

The Uneven Field of Belonging: Capital and Power Dynamics Among Long-Term Residents in a Suburbanizing Municipality

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This article examines the internal dynamics of long-term residents in Chorvátsky Grob, a municipality near Bratislava that is undergoing rapid suburbanization. Moving beyond the conventional dichotomy of “newcomers versus old-timers”, it examines how historical hierarchies, ethnic identities, and unequal distributions of economic, social, cultural, symbolic, and bodily capital shape experiences of change. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the study highlights the mobilisation of symbolic capital – such as claims to autochthony (“svitar/svitari”) – and the persistence of class-based distinctions (“bíreš”) in structuring intra-community relations. Findings reveal significant disparities in residents’ ability to access political life and navigate shifting social landscapes, depending on their cultural and social resources. The research contributes to debates on post-socialist suburbanization by demonstrating how historical legacies intersect with contemporary transformations, shaping local power relations and social cohesion in complex ways.

Keywords: suburbanization, long-term residents, newcomers, symbolic capital, power relations

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Introduction

Over the past three decades, the dynamics of suburbanisation in Central and Eastern Europe have undergone significant transformation, reshaping not only the physical but also the social and symbolic geographies of formerly rural municipalities. This

process has been characterised by the selective in-migration of middle- and upper-middle-class urban populations, fundamentally altering local class structures and community configurations (Leetmaa, Tammaru, 2007; Sýkora, Bouzarovski, 2012). While some scholarly attention has focused on the interactions and potential conflicts between these newcomers and the established “old-timer” populations (Špačková, Ouředníček, 2012; Orchowska 2024), less is known about the internal dynamics and power relations within the long-term resident communities themselves. In fact, especially earlier post-socialist suburban studies borrow Western frameworks that overemphasise the “pioneering” role of suburban newcomers, without properly integrating the social heterogeneity of the peri-urban fringe. Long-term residents (including working-class villagers, agricultural populations, or marginalised groups) often “disappear” analytically into the background of narratives about suburban newcomers’ housing preferences (Ouředníček, 2016; Orchowska, 2024; Galčanová, Staveník, 2020).

This study addresses this gap by examining the social landscape of Chorvátsky Grob, a village near Bratislava experiencing intense suburban development. The primary objective is to examine how historical social hierarchies, ethnic identities, and unevenly distributed forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, bodily, and symbolic) influence the internal differentiation, power relations, and experiences of long-term residents as they navigate the social transformations resulting from intensive suburbanization.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of capital and its forms (1986), this research investigates how pre-existing social hierarchies, rooted in historical class divisions and ethnic identities, intersect with the changes brought about by suburbanization to shape the experiences and interactions of long-term residents. I argue that understanding the distribution and mobilization of various forms of capital – including economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, as well as claims to autochthony – among different groups of long-term residents is crucial for comprehending the complex social dynamics unfolding in suburbanizing contexts.

The case of Chorvátsky Grob, with its distinct historical communities and rapid influx of new residents, presents a unique opportunity to examine these intra-community dynamics. This study focuses on two groups of long-term residents, differentiated by their historical ties to the original village and a former agricultural estate, to analyse how their distinct social trajectories and capital endowments influence their perceptions of change, their relationships with each other, and their engagement with the new suburban reality. By examining the symbolic boundaries they construct and the forms of capital they leverage, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of social transformation and power relations in post-socialist suburban settings, moving beyond a simplistic binary of newcomers and old-timers to reveal the intricate social fabric of communities undergoing rapid change.

Suburbanization, Diversity, and Conflict

Post-socialist suburbanization significantly transforms the hinterlands of major cities in Central and Eastern Europe through the selective migration of middle and upper-class populations, thereby substantially reshaping the social structures of original rural municipalities (Leetmaa, Tammaru, Anniste, 2009; Sýkora, Bouzarovski, 2012; Krišjāne, Bērziņš, Ivlevs, Bauls, 2012; Zwęglińska-Gałecka, 2021; Šuška, Šveda, 2023). Despite the longevity of these processes, suburban communities remain far from homogeneous; rather, they are marked by persistent social, cultural, and generational differences between long-term residents and newcomers (Šveda, Madajová, Podolák, 2016). While the composition of in-migrating groups is not entirely uniform, research consistently indicates a dominance of socio-economically advantaged populations (Kährlik, Tammaru, 2008; Špačková, Ouředníček, 2012; Michálek, Výboštok, 2020). In the case of Bratislava, Ladislav Novotný (2016) highlights a shift from earlier, more heterogeneous waves of migration to the more recent and overwhelming presence of socially dominant groups. These demographic changes have significant implications for the nature of community life, public participation, and symbolic claims to space.

Interactions between these two groups are often marked by cultural, generational, and value differences, accompanied by distinct rhythms of everyday life and different expectations regarding the functioning of local governments (Krišjāne, Bērziņš, 2012; Šuška, Šveda, Krivý, 2018; Šveda, Výboštok, Gurňák, 2021). This relatively rapid, market-driven process of social polarization (Golubchikov, 2017; Zwęglińska-Gałecka, 2021) has several negative impacts on local communities and their cohesion, as documented also by examples from outside the Central European context (Salamon, 2007, Putnam, 2000). While the resulting spatial and symbolic fragmentation, in some cases, gives rise to pronounced forms of social exclusion and group-based conflict, reminiscent of broader urban patterns, including the emergence of gated communities (Polanska, 2010a, 2010b; Kovács, Hegedűs, 2014; Petrovic, Ouředníček, 2024), the very arrival of a large number of new, economically stronger residents creates a specific environment for the interaction of distinct groups (Špačková, Ouředníček, 2012; Galčanová, 2013). Several works highlight differently expressed group demands, with their unequal levels reflecting different social statuses and the associated expectations and requirements in areas such as infrastructure and services from the local government, as well as the limited capacities for their fulfillment (Hirt, 2007; Sládek Madajová, Šveda, Výboštok, 2020). While some authors emphasize the positive aspects of the resulting social dynamics, such as the weaving of social networks (Špačková, Ouředníček, 2012), others observe changes in the functional and symbolic use of space and the conflict potential that arises (Zwęglińska-Gałecka, 2021; Wójcik, 2013).

Despite this, a considerable body of literature tends to focus on descriptive distinctions between newcomers and older residents, frequently underestimating the role of embedded power relations and the relational production of social inequality

(Tomay, Berger, 2024; Orchowska, 2024). Simple observations of cultural or class-based differences can yield a surface-level understanding of suburban diversity, but they often fail to grasp the underlying mechanisms through which such diversity becomes a field for contestation and symbolic boundary-making. In this regard, Bourdieu's theory of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – offers a powerful conceptual toolkit for analysing how social hierarchies are produced, legitimised and contested in specific spatial contexts (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992).

This article seeks to contribute to this critical analytical shift by examining not only the tensions between long-term and newly arrived residents, but also the overlooked internal stratifications within the “native” population itself. Specifically, it aims to explore how distinct sub-groups of long-term residents – differentiated by historical trajectories, educational attainment, and occupational backgrounds – mobilise different forms of capital to defend their social positions in the face of rapid suburban change. The study posits that the construction of community boundaries and symbolic claims to local legitimacy are not solely directed at newcomers, but also operate within the native population through persistent class-based distinctions, often expressed in locally resonant terms such as *bíreš* and *svitar*.

The research focuses on the municipality of Chorvátsky Grob, a rapidly developing suburban locality on the outskirts of Bratislava. The empirical material is based on qualitative fieldwork with senior residents from two distinct sections of the municipality: the original village core, historically associated with Croatian settlement and local elite structures, and the area known as Čierna Voda, which was shaped by state socialist agricultural policy and post-1989 privatisation. By comparing these two communities, the article examines how symbolic ownership, cultural memory, and perceived legitimacy are differentially articulated in relation to both internal and external others.

In advancing this analysis, the article aims to transcend the binary opposition of “locals versus newcomers” and instead illuminate the complex, multilayered processes through which symbolic power and exclusion are reproduced in post-socialist suburban spaces. Through this lens, suburbanisation is understood not simply as a demographic or spatial process, but as a contested field of social meaning and political agency, where place-based identities are actively performed, negotiated, and stratified.

In the sections that follow, the article first introduces the theoretical underpinnings grounded in Bourdieu's sociology of space and capital. It then outlines the methodology of the fieldwork and presents the empirical findings, followed by a discussion linking the observed patterns to broader debates in urban and social theory. The concluding section synthesises the key findings and offers reflections on the implications for future research on suburban social dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe.

Theoretical framework

This study draws upon the sociological framework of Pierre Bourdieu to examine how social, cultural, and symbolic distinctions are constructed, legitimised, and contested within a rapidly suburbanising locality. Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and social space offer a critical lens through which to understand the relational and dynamic reproduction of power within community structures (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992). Rather than treating suburbanisation as a merely demographic or spatial process, the article conceptualises it as a field of social struggle, where actors mobilise different forms of capital to assert symbolic dominance and preserve their perceived legitimacy.

At the core of Bourdieu's theory lies the understanding that various forms of capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic – are unequally distributed among social agents and are convertible under specific conditions. Economic capital, referring to financial resources and material wealth, may be translated into cultural capital in the form of educational credentials or tastes, or into symbolic capital, which denotes recognised authority, prestige, and legitimacy within a particular social field (Bourdieu, 1986). In the context of suburban transformation, these forms of capital interact in complex ways to define who is seen as a legitimate member of the community, and who is marginalised or excluded.

The concept of social capital, in particular, requires further elaboration, as its use in contemporary scholarship often straddles competing paradigms. While Robert Putnam (1995) views social capital as a collective resource rooted in civic trust, norms of reciprocity, and horizontal networks, Bourdieu's interpretation diverges markedly. For Bourdieu (1990), social capital is a resource that individuals or groups actively cultivate through investment in relationships, which are embedded in structures of power and exclusion. Far from being universally accessible or benign, social capital is both a product and a vehicle of social stratification. In this view, the ability to mobilise social capital depends not only on network size but on the recognition and legitimacy of those networks within the prevailing symbolic order.

Bourdieu's relational perspective views social capital as a resource tied to power structures, where access depends on social position and investments in relationships and requires strategic effort for the maintenance and reproduction of advantages (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Portes, 1998). The reproduction of social capital, both practically and symbolically, is crucial to understanding urban processes such as gentrification and suburbanization, where dominant classes leverage their social capital to secure advantageous positions (Lees, Slater, Wyly, 2008; Butler, Robson, 2003). In such a struggle for the "appropriation of space", residents attempt to mobilise their own capital and may also seek to discredit the capital upon which the power of opponents is based (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992: 99). The specific strategies employed depend on the actors' positions within the social field and their habitus (Bourdieu, 1986). Recent studies examining cases of post-socialist suburbanization and rural

gentrification demonstrate how different social groups mobilise capital in struggles for spatial and social dominance. Long-term residents often utilise symbolic and social capital, including claims to autochthony and historical merit, to challenge the perceived dominance of newcomers (Orchowska, 2024; Tomay, Berger, 2024; Lewicki, Drozdowska, 2017; Bukowska, Jewdokimow, Markowska, Winiarski, 2013).

Building on these insights, this study examines how local populations, specifically the differentiated communities of long-term residents in Chorvátsky Grob, mobilise various forms of capital to navigate the process of suburbanization. Key questions include: What practices do long-term residents in different parts of Chorvátsky Grob employ to maintain access to local resources and assert their status? How do the distinct socio-economic realities influence their perceptions of change and their interactions with newcomers and each other? Which forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) are most effectively utilised by different groups of long-term residents in articulating their claims and navigating the evolving social landscape affected by the intense migration of the urban middle class?

Research Setting and Methods

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in the municipality of Chorvátsky Grob, located within the suburban hinterland of Bratislava, Slovakia. Over the past two decades, the locality has experienced intense demographic growth and spatial transformation (Šveda, Šuška, 2014), making it an exemplary site for studying the socio-symbolic effects of suburbanization in a post-socialist context. Between 2001 and 2025, the registered population increased from 1,587 to 7,855 inhabitants, although unofficial figures suggest a higher number due to underreporting in official registries (Šveda, Podolák, 2014). This demographic surge has been accompanied by profound shifts in the community's social structure, with the influx of younger, economically better-off, and more urban-oriented residents (Šuška et al., 2018).

The site selection was guided by the need to examine the interplay between long-term community structures and the emerging dynamics of social exclusion, identity construction, and symbolic power. The municipality of Chorvátsky Grob presents a unique internal division: although it is formally a single administrative entity, it consists of two spatially and socially distinct parts. On the one hand, there is the original village of Chorvátsky Grob and the former manor estate in the area today known as Čierna Voda, where the overwhelming majority of new construction is taking place.

As the name suggests, Chorvátsky Grob was one of the villages to which waves of Croatian colonization headed in the early modern period, and as late as the end of the 19th century, the Croatian population still represented the majority in the original village (Botík, 1996). Although its share declined during the 20th century, and today only a marginal proportion of the population officially declares Croatian nationality,



Figure 1. The position and spatial development of parts of the municipality of Chorvátsky Grob

the local community has been engaging in efforts to preserve Croatian identity through cultural, linguistic, and memory practices (language courses, folklore, traditions, publications), which since the 1990s have taken on an institutionalized form. Despite the small number of inhabitants identifying as Croats, these activities maintain a sense of identity as a symbolic and cultural value. Yet, it is precisely the pressure of suburbanisation and the profound demographic change that pose a challenge to the position of Croatianness in the municipality (Nemčíková, Kišová, Krogmann, Veselovský, 2018).

Čierna Voda functioned primarily as an economic space with limited residential use for a long time. It hosted a noble manor and later a state agricultural enterprise, whose development under state socialism stimulated the migration of agricultural workers in particular. The relatively simple property structure of the land facilitated the privatisation of extensive areas after 1989, which were subsequently prepared for intensive development. It is precisely in Čierna Voda that the dominant share of the municipality's expansion has been realized, transforming what was until recently a less significant location in terms of residential function into an area where more than two-thirds of the municipality's population resides (Šveda, Šuška, 2014). This migratory dynamic gave rise to distinct and spatially separated communities, which was also reflected in the composition of the groups of communication partners in the research. Such internal segmentation offered a valuable opportunity to study not only tensions between old and new residents but also the stratification within the original population itself.

The empirical data were collected using a qualitative ethnographic approach, which combined participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted

in 2019 and 2020. Fieldwork was conducted primarily among senior members of two community groups: one situated in the original village of Chorvátsky Grob and the other in Čierna Voda. The research participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on elderly long-term residents who had resided in the locality for a long time before the onset of large-scale suburban development. Most of them are affiliated with two retirement associations: the Retirement Club (Čierna Voda) and the Senior's Club (the original village of Chorvátsky Grob). During repeated visits to the club premises and interactions with the seniors present, statements were also recorded from "new" elderly residents, but these were not used in the analysis presented, which was based on accounts from residents who had lived in the village for all or most of their lives.

The group in Čierna Voda was relatively homogeneous in terms of gender, education, and professional background. The majority were elderly women, often widowed, whose working lives had been tied to manual labour in agriculture or local services. Their social networks tended to be more localised and closed, reflecting shared histories rooted in state-socialist agricultural institutions. These residents often expressed a strong sense of marginalisation, not only in relation to newcomers but also within the broader municipal context.

In contrast, the group in Chorvátsky Grob village exhibited greater internal diversity. It included men and women with non-manual work histories, such as former teachers, administrative employees, and members of the former local political elite. Many had higher levels of formal education and demonstrated higher levels of digital literacy, which allowed them to participate more actively in municipal affairs. This group articulated more complex narratives of loss, nostalgia, and claims to symbolic ownership of space and community identity.

Data were collected during regular group meetings, community events, and individual interviews. These encounters provided access to everyday discursive practices through which residents constructed their sense of belonging, identified social boundaries, and evaluated recent changes.

Empirical Findings

The empirical material gathered in Chorvátsky Grob reveals that the effects of suburbanisation are not merely evident in the dichotomy between newcomers and long-term residents but are also deeply embedded within the internal dynamics of the original population. The study identified persistent social hierarchies, symbolic boundaries, and varying capacities for political participation and cultural recognition. These distinctions are constructed and reproduced through local terminologies, historical narratives, and perceived legitimacy in claiming the community's space.

“Svitari and the New Ones”

In the statements of both communities, the winners of the ongoing changes in the municipality were clearly identified as the group of newly arrived suburbanites. However, this does not mean that there was a homogeneous society devoid of distinctions and stratification attributes, or an unequal distribution of capital that would not have had the capacity to bring problematic moments to cohabitation in the pre-suburbanization past. Despite the strong Slovakization of the municipality during the 20th century, a revival of Croatian culture has been observed in the original village of Chorvátsky Grob since the 1990s. Croatian language lessons are led by a lecturer from Croatia. Primary school students are introduced to Croatian culture through the cross-cutting theme of Regional and Multicultural Education, and language camps are also organised in Croatia. The folklore group Chorvatanka (1989), the Croatian Cultural Union (1990), and the folklore group Malá Chorvatanka (2012) operate here, and a “Croatian Room” has been established, and events such as the Croatian Ball, Croatian Culture Days, and Croatian Day are organised (Nemčíková et al., 2018). However, officially, only a handful of inhabitants officially declare Croatian nationality, and Croatian is no longer actively used for communication, even among the oldest members of the community, attribution and claims to various forms of commemorated and practiced Croatianness and Croatian roots represents a form of cultural capital through which individual members demonstrate their multigenerational belonging to the community and the symbolic status derived from it. From the local form of Croatian, the word “svitar/svitari” is still used, by which elderly locals from the original village refer to the population who have immigrated to the municipality without Croatian roots or generally to immigrants. The use of precisely this designation can be interpreted as an effort to establish a key hierarchizing distinction that confirms their own superiority in the local community, based on their multigenerational presence. They add an ethnic dimension to the general nostalgia for times past, which in itself represents a tool for maintaining social boundaries and confirming their own insider status against those who do not have the opportunity to remember in this way, thereby striving for the valorisation of a form of symbolic capital that Justyna Orchowska (2024) called the capital of origin or autochthony. The emphasized ethnic aspect and multigenerational presence thus primarily distinguish them from current and historical migrants to the original village of Chorvátsky Grob, not necessarily Čierna Voda, where intensive construction development associated with migration is currently taking place.

In relation to contemporary immigration, beyond ethnicity and long-term presence, the perceived degree of merit associated with these factors is further emphasized, serving both as a basis for community belonging and for articulating certain claims. As one resident put it: “We built this on Saturdays and Sundays, through community work. The newcomers don’t get involved; they only hold out their hands.”

Such statements not only assert entitlement but also reveal the core of a political dispute, which, as elsewhere, takes the form of competing claims and visions regarding the allocation of local public resources. Alongside the widespread sense of underinvestment in the historical village core – largely a consequence of redirected funding to meet the development needs of Čierna Voda – this sense of entitlement occasionally re-emerges, intertwined with Croatian identity and long-term rootedness in the municipality. Complaints arise, for example, that the Croatian Association and the Seniors' Club were forced to relocate or were “pushed out” into increasingly modest premises within the local school, due to the growing demand for classrooms for the children of newcomers. The perceived loss of former status and privileges is experienced negatively by many long-term residents of the original village of Chorvátsky Grob; as one of them expressed, “We feel offended, hurt.” In assessing both the current situation and municipal policy, the defining line between “us” and “them” once again crystallizes along the division between the original and newly developed parts of the settlement, where the struggle over resources is most visible.

“Svitar is better than a Bíreš”

However, social contrasts were not defined exclusively by reference to Croatian descent, and long-term residence alone was not necessarily a sufficient condition for acceptance. Although declared cultural-ethnic affiliation constituted a significant line of differentiation even in the past – before the onset of suburbanization processes and the associated disruption of privilege distribution – other distinctions with hierarchical potential also emerged, shaping possibilities for broader social recognition and the accumulation of symbolic capital. While class affiliation or the social status of newcomers is not often made explicit today, the memories of older residents recall this boundary with clarity.

The original community of Čierna Voda, composed predominantly of in-migrated agricultural laborers of the 60's and 70's, was – and in many ways still is – perceived simply as *bíreši* (farmhands) by their counterparts in the original village of Chorvátsky Grob. In this case, cultural differentiation is seamlessly replaced by references to ownership as the foundation of symbolic superiority. The designation *bíreš*, meaning a farmhand or agricultural worker, carries the crucial implication of landlessness, which positions the individual below the self-sufficient farmer-landowner. It is noteworthy that such class distinctions within the agrarian community did not disappear, but were instead successfully reproduced even during the period of a formally classless, industrializing society. As one informant, remembering the years of youth, explained, “One couldn't have a girlfriend from there [the original village of Chorvátsky Grob]. Because he was just a *bíreš*... He could not!”

This pre-suburban social hierarchy between the two communities continues to shape perceptions of ongoing transformations. Although neither group of long-term

residents sees itself as a “winner” in these changes, their distinct positions within the earlier hierarchy condition their current attitudes and interpretations of social dynamics. Among elderly residents of the original village of Chorvátsky Grob, nostalgia for earlier times – and the privileges associated with the historically dominant group, tied either to the village core or to ethnic identity – is a recurring theme. By contrast, long-term residents of Čierna Voda often express a sense of hope and a greater readiness to identify with the newcomers, positioning themselves as part of a new majority that offers at least a hypothetical advantage in asserting claims. Such hope for redressing historically generated inequalities is reflected, for instance, in comparisons of meeting facilities for senior groups: “They [in the original village] have everything there. We [Čierna Voda] are big and have nothing. We are bigger, but so scattered. They stick together more there. The place where older people meet in [the original village of Chorvátsky] Grob is super equipped. A double hotplate, a television.”

At the same time, the problem of absent community cohesion is articulated clearly, linked both to the relatively short time available for social ties to develop and to the limited willingness of newcomers to cultivate such relationships. The social capital of these new residents was not the focus of the present investigation, but it may be assumed – following observations from other cases of early-stage suburbanization – that city-linked populations settling in older communities often maintain social practices and everyday routines or an urban habitus (Orchowska, 2024; Tomay, Berger, 2024) oriented toward the metropolitan center. In this respect, only the long-term residents invoke local patriotism and emphasize the depth of their connection to the community, while newcomers tend to distribute their identification more evenly across various places and networks (Wójcik, 2013).

“The Mayor is a Svitar, yet Ours. We had her elected.”

For the elderly residents of the original village of Chorvátsky Grob, perceptions of newcomers residing in the emerging housing estates – typically located outside the village core – are largely mediated through local politics and the functioning of municipal institutions. In this context, newcomers are described as “young, progressive” (at a time when the term was not yet politicized by conservative or far-right discourse) and as individuals capable of securing or demanding resources, sometimes at the expense of the historic village core and its long-term residents. As one senior explained: “We want balance. If we [the original village of Chorvátsky Grob] are one-third, then one-third of the funds should be reinvested here!” This sentiment reflects a perceived bias in investment toward the newer part of the municipality, facilitated in part by municipal election outcomes in which it has been nearly impossible to elect a “representative of the original village”: “The last two mayors had been from Čierna Voda; just look at how much is invested in each part.”

However, similarly expressed dissatisfaction with the diminishing political weight of senior citizens from the original municipality does not prevent them from their proud engagement in local social and political life: “We help the village – when the maypole is erected, the women bake, we were at the community work... We also attend municipal council meetings and watch the videos. Now the minutes are available; if I want something, I can find everything. We helped elect our mayor.” These statements demonstrate that seniors in the original village perceive themselves as part of the community, albeit not necessarily a unified one.

The question of political participation again sharply differentiates the two communities of seniors. Differences are not only related to land ownership and the opportunities afforded by economic and social capital, but also to the ability to utilize the forms of cultural capital. While physical space can pose a barrier to active participation in council meetings, technological skills that enable remote engagement require education and experience. The unequal distribution of these resources determines the degree to which seniors can mobilize and reproduce existing social capital. This disparity explains why residents of the original village of Chorvátsky Grob describe a direct role in electing their mayor, whereas elderly residents of Čierna Voda report being largely unaware of local social and political life or face multiple obstacles to participation: “Over the weekend, there was a party in Chorvátsky Grob – goulash, or whatever – but nobody here knows anything. Village Day, perhaps, or something else. But who’s going to trek over there? If you’re there until evening, how do you get home? We don’t go to the meetings. We don’t even know when they are. There’s no local radio here. Not even a post office.”

Sentiments like these also highlight the physical and infrastructural dimensions of symbolic exclusion. Limited public transport, poor pedestrian connectivity, and weak communication channels between the two parts of the municipality restrict everyday interaction and reinforce spatially grounded social distance. These barriers are particularly acute for older residents with restricted mobility in the car-oriented environments of new residential areas, for whom access to public life is constrained not only by willingness but by feasibility. Lager et al. (2015) similarly discuss how aging populations experience social and spatial exclusion due to declining mobility and neighborhood demographic changes, highlighting the role of bodily capital (Wacquant, 2004) in determining an individual’s capacity to participate socially and economically, and thus reproduce social capital. This capacity – embodied in bodily capital – is unevenly distributed across the population, and opportunities for its deployment are relationally produced. In the case of Čierna Voda, the spatial and urban context diminishes the value of residents’ bodily capital, further constraining their ability to engage in civic life.

Conclusion

The case of Chorvátsky Grob illustrates how suburbanization reshapes not only the relations between newcomers and long-term residents but also the hierarchies within established populations. Ethnic heritage, class-based labels, and unevenly distributed forms of capital continue to structure social boundaries, political participation, and claims to belonging. Residents of the original village leverage multigenerational presence and cultural memory as symbolic capital, while those from Čierna Voda face the enduring stigma of historical class divisions yet sometimes align more readily with the suburban majority. Unequal access to cultural, social, and bodily capital further differentiates these groups, influencing their capacity to engage in community and political life.

The study demonstrates the value of a nuanced approach that moves beyond the simple dichotomy of “old” versus “new” residents. By focusing on the relational and historically embedded distinctions among long-term inhabitants, it reveals a more complex picture of social dynamics in suburbanizing contexts. At the same time, the findings must be interpreted with caution. The views expressed by the research participants, primarily senior residents, cannot fully represent all perspectives within the community. Their narratives provide valuable insight into the lived experiences of change but remain partial, shaped by generational outlooks and specific community memberships.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a richer and more differentiated understanding of suburban transformation in post-socialist settings. It highlights how legacies of class and ethnicity intersect with contemporary migration-driven change, shaping both conflict and cohesion. By foregrounding the layered and contested nature of belonging, it contributes to more nuanced interpretations of suburbanization and underscores the need for inclusive, historically sensitive approaches to policy and community development in Central and Eastern Europe.

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