THE CREATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND IDENTITY OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN LOWER SPIŠ (UNTERZIPS)

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Abstract: The study examines the role of heritage books [Heimatbücher], which preserve the memories and specific historical narratives of forcibly displaced Carpathian Germans from Lower Spiš, in shaping the collective memory and identity of the local community in one of their former villages. Based on the cultural memory theory of Jan and Aleida Assmann (2001; 2006) and ethnographic research conducted in 2020, the preliminary findings suggest that the contents of these books are purposively selected with the intention of memorializing founding and biographical memories, thus supporting the persistence of group identity and historical awareness among the local population. Furthermore, heritage books not only inspire residents to document and explore local cultural heritage but also reinforce the community's identity, which faced assimilation pressures under socialist Czechoslovakia in the latter half of the 20th century.

Keywords: forced displacement, Carpathian Germans, expellee organisations, expellee heritage books, collective memory and identity

Introduction[1]

In the modern history of Slovakia, the wartime and postwar events of World War II, the political decisions of the victorious powers and the Czechoslovak government at the end of the war, as well as the postwar nationality policy of socialist Czechoslovakia significantly impacted the German minori-

ty, nearly leading to its disappearance (Gabzdilová-Olejníková, Olejník, 2004).[2] Part of the German-speaking population, which was forcibly displaced and obliged to seek a new home in the post-war Federal Republic of Germany, founded almost from the beginning organisations of Slovak, or Carpathian Germans[3] and carried out various activities. Among other efforts, they focused on their own publishing activities (Drechsler-Meel, 2015); the first books dedicated to their homeland were published in 1952 (Kobialka, 2008, p. 74).

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of the so-called "heritage books" or "home books" [Heimatbücher] of the displaced Carpathian Germans from the Lower Spiš region in the process of collective memory and identity of their compatriots in Slovakia, where during the socialist period, they were subjected to assimilation pressure and were not granted minority rights as a group (Botík, 2021, p. 155). In this paper, I will draw on the theoretical works of Jan and Aleida Assmann on cultural memory, which build upon the concept of collective memory developed by Maurice Halbwachs. In the first part of the paper, I will introduce the phenomenon of expellee organisations and heritage books. Subsequently, I will describe the field research I conducted in the Lower Spiš region in 2020. Finally, I will present an interpretation of the preliminary results of the analysed empirical material using selected theoretical frameworks.

The expellee organisations of Germans and their heritage books

In the immediate post-war period, the association of displaced Germans was prohibited and suppressed in all occupied zones of Germany.[4] The Allied powers implemented this measure to prevent protests, radicalisation, or destabilisation of the zones. The ban was lifted in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1948; however, it remained in force in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In the context of the new socialist society, the origin of dis-

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[2] For more information on the history and culture of Germans in Slovakia, see Botík, 2021, pp. 127-156; Gabzdilová-Olejníková, Olejník, 2004.

[3] The term "Carpathian Germans" was introduced into literature at the beginning of the 20th century by historian Raimund Friedrich Kaindl, referring to the German-speaking inhabitants living in Kingdom of Hungary, Galicia, Bukovina, Romania, and Bosnia. In the 1920s, the Carpathian German Party adopted the term with the aim of creating a common identity for Slovak Germans. However, unification under this term occurred only after their forced displacement (in emigration) (Mannová, 2009, p. 412). For more details on the ethnic identity of Germans in Slovakia and the category of "Carpathian Germans," see Tancer, Mannová, 2009.

[4] The total number of forcibly displaced Germans is estimated at 14 million, with almost 3 million of them originating from the territories of today's Czech Republic and Slovakia (Bade, Oltmer, 2007, pp. 155-158).

placed persons was not meant to play any role (Bauerkämper, 2007, p. 483; Franzen, 2016, pp. 726-727). These decisions should be understood within the context of the differing historical and political development of the countries, which stood in political and ideological opposition during the Cold War. This was ultimately reflected in the divergent terminology and interpretations of forced displacement (Scholz, 2020).[5]

In response to the lifting of this ban, numerous "expellee organisations" [Vertriebenenorganisationen] with various regional and thematic focuses began to emerge in post-war West German society (Weber, 2014, p. 1). Prior to the ban, only sporadic apolitical organisations were established, primarily aimed at providing humanitarian aid to displaced persons. Initially, their efforts focused on securing basic needs and locating family members, and only later did their activities shift towards preserving the culture of their homeland. Due to its ability to mobilise expellees, the most significant (and at the same time most debated) expellee organisation in the FRG became the *Federation of Expellees − United Homeland Societies and State Associations* [Bund der Vertriebenen −Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände; BdV], which was formed between 1957 and 1959 through the gradual merger of two independent and previously competing organisations (Kossert, 2011, pp. 170-175; Stickler, 2004, p. 16).

Approximately one million members of the *Federation of Expellees* are currently organised into 18 "homeland societies" [Landsmannschaften], 15 "state associations" [Landesverbänden], and 3 other "affiliated member organisations" [Mitgliedsorganisationen] (Bund der Vertriebenen, n. d.).[6] Members are organised based on both their regions of origin and their areas of activity in the federal states of Germany. The homeland societies also encompass many other "hometown communities" [Heimatortsgemeinschaft], which were formed out of a longing for their homeland and a desire to stay in contact with neighbours and friends from their home districts, towns, or villages (Kossert, 2011, p. 192). As Kreisslová, Nosková, and Pavlásek (2019, pp. 199-201) point out, expellee organisations are characterised by specific discourses that often include established historical narratives.[7] For example, within these discourses, the 'myth of expulsion' is constructed to gain 'victim status,' while the process-

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[5] In the FRG, the term "expulsion" [Vertreibung] was adopted to refer to the post-war forced displacement of Germans from Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European countries, while "expellees" [Vertriebenen] referred to the displaced persons. In this study, I use the term "expellee" due to its historical embeddedness and specificity. For more on the inconsistent terminology and discussions surrounding this context, see, for example, Scholz, 2020 or Lešková, 2023.

[6] As stated on the official website of the BdV, the members include displaced Germans as well as (later) repatriates [(Spät)Aussiedler].

[7] In the academic literature, they are analysed under the term "expellee discourse" [Vertriebenendiskurs] (Kreisslová, Nosková, Pavlásek, 2019, p. 199).

es and events leading up to the forced displacement of Germans are overlooked. According to the authors, this narrative is most associated with the *Sudeten German Homeland Society* [Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft], but it cannot be attributed to all expellee organisations or people of German origin with experiences of displacement.

Among many organisations, there are also four Carpathian German ones that have not yet received significant scholarly attention. In 1946, the *Auxiliary Committee for Evangelical-Lutheran Slovak Germans* [Hilfskomitee für die Evangelisch-Lutherischen Slowakeideutschen] was established, followed two years later by the *Auxiliary Association of Carpathian German Catholics* [Hilfsbund Karpatendeutscher Katholiken]. At the first national meeting of Carpathian Germans in Ludwigsburg in 1949, the founding of the *Carpathian German Homeland Society Slovakia* [Karpatendeutsche Landsmannschaft Slowakei; KDLM] as a political organisation was announced. The last to be formed was the *Carpathian German Cultural Association Slovakia* [Karpatendeutsches Kulturwerk Slowakei e. V.; KKS] in 1969, which manages the Carpathian German homeland museum and a relatively extensive library with an archive. In 2004, these organisations jointly decided to establish the *Carpathian German Cultural Heritage Foundation* [Stiftung Karpatendeutsches Kulturerbe; SKK] (for more information, see Drechsler-Meel, 2015; Kobialka, 2008).

The formation of collective identity and memory in expellee communities took place through both expellee organisations and public expressions, such as the establishment of an expellee museums (Beer, Fendl, Hampe, 2012), the organisation of expellee meetings (Fendl, 2019), or the publication of expellee periodicals and books (Kasten, Fendl, 2017; Kreisslová, Nosková, 2021). The latter category also includes heritage books[8] (Kessler, 1979, p. 13, as cited Beer, 2010, p. 19). These are books written by expellees from former German areas east of the Oder and Neisse rivers and other southeastern European settlements in West Germany after 1945 about their lost homeland, which they were forced to leave as a result of the war (Faehndrich, 2011, p. 69). They reached their peak in the 1970s,[9] but after the reunification of Germany, they

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[8] To some extent, they are related to the similarly named "heritage books," i.e., local monographs collectively written about German, Swiss, or Austrian places. In the German-speaking world, they have been a phenomenon appearing since the early 20th century (and even reaching back to the early 19th century) up to the present. Their historical development is closely connected to the issue of local history (Beer, 2010, pp. 28-37; Faehndrich, 2011, pp. 44-65).

[9] This was connected to the treaties signed between the FRG and Eastern Bloc countries at the turn of the 1970s, which were part of the FRG's foreign policy aimed at improving mutual relations between these countries. One of these treaties was the so-called *Warsaw Treaty* (1970), signed with the Polish People's Republic, in which the FRG recognised the post-war Polish western border along the Oder and Neisse rivers (see, for example, Soběhart, 2011).

experienced a significant decline that continues to this day (Faehndrich, 2015, p. 181).

With the term "final history," German historian and cultural studies scholar Jutta Faehndrich points to the limited lifespan of expellees' heritage books, as they cannot be written and published beyond the lifetime of the generation with direct experience of losing their homeland and living in the old country.[10] Recognising the important role these books play in preserving the memory of this generation, in her book *Eine endliche Geschichte. Die Heimatbücher der deutschen Vertriebenen* (2011), she reflects on the question of the reception and transmission of the contents of these books to the next generation. She also considers the possibility of their rediscovery by the current inhabitants of the regions from which the displaced Germans originated, who might continue writing them as their own (see Faehndrich, 2011, pp. 242-252).

"Homeland" or "home" [Heimat], as presented in the books, almost exclusively refers to a smaller cultural-historical region, district, town, or village. Although the books are closely tied to the specific places of origin of the displaced Germans, they share several common characteristics. The primary characteristic is the collective authorship of former inhabitants of the described places. The content of the books was shaped by group consensus, and the authors were mostly educated laypeople from the generation with direct experience of forced displacement. Another characteristic is the broad range of themes through which the authors aimed to offer the most comprehensive view of their lost home and various aspects of local life. Some attention is also given to the displacement of the German population, the post-war history of their hometowns, and the lives of the expellees in the FRG. The books contain two types of knowledge: biographical memories of the mentioned generation and factual data about the hometowns drawn from literature and other sources. The books were often supplemented with photographs, lists of residents and houses, maps, and other documentary materials. They were published with financial support from the hometown communities, sponsoring towns, various other sponsors, or the authors themselves (Faehndrich, 2015, pp. 180-182).

Despite these common characteristics, there are regional differences among the heritage books. Faehndrich links these differences not only to the varying experiences of the expellees in their home countries and the forced displacement itself but also to the homeland associations (which were often behind the publication of these books) and their specific post-war discourses. According to her, they are especially evident in the interpretations of history and specific historical events, including the selection, emphasis, or absence of certain topics (Faehndrich, 2015, pp. 182-183). She also emphasizes that, just as it is

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[10] At the same time, this highlights the perspective of the generation of experience, as the history of their homeland ended for them the moment they had to leave it permanently. The term is borrowed from the German historian Ferdinand Seibt.

impossible to consider the expellees as a homogeneous group, one cannot speak of a unified culture of memory among them: 'There are only individual groups of homeland associations, each with its own distinct and easily distinguishable group memories, founding and regional myths, self-images, and images of others, all of which can be clearly traced in the heritage books' (Faehndrich, 2011, pp. 238-239). In line with this, she sees the primary role of the books as fostering regional identification and cohesion within expellee communities.

Expellee heritage books as a tool of cultural memory

Research and analysis of heritage books began to emerge more prominently at the start of the 21st century. Among scholarly works, there are some that interpret these books within the framework of collective memory (Faehndrich, 2011; Frede, 2004; Orosz-Takács, 2007).[11] This is certainly no coincidence, as interest in the culture of remembrance related to German expellees has been gradually growing among researchers since the 1990s (Nosková, Kreisslová, & Pavlásek, 2019, p. 155). During this period, there was also a broader and more intense academic focus on the topic of memory across various disciplines. This trend is linked to the end of the Cold War and the reinterpretation of the past, the passing of the generation of witnesses to traumatic historical events of the 20th century, or delayed memories of that period, and finally, the digital revolution in communication technologies (Assmann, 2006, pp. 211-212). In our region, the main reasons for the research focus on this topic are the political events of 1989 and the subsequent social changes (Bužeková, 2018, p. 57; Bužeková & Uhrin, 2021, p. 58; Hlôšková, 2008, p. 13).

The term "collective memory" was first used in the late 1930s by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. It was rediscovered in the 1970s, a period when the study of memory expanded within the social and humanities sciences. In his theoretical works, Halbwachs proposed the thesis of the social conditioning of memory, highlighting the collective nature of memories. Although he distinguished between individual and collective memory, he did not consider the biological nature of memory and viewed the origin of all memories (including personal ones) as rooted in group thinking, communication, and interaction within that group. According to him, individual memory is shaped, preserved, and reproduced depending on the individual's affiliation with a group. To describe this process, he introduced the concept of "social frameworks of memory".[12] Jan and Aleida Assmann, a German Egyptologist and

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[11] For more on the state of research on expellee heritage books, see Beer, 2010, pp. 21-25 or Faehndrich, 2011, pp. 20-24.

[12] For more on the concept of collective memory, see Šubrt, Maslowski, & Lehmann, 2015.

a literary historian, built upon Halbwachs' main thesis and jointly developed the concept of "cultural memory", which the aforementioned Faehndrich (2011) uses in her analysis of heritage books.

In contrast to Halbwachs, J. Assmann does not consider the collective as the subject of memory and recollection, but rather always the individual 'depending on the "frameworks" that ensure the organization of their memories' (2001, p. 37). Within the concept of collective memory, Assmann distinguishes between two memory frameworks, which he calls "communicative memory" and "cultural memory". He differentiates them in relation to content, form, mode of transmission (medium), temporal structure, and carriers. Communicative memory includes "biographical memories" related to the recent past, which develop and are shared in everyday interactions with members of one's own group. These memories are typically preserved in communicative memory for 3 to 4 generations, corresponding to a span of 80 to 100 years. With the death of the carriers, the contemporary witnesses of a certain memory community, this memory fades (Assmann, 2001, pp. 48-53).

Cultural memory contains "foundational memories," which relate to fixed points – significant historical events – from the more distant past. These memories exceed the aforementioned time spans of transmission and reach back to the mythical origins of societies. The main distinction of this type of memory is its higher degree of formalization and ritualization. In it, the past is condensed into "symbolic figures," in other words, into established forms of both linguistic and non-linguistic nature, such as myths, rituals, dances, monuments, books, etc. These figures serve a mnemonic function, providing support for memories, and by their reenactment, the group ensures its identity. It is also important to note that this memory always has specialised carriers (such as shamans, priests, teachers, writers, etc.) responsible for its preservation. The rest of the group shares in the cultural memory through gatherings and personal presence (Assmann, 2001, pp. 49-56).

A. Assmann (2006, pp. 221-222) in her work provides a more detailed definition of cultural memory and its relationship to other formats of memory: individual, social, and political.[13] Unlike other formats of memory, cultural memory has the ability to store vast amounts of information on external carriers, which remain accessible for potential future use. In this context, the distinction between "active memory" and "archival memory" is important. Active memory focuses on what society deliberately selects and preserves as significant and essential for collective remembrance. The contents of active memory are maintained through specific practices and institutions with the aim of preserving the continuity and identity of the group and preventing forgetting.

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[13] Her argument is that the two categories of memory – individual and collective – 'are not sufficient to describe the complex network of memories in which humans participate' (Assmann, 2006, p. 212).

While these active contents are accessible to and reach the wider public, the documents of archival memory are available only to experts. However, they remain accessible and open to reinterpretation. As is evident, the role of the individual as a member of the group is particularly important in cultural memory: '(...) the content of cultural memory favours individual forms of participation, such as reading, writing, learning, researching, criticizing, and appreciating, and draws individuals into a broader historical horizon that is not only transgenerational but also transnational' (Assmann, 2006, p. 222).

In the context of the theoretical frameworks described above, similar to Faehndrich (2011, pp. 39-43), I understand heritage books as specific media of cultural memory for groups of expellees from a particular place or district. For these memory communities,[14] framed by homeland communities (or homeland associations), heritage books primarily serve as a medium for preserving and presenting foundational memories tied to the experience of loss and life in the old homeland. While Faehndrich conducted a detailed analysis of a selected corpus of heritage books and, through their example, traced the transition from communicative to cultural memory within expellee groups, I focus on the active contents of the cultural memory of the displaced Germans from Lower Spiš in the region of their origin and the role of individuals in this process. In other words, in this paper, I consider the following questions: Who, and with what intent, engages with the heritage books of displaced local Germans in the selected research location? What contents are deliberately selected and preserved, and for what purpose? Finally, what role do these books play within the context of the local community?

Field research

I chose the village of Lesno,[15] located in the Lower Spiš region, as my research location. According to the current administrative division, the village belongs to the Košice region and the Gelnica district. Its territory lies in the valley of the Hnilec River and is surrounded by the Volovec Mountains. I conducted preliminary research from the end of July to the beginning of September in 2020.

The history of this region is closely tied to mining, which in the past was the foundation of the economic activities of the German population in this

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[14] Faehndrich (2011, pp. 39-40) uses the term "communities of remembrance" to emphasize the processual nature of memory construction.

[15] The name of the village and the names of the respondents are anonymised/fictional.

area.[16] Among the Germans in Spiš, the majority were Lutherans, while in other settlement areas, Catholics predominated (Gabzdilová-Olejníková & Olejník, 2004, p. 9). In the 1930s, approximately 35,000 Germans lived in Spiš, and in several localities inhabited by Germans, more than a third of the local population claimed German nationality (Botík, 2021, pp. 130-131; Pöss, 2002, pp. 10-18). In 1930, the selected village had 2,088 inhabitants, of which 91 % declared German nationality.[17] Most of the population identified with the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (62 %) and the Roman Catholic Church (35 %) (Ministry of the Interior, State Statistical Office, 1936).

When comparing the population censuses of the village from 1930, 1980,[18] and 1991,[19] we can observe, as with the national census, a significant decline in those identifying as ethnic Germans. In this case, we can conclude that this most likely relates to the (post-)war forced migratory movements of the local German population and their assimilation during the second half of the 20th century. The change is evident not only in the ethnic structure of the village but also in the religious structure, as Lutherans (10 %) are no longer the most represented; Catholics (57 %) now hold the majority (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic [SO SR], n. d.).

In the most recent census from 2021, the village recorded approximately 1,800 inhabitants, with 88 % identifying as Slovak, around 2 % as German, 2 % as Roma, and 1 % as Ruthenian. The public had the opportunity to declare their second ethnic identity for the first time. In the village, 7 % of inhabitants used this opportunity, with 38 % of them identifying as Roma, 30 % as German, 14 % as Slovak, 2 % as Ruthenian, 1 % as Hungarian, and 1 % as Czech. When combining the number of inhabitants who identified as German and those who chose it as an additional nationality, the total amounts to 4 %. German is considered the mother tongue by 3 % of residents. The same percentage applies to those who identify as Roma or selected it as their second nationality and consider Romani as their mother tongue (SO SR, n. d.). On the other hand,

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[16] A distinct group in this region consisted of the villages of Štós, Vyšný and Nižný Medzev, situated in the valley of the Bodva River, which were characterised by blacksmithing and ironworking occupations (Botík, 2021, p. 130, pp. 147-148).

[17] 6% declared Czechoslovak, 1 % Roma, 1 % Ruthenian, 0.5 % Hungarian, and 0.3 % Jewish nationality.

[18] At that time, the village had 1,664 inhabitants, of which 1,656 identified as Slovak and only 4 as German. According to M. Antal (employee of the SO SR), the data from this census was not published; it comes from processed outputs stored in the internal database of the SO SR (email communication, October 31, 2023).

[19] According to the first census conducted after the fall of the communist regime in 1991, out of the total population of the village (1,518), 1,275 (84 %) inhabitants identified as Slovak, 162 (11 %) as German, and 76 (5 %) as Roma. In terms of religious affiliation, most inhabitants identified as Catholic (56 %) and Lutheran (22 %) (INFOSTAT Bratislava, Faculty of Natural Sciences CU Bratislava, 2009).

the authors of the *Atlas of Roma Communities* (2019), based on assigned ethnicity (not self-declared), estimate that Roma represent 51 % to 60 % of the village's population (Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, n. d.).[20]

In terms of facilities, the village has a kindergarten, a primary school, a Roman Catholic church and an Evangelical church, a cemetery, a funeral home, a cultural centre and a community hall, a health centre, grocery stores, a restaurant, a pub, and several specialised shops. There are also several active civic associations and interest groups, most notably the *Carpathian German Association* [Karpatendeutscher Verein; KDV], which has its own premises, a reading club, and a currently less active choir. I identified three areas of Roma community concentration in the village – one within the village and two on its outskirts – and several projects are underway to support marginalised Roma communities. The village belongs to a district that has been listed as one of the least developed districts since 2017 due to its long-standing high unemployment rate. The registered unemployment rate in this district has consistently been above the Slovak average, standing at 11 % in 2021 (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for Investment and Informatisation, n. d.).

The aim of the preliminary research was to become more familiar with the selected research location and map it, establish contacts with its residents, gain their trust, and ultimately gather additional relevant data. The interviews with respondents were not structured, and I did not apply the ethnographic interview method. They could rather be characterised as informal, with my initial approach always focusing on asking open and ethnically neutral questions. I used the participant observation method, for example, during the ceremonial gathering of members of the *Reading Club at KDV*. All the data and relevant sources collected were subjected to content analysis using the software tool Atlas.ti, designed for qualitative data analysis. The goal of the analysis was to generate key thematic areas.

In the village, I spoke with approximately 50 residents. However, I selected the main research sample from 12 respondents because the interviews with them were either targeted or, in some cases, repeated. The respondents in this sample are non-Roma, born between 1940 and 1967. The research sample consists of seven women and five men. Nine of them identified situationally as Germans or as descendants of local Germans; all were of the Lutheran faith. The other three identified as Slovaks of the Catholic faith. One of them identified as a descendant of post-war settlers from Transcarpathia, who moved to

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[20] The reason why Roma do not declare their Roma nationality is their long-term stigmatization and discrimination by the majority population, as well as efforts to assimilate them. For more on the relationship between the majority and the Roma, see, for example, Lešková, Uhrin, 2020; Podolinská, Hrustič, 2016; Vašečka, 2002.

the village as part of the optation of population to Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1947, based on the treaty between the Czechoslovak Republic and the USSR from June 29, 1945 (see more in Gajdoš, Sjusko, 1999).

Expellee heritage books dedicated to the Lower Spiš

In the expellee periodical of the displaced Carpathian Germans, *Carpathian Yearbook* [Karpathenjahrbuch], a list of all known (heritage) books dedicated to Slovakia and its German settlement areas, is maintained and updated regularly. In 2008, this list contained almost 200 entries (Kobialka, 2008, p. 74). However, in this paper, I focus on two of the most frequently mentioned heritage books dedicated to the Lower Spiš region in the selected research site: *Mining Towns of Lower Spiš* [Bergstädte der Unterzips] and *The Language Treasure of Lower Spiš with Dictionary: Documentation of the Gründler Dialect* [Unterzipser Sprachschatz mit Wörterbuch. Eine Dokumentation der Gründler Mundarten]. Before presenting the preliminary results of the analysis, I will briefly describe the conditions of their creation and the content of the selected books.

Figure 1
Book covers
Source: personal archive of the author

At the turn of 1981/1982, within the homeland communities of KDLM, the *Working Group Lower Spiš* [Arbeitskreis Unterzips] was established with the aim of preparing and publishing a heritage book about the region. Its creation was initiated by teacher Ladislaus Guszak,[21] who also became the chief editor of the first book *Mining Towns*, published in 1983. After its success, he managed to inspire fellow countrymen for another project. After his unexpected death in 1986, architect Adalbert Haas[22] took over the leadership of the working group and preparations for the next book. Under his direction, the book *The Language Treasure* was completed and published by KDLM in 1989. Both books are extensive works; the first has 436 pages, and the second has 352 pages. They were made possible thanks to the financial support of two church expellee Carpathian German organisations, as well as other supporters (Guzsak, 1983, p. 7; Haas, 1989, pp. 6-7; Kobialka, 2008, pp. 52-53).

The book *Mining Towns* deals with fourteen mining towns in Lower Spiš[23] and the way of life of their German inhabitants. It aims to provide a comprehensive view of the old homeland from historical, economic, cultural, religious, political, social, and socio-political perspectives. The timeline covers the settlement of the region by Germans up until their forced displacement. The content is divided into six chapters. The first five chapters (taking up approximately 1/3 of the book) cover topics such as local history (including memories and documentation of forced displacement), industry, crafts, trade, economy, culture and art, folk costume, oral tradition, customs, education, and social life, all in relation to the German population in Lower Spiš. The sixth and final chapter of the book, which takes up about 2/3 of its content, details the history and life in selected mining towns, covering a wide range of thematic areas. It is supplemented with photographs, drawings, maps, town plans, statistical data, lists of residents and houses, and other documentary materials (Guszak et al., 1983).

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[21] L. Guszak (1924 Švedlár − 1986 Erlangen) is described as a dialect poet, writer, local historian, active member of KDLM (since 1980 the second president of KDLM), and contributor to expellee periodicals. After graduating from high school in Kežmarok, he served in the military and was imprisoned. He was forced to leave Lower Spiš in 1945 (Haas et al., 1989, pp. 52-59).

[22] A. Haas (????) was an active member of both KDLM and KKS. After 1989, he contributed to the development of KDV in Slovakia (Kobialka, 2008, pp. 52-53, 99-108, 131-133).

[23] These towns include: Gelnica [Göllnitz], Mníšek nad Hnilcom [Einsiedel], Švedlár [Schwedler], Nálepkovo [Wagendrüssel], Dobšiná [Dobschau], Smolník [Schmöllnitz] a Smolnícka Huta [Schmöllnitz-Hütte], Štós [Stoß], Vyšný a Nižný Medzev [Ober- / Unter- Metzenseifen], Spišská Nová Ves [Zipser Neudorf], Spišské Vlachy [Wallendorf], Spišské Podhradie [Kirchdrauf], Krompachy [Krompach]. The authors link the founding of these towns and their significance in the mining and metallurgical industries to the arrival and economic activities of German colonists.
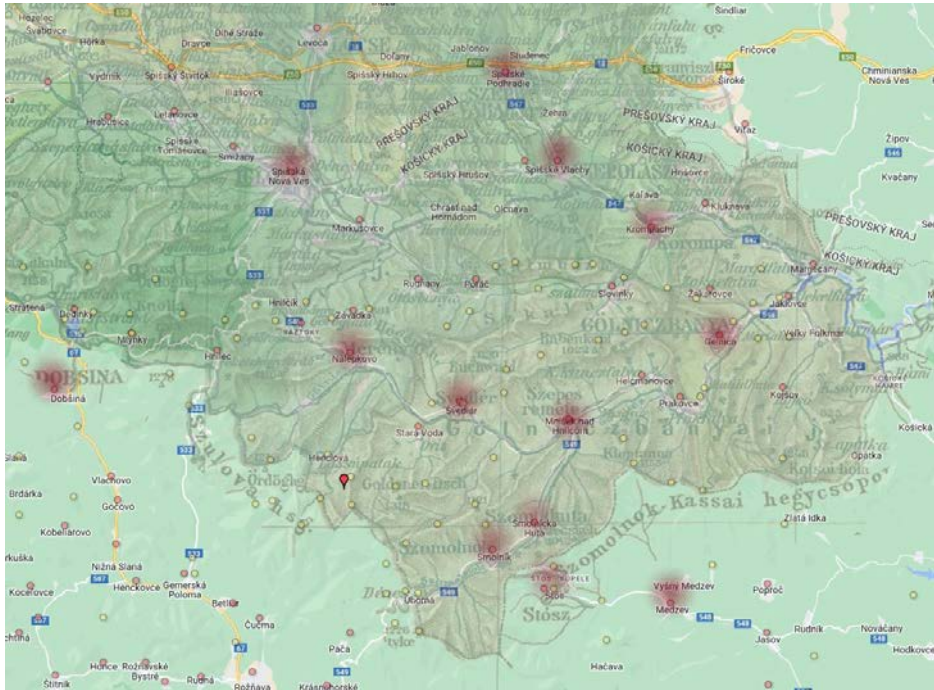
Figure 2

*The 14 mining towns included in the book. The German settlement of Lower Spiš
extends south into the regions of Gemer (Dobšiná) and Abov
(Štós, Nižný, and Vyšný Medzev).
Source: Staré Mapy, 2012 – 2024 (edited by author)*

The main goal of the authors was to record and pass on to their descendants the most accurate image of their homeland, which they experienced as the last generation before displacement. To achieve this, the members of the working group gathered various materials: they studied local chronicles, wrote documents from former mayors and residents, available literature, conducted interviews with older compatriots, and, in several cases, contacted compatriots who remained living in the old homeland. The authors were aware that the book did not meet the criteria of an academic work. Its aim was to inspire interest among all Carpathian German compatriots and their children. For the younger generation, it was intended to lead to learning about various aspects of the region's history and life, while for the older generation, it aimed to evoke memories of the past (Guszak, 1983, p. 7).

The Language Treasure can be considered a continuation of the previous book. As the title suggests, the team of authors this time focused on the Lower Spiš German dialect and its variants characteristic of the Gründlers from the

valley of the Hnilec River.[24] The authors, mostly non-academic individuals from a generation that grew up with these German dialects as their mother tongue, aimed to document and preserve the 'language of the ancestors' and the 'literary heritage' of local German poets[25] writing in the dialect, not only for future generations but also for the entire German society. They document poetry in the dialect with various themes, especially from the end of the 19th century to the 'time of expulsion in 1945 – 1946'. However, the book also includes later works by poets writing in the dialect (Haas et al., 1989; Haas, 1989, pp. 6-7).

The book begins with a look for an answer to the question of the origin of the local dialect, the German colonists, and the characteristics of their economic activities, such as mining and metallurgy. It then continues with a selection of literary, primarily poetic, works by local German poets from various Lower Spiš mining towns. The excerpts are supplemented with short biographies of the poets and an introduction to their work, the specifics of the dialect in question, local history, or a description of life in the towns and villages from which they came or in which they worked. Another section focuses on oral tradition—lullabies, children's songs/rhymes/games, mining songs, riddles, (weather) proverbs, and the like. At the end, there is an approximately 120-page dialect dictionary, expanded, like the first part of the book, with explanations, photographs, drawings, maps, excerpts from town books, and other sources (Haas et al., 1989).

The role of heritage books in the formation of local identification

Expellee heritage books dedicated to the Lower Spiš region have found their readers among the inhabitants of the selected research site and hold a place in their libraries. Before entering the field, I was not familiar with the issue of heritage books, but on the very first day, I was directly confronted with the book *Mining Towns*. One of the local men, who identified himself as a 'Manták' (ger. Mantaken - a term for the local German population), showed it to me shortly after we met and recommended it for reading. He noted that I would

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[24] These also include Germans from Bukovina (from the Iakobeni [Jakobeny] area). According to the authors, at the end of the 18th century, miners from Lower Spiš migrated to this area (Haas et al., 1989, p. 16).

[25] For example: Samuel Fuchs/Fux (1809 − 1847), Franz Ratzenberg (1863 − 1930), Ladislaus Guszak (1924 − 1986), Samuel Kurjan (1876 −1933), Rudolf Göllner (1904 − 1991), Karl Konrad (1874 −1956), Adalbert Mehly (1893 − 1972), Konstantin Schranz / Szilárd Schrancz (1865 − 1934), Alexander Nagy (1831 − 1878), etc. (see Haas et al., 1989 for more information).

learn more about the history of the village and its inhabitants from it. However, he refused to lend it to me, as it holds great value for him. Two other respondents later referred to the heritage books: the main editor of the hometown monograph and another member of the monograph's authoring team (who, through this collaboration, became an active contributor to the section on the history and life of the village in the local newspaper). The leader of the *Reading Club at KDV* mentioned the book *The Language Treasure* at a ceremonial literary gathering of its members. At the beginning of the meeting, she read a poem by a local expellee expressing love for the hometown and a longing to return home.

I examine the formation of collective identity and memory through the example of a hometown monograph.[26] It represents one of the ways to preserve the cultural memory of the local expellees. The idea to write a monograph about the village and its inhabitants came from a local resident, Johann (*1965). He has a technical university education and runs a business in construction and carpentry. During the interview, he repeatedly identified himself situationally with the local German population and is a member of the local group of KDV. His inspiration for writing the monograph came from the *Mining Towns*, which came into his hands in the late 1980s when his grandfather received it as a gift from displaced relatives. It was through this book that he first read about the history and culture of the village, which were closely tied to the German minority, and realised the absence of works in Slovak and the lack of education on local history. This was undoubtedly also because, during state socialism in Czechoslovakia, the history of Germans was, to some extent, silenced (Kreisslová, Nosková, & Pavlásek, 2019, p. 152).

In the book *Mining Towns*, he was most fascinated by the chapter dedicated to the oral tradition, which aligned with his personal interest in this area. This led him to explore other topics, such as local history, place names, and more. In his free time, he began translating excerpts from this book and searching for additional information. This activity gradually grew into a desire to publish a book that could serve as teaching material for local children or residents so they could learn more about the history and life of the village. He showed the first materials he had gathered to a future publisher, who is a relative of his, but the publisher considered them insufficient for publication. Therefore, alongside his job and at the expense of family finances and time spent with his family, he continued collecting relevant information about the village, its surroundings, and the local population. Over the course of Johann's several years of effort, other residents, including one descendant of local expellees, gathered around him, willing to help and contribute their knowledge and memories:

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[26] In this case, we could also refer to it as a home or heritage book. However, I chose a different term for better readability and clarity.

'I started alone. Then, when it seemed that the book could be published, a group of authors, people I knew, came together. They are mentioned in the book. In the last year and a half, the book was expanded with what they knew, what they collected, or there was consideration about who could contribute something more.' (Johann, 1965)

The tireless work of the entire team eventually led to the first edition of the hometown monograph at the turn of the millennium. Approximately fifteen years later, a second, expanded edition followed.[27] Johann was the chief editor and main author. The team of authors played a significant role, contributing texts on various topics, personal memories, or assisting with translations, map preparation, etc. Their contributions are always signed with their names, which is why the monograph can be considered a work of collective authorship. According to the list of authors mentioned in the monograph, the contributors were mostly educated laypeople belonging to the second or third generation from those with personal experience of forced displacement in adulthood. The publisher also played an important role, guiding the entire process of preparing the monograph, including editing the content. The funds were primarily provided from Johann's family budget, with a smaller portion coming from the village budget after financial support was approved by the village council. Other sponsors listed in the monograph include the local group of KDV and several individual donors.

As stated in the introduction of the monograph, the aim was to gather information scattered in archives, various publications, and to collect the memories of elders to provide a more comprehensive picture of the life of the village's inhabitants, and thus prevent it from being forgotten. As Johann further writes:

'I do not wish to discuss or address the still sensitive ethnic question here. However, it cannot be overlooked that most of the values created here until World War II were the work of the German population, and this publication is essentially a tribute to their efforts and skills.'

The monograph also mentions that it is a 'duty' to preserve the 'legacy of the ancestors' for younger generations and protect it from being forgotten. This demand becomes even more urgent when we realize that the current state of the German minority and the local dialect is often described by respondents as the 'dying out of the Mantaks' or the 'dying out of the Mantak dialect,' highlighting the long-term decline in the number of this minority and disappearance of minority language:

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[27] The difference in the number of pages between the first edition, which has around 140 pages, and the second edition, which has 100 more pages, was primarily due to changes in font size and style. There is relatively little difference in content between the two editions. The second edition was supplemented with a few additional memories or contributions from residents, and some sections were slightly edited.

'I read about how the culture of the Plains Indians disappeared. We are actually at the same kind of end, in a way. So, all of it will eventually be blown away by time – the culture, the ways, and it will all fall into oblivion. It is inevitable, and you can see it in the village.' (Johann, 1965)

In this context, it is important to emphasize that not only Johann but all respondents characterised the village up until the end of World War II as having a predominantly German population, Lutheran faith, and a mining tradition. According to them, the continuity of the local German-speaking population was significantly disrupted due to the events of World War II, primarily by the forced displacement of the German population at the end of and immediately following the war, as well as by the repressive measures of the state policy at the time, which impacted the everyday life of this community.[28] After the forced displacement of part of the German population, new residents arrived in the village – Slovaks from nearby villages and Transcarpathia. According to respondents, these circumstances gradually led to changes in the village's demographic composition in terms of nationality, religion, and language. Among the reasons for the continued decline in the number of members of the German minority and the fading of their language, respondents cited the passing of the oldest generation, mixed marriages, the absence of German language education, the migration of young people to cities and abroad, and the loss of opportunities to use the minority language in everyday communication. In contrast to this, the Roma minority and its growing numbers are often mentioned.

The wide range of topics represented in the hometown monographs can be divided into three thematic areas: the history of the village, the natural environment and an urban-architectural description of the village (including local place names), and the everyday culture of the village's inhabitants (including association activities, customs, and oral tradition).[29] They are supplemented with statistical data, photographs, drawings, maps, lists of village officials, war victims, and other sources. They cover an extensive period from the Bronze Age to the present. The first edition is limited to the year 1989, while the second edition includes a chapter on the period after 2000. There is also a relatively brief chapter dedicated to World War II and its consequences, including (post-)war forced migration processes (with a few biographical memories) and the arrival of new residents after 1945. The thematic area concerning the village's history was almost entirely processed by Johann himself. He was more interested in covering older history than modern history.

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[28] For more on the discrimination of Germans in the post-war period, see Pöss, 1996.

[29] The thematic area of the natural environment and the urban-architectural description of the village is represented in the book by approximately 1/5, while each of the other two areas is represented by 2/5.

In Johann's account, subjective selectivity in the choice of relevant content for the monograph could be observed:

'But for example, when I was looking, I was more interested in curiosities. For instance, when we were in Banská Štiavnica at the Mining Office, the archivist there found a record that someone had been thrown into a well in Slovinky during a fight between miners. That's the kind of thing I was looking for, mostly... There was definitely something, but to search for it in such depth... I just picked out some maps. What intrigued me was the mining extent, the number of mines. (...) Little fragments like that. I've always liked history, so I started connecting it all together.'

As he mentioned, the aim was not to write an academic work. Among the reasons, he cited the lack of professional qualifications, insufficient financial resources to invite experts for collaboration, and for accessing and studying of archival documents:

'In the archive, I was quite criticised for the history being done too superficially, that it needed to go deeper. Hmm, there was no money. In the neighbouring village, they made a book and paid the authors who wrote the chapters they specialised in. So, it's written differently. But then the publisher said that for the people who want to read about it, the information provided is entirely sufficient, that he wouldn't have gone into more depth or detail. He said it's actually enough.'

In both form and content, the publication is somewhat similar to contemporary local monographs, which are very popular in Slovakia. However, this monograph is distinguished by its specific representations of the German minority, including historical narratives shaped by particular historical circumstances. As in expellees' heritage books, this monograph contains two types of knowledge—factual and biographical. In preparing the monograph, the authors drew from various sources, such as archival documents, village chronicles, expellees' heritage books, and so on, as well as from their own memories or the memories of other residents. From the interview with Johann, certain limitations he faced in selecting and working with respondents became apparent. The first limitation was his personal preference for respondents: 'For me, the limitation was perhaps that I worked with people I enjoyed working with, and I couldn't work with everyone.' He also mentioned a language barrier: 'I knew that my friend's grandfather knew a lot, so I went to him. The problem was that he only spoke in dialect; he didn't really know much Slovak. I may have missed something back then, but I pieced some things together.'

Based on the analysis, I identified five active contents of the cultural memory of the expellees in the hometown monograph. These contents are related to the history of German colonisation, church and school history, everyday culture, and the German dialect. The history of German colonisation in Kingdom of Hungary is one of the most significant historical events, as the

existence of the village and the identity of the founding majority community are rooted in this historical event. The first active content refers to the causes and time period of German colonisation, the origin of the German settlers, their endoethnonym, and economic activities. It is one of the foundational memories and holds fundamental significance for local identification. These memories are preserved not only through established narratives that respondents reproduce but also in the form of a wooden cross standing on the dominant hill above the village. According to the information from the hometown monograph, the cross was erected and consecrated in 1936 in memory of the arrival of the German settlers. [30]

The following two active contents primarily hold documentary value. At the same time, they highlight the central role of religious and educational institutions in the life of the local community, which is particularly important in the case of ethnic enclaves (see, for example, Botík, 2023). The monograph also pays attention to historical events related to the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. These form a significant part of the history of the village, which was inhabited by the two largest religious groups – Lutherans and Catholics. The first content relates to the history and descriptions of the Lutheran and Catholic churches (the construction and furnishings of the churches, lists of priests serving in the parish, and the brass band of the Lutheran church congregation) as well as to the institutions managed by the churches (Lutheran and Catholic schools, lists of teachers). The second content concerns the local school during the period of Magyarization and the First Czechoslovak Republic, focusing on the languages of instruction, school buildings, lists of teachers, and extracurricular activities.

In the hometown monograph, the biographical memories of residents play an important role. According to the chief editor, he began writing the monograph 'too late', when he no longer had the opportunity to reach out to older residents who would remember life in the village before World War II. The respondents he worked with were children during the war and spent most of their lives during the socialist period:

> 'I started writing it (the monograph) too late. The people I spoke to, who had lived through the war, were 10 – 12 years old. The customs were already slowly fading into oblivion. So, it was already difficult to even find weather proverbs. Those people, too, didn't really care that much about the past; we always think they were so concerned about awareness, but not really. They wanted to be like these grandmothers – modern and didn't want to wear folk costumes. They remembered some things, but not in much detail... Maybe back then, in

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[30] The heritage book *Mining Towns* states that the cross was erected and consecrated in 1930 on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the "immigration" of the German settlers, which took place during the district singing festival.

roundings. At the same time, they serve as "bridges" between the past and present, enabling the connection of generations through the sharing and preservation of historical narratives, which helps maintain continuity and the richness of local culture despite the changes brought about by historical events. In this context, heritage books hold an irreplaceable role as tools for preserving collective memory and shaping identity in an environment that has been long exposed to assimilation pressures.

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