central Bohemian Region as exceptions. An increase in the density of the network of kindergartens is also seen in Slovakia, but the development in the regions of eastern Slovakia was significantly more dynamic than in the west, which even remained behind the national average. A similar lagging of the capital city as in the Czech

Republic was characteristic of Slovakia as well, with Bratislava showing values 15% lower than in the East Slovak Region.

The rate of enrolment in the CSSR (Fig. 4) reached the level of 38% in 1960, and this was higher in the Czech lands (43%) and lower in Slovakia (30%). The development of the enrolment of children indicates gradual progress during the examined period, initially with a smaller, almost one-fifth, increase between decades (1960–1970). During the 1970s, the level of enrolment exceeded 50% in almost all regions (Fig. 3). Subsequently, between 1970 and 1980, this level increased dynamically both in the Czech and the Slovak parts of the republic at the level of more than 30 percentage points. A similar trend is seen in other socialist states (Mařkova, 1988; Kocourková, 2002). The enrolment of kindergarten children culminated in the second half of the 1980s, with the rate of enrolment for the age cohort of 3–5-year-old children in the Czech Republic even exceeding 100% in 1986–1987 (especially in the South Bohemian Region, where it continuously reached more than 102%, even up to 106% after 1984). The reason was that children outside the observed age cohort, i.e., 6 years and older, or younger than 3 years, were also increasing in kindergartens. Overall, this exceeding of 100% enrolment occurred at least temporarily in 6 out of 8 regions in the Czech lands. In Slovakia, this phenomenon occurred only in Bratislava after 1984, and the highest rate of enrolment reached only 92.9% in Western Slovakia (in 1988, 1989), while the national average was 92.8% (1988).

Tab. 7. Development of selected indicators between 1980 and 1989

	General fertility rate (‰)			New housing units per 1,000 inhabitants			Employment rate – women (15–54) (%)		
	1980	1989	%	1980	1989	%	1980	1989	%
CSSR	67.9	56.4	83.1	8.43	5.66	67.2	80.2	85.1	106.1
CZE	63.2	52.4	82.9	7.84	5.32	67.8	84.2	88.1	104.7
SVK	77.2	64.2	83.2	9.65	6.35	65.8	72.2	79.1	109.7

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1980, 1990)

Tab. 8. Development of selected indicators between 1980 and 1989

	Kindergartens			Children			Teachers		
	1980	1989	%	1980	1989	%	1980	1989	%
CSSR	11,119	11,380	2.3	694,720	636,622	-8.4	47,290	50,519	6.8
CZE	7,396	7,328	-0.9	463,565	395,164	-14.8	31,110	31,790	2.2
SVK	3,723	4,052	8.8	231,155	241,458	4.5	16,180	18,729	15.8

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1980, 1990)

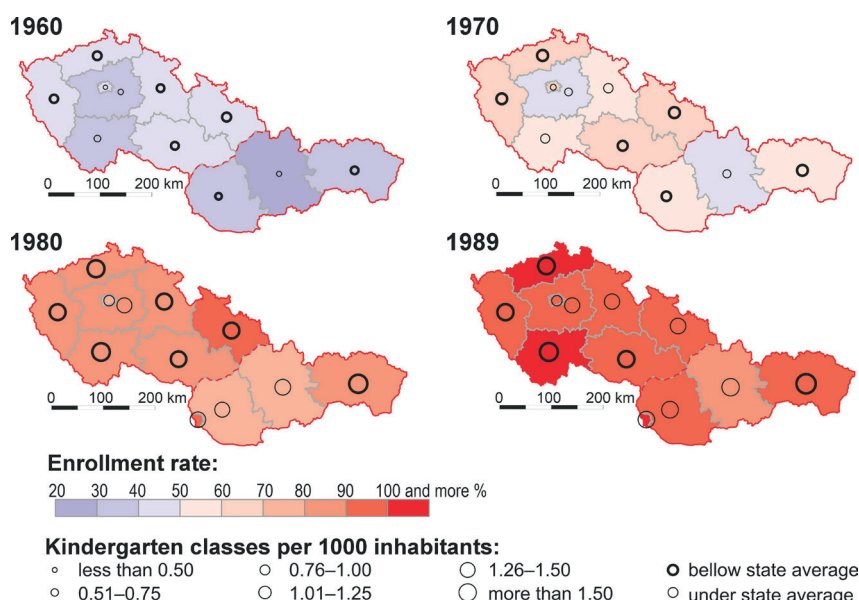


Fig. 3. Enrolment rate and the number of classes in kindergartens in the CSSR regions in 1960, 1970⁸, 1980 and 1989
Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1961, 1971, 1980, 1990)

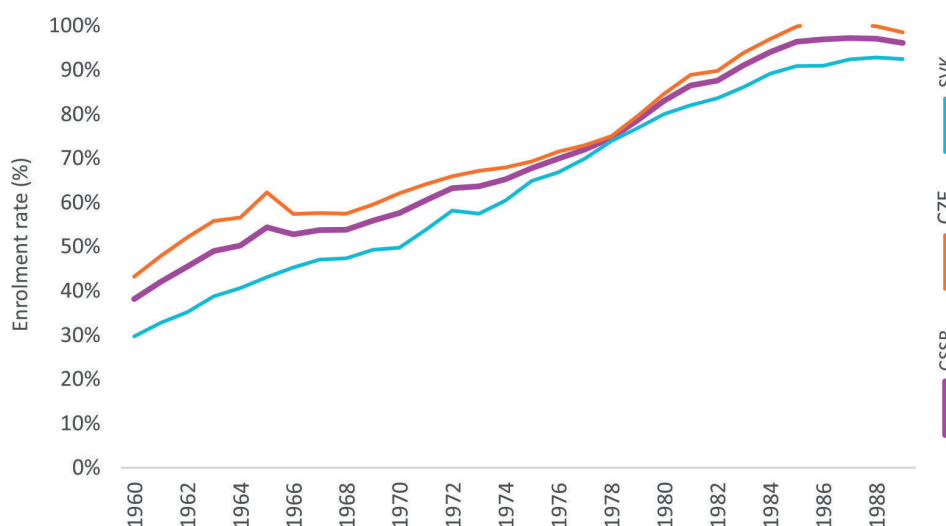


Fig. 4. Development of the enrolment rate of children in kindergartens in the CSSR, CSR and SSR in the years 1960–1989
Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR (1961, 1965, 1971, 1975, 1980, 1989)

4 CONCLUSIONS

The communist regime in the CSSR understood kindergartens as institutions that should ensure the care of children while also creating a basic prerequisite for the entry of women and mothers into employment. The massive development of childcare facilities during the period of state socialism was the result of economic and ideological arguments for the high participation of women in the labour market (Kantorová, 2004). What's more, educational systems were perceived as hypercentralised, which led to a negative evaluation of education as a whole (Mincu, 2016). The development of kindergartens in Czechoslovakia between the years 1945 and 1989 achieved never before seen dynamics, with an increase of 454% (337% in the Czech Republic and 1210% in Slovakia). This period for some authors is called the “phenomenon of kindergartens” (Hašková & Saxonberg, 2011).

The population development of the CSSR was conditioned by the state's massive support for young families with children, which created favourable conditions for high population reproduction

(Káčerová, 2012). As a consequence of various pronatal measures, the number of children increased, and in this context, a network of schools, including kindergartens, was set up (Nestorová Dická, 2011; Krížan et al., 2022). Significant progress in building new kindergartens occurred after 1948, with the change in the economic policy of the ruling Communist Party. Economic development and significant industrialisation of the state also meant an increase in employment. The rise in women's employment created pressure for the provision of childcare by the state, which led to a rapid increase in the number of preschool facilities. It needs to be noted that prior to the 1949/1950 school year, kindergartens (in Slovakia) did not provide all-day care for children (Gabzdilová, 2021). The development of pre-primary education in the CSSR was managed on the basis of five-year plans, as in other countries of the socialist bloc in Europe or Asia (Vu, 2021). The history of education systems from 1947 to 1989 and beyond can also be seen as a slow and gradual erosion of the initial impact of a Communist orientation (Mincu, 2016). Children

in the countries of the Eastern bloc were placed at the centre of the social, political and economic reconstruction of society; they were perceived as the embodiment of a new social order (Teszenyi et al., 2022). Education expanded for the instillation of morals and consciousness of children, leading to the perception of kindergartens as captivating tools of ideological indoctrination with the aim of raising a new generation of citizens shaped by socialist political ideals, values, beliefs and behaviours.

Several milestones can be identified in the development of the network of kindergartens in the CSSR. After the Second World War, there were 2,509 kindergartens in the CSSR, which were attended by 109,241 children and where 2,604 teachers were employed. With the revival of the economy torn by war came the rapid expansion of the network of kindergartens and an increase in the number of children attending them. Just five years later (1950), more than twice as many kindergartens were registered, and the number of children surpassed the 250,000 mark. In the first half of the 1950s, turbulence is seen in the development of the network of kindergartens. It can be assumed that this development was also linked to the nationalisation and centralisation of school facilities (Križan et al., 2022). Dynamic transformations in the middle of the 20th century are based on the national guidelines of the Ministry of Education from April 1951, and from the results of a review of kindergartens, it was decided that: 1. new facilities should be created exclusively with all-day care, 2. it was necessary to transform previous kindergartens into facilities with all-day operation, 3. it was necessary to cancel classes and schools that had no economic justification (Gabzdilová, 2021). From the end of the 1950s, the development of the network of kindergartens in the CSSR is characterised by the continuous growth of facilities up to the second half of the 1980s or the 1990s. Changes in the network of kindergartens also affected the level of children's enrolment. At the end of the 1980s, the enrolment rate of children aged 3–6 in kindergartens rose above 80% not only in Czechoslovakia, but also in Hungary, although in Poland this was lower than 50% (Kocourková, 2002).

Spatial differences were identified in both the development of the kindergarten network and enrolment rates. Among the regional specifics of the analysed indicators, a notable trend is the lag in kindergarten network density in the capitals of both states compared to national averages. This is primarily due to their distinct population age structure, as these are the only purely urban administrative units under study. Another factor evident in Prague from the 1970s onwards is a slight real deterioration in network density relative to the relevant age cohort of children compared to other regions. One possible explanation for this is the significant increase in housing construction and migration to the metropolis (Musil, 1993), which meant that the expansion and management of new kindergarten capacities could not keep pace. In several cities, the issue of depopulation in surrounding rural areas and urban growth was addressed through children attending (or being transported to) kindergartens in neighbouring municipalities. The dynamics of urbanisation in Slovakia (particularly in cities with over 10,000 inhabitants or over 100,000 inhabitants) were more pronounced than in the Czech Republic, which also led to different development trends in the two capital cities. Regional problems did not play a significant part in the CSSR, and the management of school

policy at the national level also led to manifestations of differences in space at lower hierarchical levels (which we identified in the case of regions). Growth in regional problems of centrally controlled planning led to the preparation of regional plans at the end of the 1990s (Pavlínek, 1992), which, however, were never implemented due to the Velvet Revolution.

The analysis of the historical development of pre-primary education facilities also brings several important lessons for the current development and planning of the kindergarten network. It points to the need for flexible and regularly updated planning based on demographic and migration forecasts, which will enable an effective response to population changes. At the same time, capacity expansion must reflect quality requirements, ensuring qualified staff and suitable conditions for children's development. Strategic decision-making should consider regional specifics and be coordinated with urban development in order to prevent capacity shortages in growing urban areas.

The limiting factors of this research are also acknowledged. These stages characterise both the Eastern area and Soviet society, though they are manifested differently and with various meanings in each country (Mincu, 2016). Another limiting factor arises from the fact that preschool facilities were not the subject of much attention from the school administration in the past; therefore, relevant data on their functioning are often not available or are incomplete (for only some spatial units). The paper is focused only on kindergartens, while preschool education also took place in other facilities (nurseries). Therefore, when generalising the results, it is necessary to take these limiting factors into account and to interpret the results based on them.

In conclusion, it is important to note that kindergartens in socialist Czechoslovakia were perceived not only as institutions providing care for children but also as care for their socialisation and development. Despite all the positive effects of preschool facilities on the development of children, the “socialist” model of kindergartens also led to a weakening of the role of the family in the socialisation of the child and to a so-called “correct” education (Kocourková, 2002; Tesar, 2018; Kudláčková, 2023b). But that is another story.

Footnotes

¹The term preschool in this work refers to kindergartens.

² Some sections of the analysis are tied to a different period due to data accessibility and their usability in comparative analysis at the regional level.

³What's more with a different system in the Czech lands – originally Austrian countries, and in Slovakia, which had the legal system of Hungary.

⁴If at least 20 children from the assumed kindergarten district were registered. The facility could be cancelled if the number of children fell below 15. The legislative standard set the number of children in one class at a maximum of 30.

⁵This is a comparison of the development between 1949 and 1953 with respect to absent data.

⁶Up to 1960 the designation was the CSR (Czechoslovak Republic), afterwards the CSSR (Czechoslovak Socialist Republic).

⁷Ibid.

⁸The numbers of kindergarten classes are from 1967, as they were not available at the regional level for 1968–1975.

Acknowledgements:

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under Contract No. APVV-21-0286 and VEGA project No. 1/0531/26.

REFERENCES

- Andic, V. E. (1953). A Comparative Study of Education in Czechoslovakia for the Periods of 1918 to 1938 and 1948 to 1953. New York University.
- Apanasewicz, N., & Rosen, S. M. (1963). Education in Czechoslovakia. U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
- Bleha, B. (2019). How much can societal turning points affect forecasts' accuracy in Europe? Case of post-communistic transformation in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. *European Journal of Futures Research*, 7(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40309-019-0158-z>
- Cowen, R. (2002). Moments of time: A comparative note. *History of Education*, 31(5), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00467600210153609>
- Crook, D., & McCulloch, G. (2002). Comparative approaches to the history of education. *History of Education*, 31(5), 397–400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00467600210151944>
- Gabzdilová, S. (2021). Miesto a úlohy materských škôl na Slovensku v systéme komunistickej výchovy (1948–1953). *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 2021, 25(1), 254–269. <https://doi.org/10.17846/SHN.2021.25.1.254-269>
- Hašková, H., & Saxonberg, S. (2011). The institutional roots of post-communist family policy: Comparing the Czech and Slovak Republics. In Krook, M. L., Mackay, F. (Eds.), *Gender, Politics and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism* (pp. 112–128). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230303911_7
- Józsa, K., Török, B., & Stevenson, C. (2018). Preschool and kindergarten in Hungary and the United States: A comparison within transnational development policy. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 62, 88–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.03.001>
- Káčerová, M., Ondačková, J., & Mládek, J. (2012). A comparison of population ageing in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic based on generation support and exchange. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 20(4), 26–38.
- Kantorová, V. (2004). Education and entry into motherhood: The Czech Republic during state socialism and the transition period (1970–1997). *Demographic Research*, 3, 245–274. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2004.S3.10>
- Kocourková, J. (2002). Leave arrangements and childcare services in Central Europe: policies and practices before and after the transition. *Community, Work & Family*, 5(3), 301–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1366880022000041793>
- Korda, B., & Moravcik, I. (1980). Thirty years of socialist economic development in Czechoslovakia. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 22(4), 481–495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.1980.11091643>
- Križan, F., Gurňák, D., & Švecová, A. (2022). Transformation of the Kindergarten Network in Slovakia: Notes on the Temporal and Spatial Changes. *Geografické informácie*, 26(2), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.17846/GI.2022.26.2.17-28>
- Križan, F., Kunc, J., Bilková, K., & Novotná, M. (2024). National retailing after the Second World War: structural changes, differences and the impact of the socialist model on the Czech and Slovak Republics (1953–1989). *History of Retailing and Consumption*, 10(2), 187–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2373518X.2024.2369829>
- Kučera, M. (1994). *Populace České republiky 1918–1991*. SOÚ AV ČR, Česká demografická společnost.
- Kudláčová, B. (2023a). Education as a political tool of the communist regime in Slovakia. *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 42(2), 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.48261/pis234204>
- Kudláčová, B. (Ed.). (2023b). Two sides of the same coin: Examples of free and unfree education in Slovakia during the period of socialism. VEDA. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b20915>
- Kudláčová, B. (2022). History of education as study subject and academic discipline: the case of Slovakia. *Paedagogica Historica*, 58(6), 944–959. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2022.2103385>
- Malkova, Z. A. (1988). Education in the Countries of Socialism. *Soviet Education*, 30(6), 34–66. <https://doi.org/10.2753/RES1060-9393300634>
- Millei, Z., & Imre, R. J. (2013). The “cosmopolitan” project and Hungarian kindergarten education: Re-reading socialism. *Prospects*, 43(2), 133–149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-012-9252-8>
- Mincu, M. E. (2016). Communist education as modernisation strategy? The swings of the globalisation pendulum in Eastern Europe (1947–1989). *History of Education*, 45(3), 319–334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2015.1127432>
- Musil, J. (1993). Czech and Slovak society: Outline of a comparative study. *Czech Sociological Review*, 5–21.
- Nestorová Dická, J. (2011). Transformácia siete predškolských zariadení v Košiciach po roku 1989. *Geographia Cassoviensis*, 5(2), 77–92.
- Pajdlhauserová, E. (2009). Od detských opatrovní k materským školám v sústave škôl. In Gašparová, E., & Miňová, M. (Eds.), *Od detskej opatrovne k materskej škole* (pp. 65–72). Slovenský výbor Svetovej organizácie pre predškolskú výchovu Spoločnosť pre predškolskú výchovu.
- Pavlínek, P. (1992). Regional transformation in Czechoslovakia: towards a market economy. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 83(5), 361–371. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.1992.tb00616.x>
- Pavlínek, P. (1995). Regional development and the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. *Geoforum*, 26(4), 351–372. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(95\)00030-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(95)00030-5)
- Pupala, B., Yulindrasari, H., & Rahardjo, M. M. (2022). Diversity and centrism in two contrasting early childhood education and care systems: Slovakia and Indonesia compared. *Human Affairs*, 32(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2022-0012>
- Rychtaříková, J. (2018). Demographic trends and patterns in Czechia and Slovakia during the socialist era. *Demografie*, 60(3), 184–201.
- Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1961. Federální statistický úřad, Český statistický úřad, Slovenský štatistický úřad, SNTL/ALFA 1971.
- Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1965. Federální statistický úřad, Český statistický úřad, Slovenský štatistický úřad, SNTL/ALFA 1965.
- Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1971. Federální statistický úřad, Český statistický úřad, Slovenský štatistický úřad, SNTL/ALFA 1971.
- Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1975. Federální statistický úřad, Český statistický úřad, Slovenský štatistický úřad, SNTL/ALFA 1980.
- Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1980. Federální statistický

- úrad, Český statistický úrad, Slovenský štatistický úrad, SNTL/ALFA 1980.
- Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1989. Federální statistický úrad, Český statistický úrad, Slovenský štatistický úrad, SNTL/ALFA 1990.
- Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1990. Federální statistický úrad, Český statistický úrad, Slovenský štatistický úrad, SNTL/ALFA 1990.
- Statistická ročenka republiky Československé 1948. Státní úřad statistický 1948.
- Statistická ročenka republiky Československé 1957. Státní úřad statistický republiky československé, Orbis 1957.
- Statistická ročenka republiky Československé 1959. Státní úřad statistický republiky československé, Orbis 1959.
- Škorvanková, E. & Džambazovič, R. (2024). Socialistická rodinná a populačná politika na Slovensku. *Kapitál*, 8(3). <https://kapital-noviny.sk/socialisticka-rodinna-politika/>
- Šprocha, B., Tišliar, P., & Ďurček, P. (2018). Socialistický model populačnej politiky a reprodukčné správanie na Slovensku. *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 22(1), 105–131. <https://doi.org/10.17846/SHN.2018.22.1.104-131>
- Šuhajdová, I. (2024). Nedostatok tradície. Sociálna starostlivosť o deti na slovenskom území v období prvej Československej republiky. *Sizyfovská práca, druh ušľachtilého športu starších dám* a dobrosrdečných osôb či zrod veľkého činu? *Slovenský národopis*, 72(1), 104–122. <https://doi.org/10.31577/SN.2024.1.06>
- Švecová, A., & Tolmáči, A. (2025). Pre-Primary Education in Slovakia over the Last Three Decades: Temporal and Spatial Analysis. *Geografický časopis/Geographical Journal*, 77(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.31577/geogrcas.2025.77.1.03>
- Tesar, M. (2018). Children, childhoods and kindergartens in communist Czechoslovakia: untold narratives of the early years. *Early Years*, 38(2), 212–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2018.1450850>
- Teszenyi, E., Varga Nagy, A., & Pálfi, S. (2022). Re-imagining socialist childhoods: Changing narratives of spatial and temporal (dis) orientations. *Journal of Childhood, Education & Society*, 3(3), 212–217. <https://doi.org/10.37291/2717638X.202233252>
- Tišliar, P., Hrnčiarová, D., Škorvanková, E., & Šprocha, B. (2019). *Populačná a rodinná politika na Slovensku v 20. storočí*. (1. st. ed.). Centrum pre historickú demografiu a populačný vývoj Slovenska FiF UK v spolupráci s vydavateľstvom Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo.
- Vu, T. T. (2021). Early childhood education in Vietnam, history, and development. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 15(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-020-00080-4>



Article first received: 30 July 2025
Article accepted: 29 September 2025