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'Like all small towns; you strangle our grand feverish dreams'¹: Cultural Heritage Projects and the Processes of Reconciliation in the Town of Kráľovský Chlmec

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ABSTRACT

This article centres Kráľovský Chlmec, a rural town in South-East Slovakia, and how the restoration of historical sites represents the multifaceted challenges of an existence on the periphery. This tri-border region harbours historical and cultural significance while having been a site of economic and geographical marginalisation. The town is near Slovakia's border with Ukraine and Hungary, but far from the closest urban centre, Košice. Despite its place as a literal and symbolic crossroads of history, politics, and culture; underdeveloped infrastructure makes Kráľovský Chlmec difficult to reach. However, engagement with heritage projects in Kráľovský Chlmec reveals a surprising resilience to relative isolation. Action to restore historical sites provides an example of flourishing civic participation, whereby it becomes the responsibility of local people, rather than the state, to enact change. Drawing on historical literature and ethnography, I use three case studies: the renovation of the town's castle, and the restoration of the Jewish cemetery and synagogue, as a framework through which to understand how a town is coming to terms with an existence on the margins and is reconciling with a complex history and present. This micro-case study therefore interrogates the possibility of positive and innovative action, through civic participation, in revitalising a region assumed to be apathetic and disillusioned.

Keywords: Slovakia; Cultural heritage, CEE, Minorities

¹ From the poem 'Királyhalmec', by Margit Prerau, translated by Aaron Ehrman (1997), Erhman, A. 'A Short History of the Jewish Communities of Kralovsky Chlemc, Kiralyhalmec, and the Bodrog District', Printed Friedman Lipe, Bnei-Brak, Slovakia (1997) accessed through JewishGen, Inc, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kralovsky_chlmec/Kralovsky_chlmec.html#TO> [accessed 31 March 2025]

Introduction

Csonkavár has stood, albeit unsteadily, at the top of Kráľovský Chlmec's hill for most of the town's existence. The castle, whose name means 'maimed', had a fate less durable than the original owners, the Pálóczi family, would have hoped when it was built in 1414. The castle was never particularly grand, certainly not to the same extent as others in the area. However, it did fulfil an important purpose, as an outpost in an area always awkwardly disconnected from major settlements or cities. In 1548, Habsburg king Ferdinand I ordered by decree that the castle be demolished.² By the twentieth century, nature had overtaken the castle's façade, mounds of soil covering the original foundations. To a passing visitor the castle was simply a large mound and two lonely walls without signage which might have attracted tourists. The town's Jewish cemetery and synagogue suffered a similar fate, overgrown with weeds and left mostly forgotten and desolate since the Second World War. Only in recent years has an effort been made to appreciate Jewish heritage in the town, and to commemorate the fate of Kráľovský Chlmec's once significant Jewish community.³ I use the castle and Jewish heritage sites as representative case studies, mirroring how Kráľovský Chlmec has been overlooked for much of its history, and how regional realities can be reconciled with in ways unique to the locality.

Kráľovský Chlmec (Hungarian: Királyhalmec) has been part of the Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburg monarchy, dualist Austria-Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian wartime state that allied with Hitler, and today is in the far east of the Slovak Republic. The town was once dependent on a market and agricultural economy; most of its oldest buildings are one-storey, characteristic of small towns of the Habsburg era. The town is multiethnic and multilingual, with Hungarian as the majority language and Slovak and Romani among other languages spoken here. The town's diverse and layered identities, and its removed geographical positioning have made it more vulnerable to economic marginalisation.⁴ For many this is a fate manufactured by having its two economic centres, Uzhhorod [Hungarian: Ungvár] in Ukraine and Sátoraljaújhely in Hungary, cut off with the Treaty of Trianon.⁵ These compounding factors have been imprinted onto the town's landscape, whereby cultural heritage representing this multiethnic and peripheral history not only remains, but is being increasingly renegotiated.

There is no single set of scholarly works which provides a complete picture of Kráľovský Chlmec. Regional studies of the past and present exist, such as Péter Kónya and György Hogya's narrow but useful histories of the town, though these are not available in English.⁶ The leading journal of the Hungarian-minority in Slovakia, *Újszó* [New Word], frequently writes about specific issues facing Kráľovský Chlmec, but this is limited to current events.⁷ Wider scholarship on Central East Europe addresses the reasons for broad

² Bogoly, J. 'Betükbe Szedett Régmúlt: Bodroghöz és Ung-vidék közséégeinek történelme 1900-ig, az írott források tükrében' (Királyhalmec: Mécsek László Népfőiskola, 1994), p.45.

³ Molnár, G. 'Emlékezz! 1944-2024', *Ma7* (13 March 2024), <<https://ma7.sk/tajaink/emlekezz-1944-2024>>, [accessed 27 May 2026].

⁴ Novotný, L and others. 'Development Trajectories of Small Towns in East Slovakia' *European Countryside*, 8.4 (2016), pp.383-384 (p.381), doi:10.1515/euco-2016-0026.

⁵ Finta, M. 'A vár, amely nem is vár, a világ végén, ami nem is a világ vége: Bodroghöz a messziről jött ember szemével', *Napunk* 17 August 2022, <<https://napunk.dennikn.sk/hu/2970627/a-var-amely-nem-is-var-a-vilag-vegen-ami-nem-is-a-vilag-vege-bodroghoz-a-messzirol-jott-ember-szemevel/>>, [accessed 16 March 2025].

⁶ Kónya, P. 'Dejiny Kráľovského Chlmca / [zost.] [prekl. Zakar Piroška] Királyhalmec története' [translator: Piroška Zakar] (Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Prešovskej univerzity, 2013) and Hogya, G. *Királyhalmeci Emlékképek 1890-1990.*, (Equilibria: 2021).

⁷ Újszó, 'Keresés: Királyhalmec', <<https://ujso.com/kereses?search-text=kir%C3%A1lyhalmec>> [accessed 7 April 2025].

disillusionment across the region, but continually assumes the importance of one angle over another, and often only tracks sentiments since 1989. However, the problems facing Kráľovský Chlmec cannot be solely blamed on economic underdevelopment since 1989, on the existence of the Hungarian minority, and not even on its peripherality alone. Therefore, dissecting the way these multiple points interact, through case studies which are reflective of this web of issues, highlights complex roots to disillusioned sentiments. The restoration of historical landmarks in Kráľovský Chlmec addresses the role of heritage sites in reflecting past, present and future challenges for a small peripheral town. Specific scholarship relating to the castle and Jewish historical spaces was limited to news articles or isolated studies.⁸ Through an interview with the owner of the castle, Bertalan Gönczy, and ethnographic research in the town, this paper contributes to the literature on heritage sites and rural realities in Central East Europe, with locality at the centre, allowing for a fresh understanding of the town and of these sites of memory.⁹

With Kráľovský Chlmec as my reference point, I aim to tell a wider story of how local identities and sentiments are represented in interactions with local historical sites. In analysing physical sites through a historical and ethnographic framework, I will demonstrate the complex mosaic of Kráľovský Chlmec's past and present, arguing that the town displays a surprising resilience to its marginalised position. This article will centre on case studies which are representative of the multipronged positives and caveats existing within the town: the restoration of Csonkavár castle by its owner Bertalan Gönczy, and the ongoing reconciliation with the town's Jewish history, in which a wider set of local actors and external participants are actively engaged. Both provide a glimpse into bubbling civic participation which has emerged out of a void of stagnation; whereby it becomes the responsibility of local people, rather than the state, to enact change, development, and reflection. These examples illustrate the complex and tangled intersection of factors affecting the town. For instance, what is the economic viability of a town on the periphery like Kráľovský Chlmec, and can a town regenerate itself without complete top-down support? I will conclude by grappling with the question: has regional isolation and challenging socioeconomic circumstances led the inhabitants of Kráľovský Chlmec to have a predisposition to pessimism, or can they be defined by a resilience and a capacity for renewal which challenges simplistic interpretations of regional decline?

Context

Before turning focus to the case studies, these physical sites must be situated within the context of Kráľovský Chlmec, thus indicating their specific historical, cultural and religious roles in the town. Furthermore, the portrayal of Kráľovský Chlmec's cultural landscape tied to current socioeconomic realities and a wider dialogue around representations of national memory.¹⁰ According to the most recent 2021 census, Kráľovský Chlmec has a population of under 7,500.¹¹ The town is nestled close to the Hungarian and Ukrainian border, but Kráľovský Chlmec's disconnect from the rest of Slovakia, or any cosmopolitan centre is palpable. The town is removed in a geographical sense, exacerbated by a lack of adequate

⁸ Erhman, A. 'A Short History of the Jewish Communities of Kralovsky Chleme, Kiralyhelme, and the Bodrog District', Printed Friedman Lipe, Bnei-Brak, Slovakia (1997) accessed through JewishGen, Inc, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kralovsky_chlmec/Kralovsky_chlmec.html#TO> [accessed 31 March 2025].

⁹ Interview with Bertalan Gönczy, conducted in English, 24 August 2024 Kráľovský Chlmec, with consent to have his name disclosed.

¹⁰ Kollai, I. 'If Castles and Statues Could Speak to Us. The Changing Freedom of Historical Interpretation in the Case of Slovakia', *Intercultural Relations: Freedom in Culture*, Jagiellonian University Kraków, 2.4 (2018), pp.69-82, <<https://doi.org/10.12797/irm.02.2018.04.04>>

¹¹ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 'The 2021 Population and Housing Census: Population by ethnicity and mother tongue in the SR' (2021), <<https://gis.scitanie.sk/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=9e0c6548b4a240b09a9894a0502e5819>> [accessed 21 December 24].

transportation links to any major cities. The nearest large city, Košice, takes almost 90 minutes to reach by car, while the capital Bratislava is well over five hours drive away. Inconveniently, much of the transport infrastructure seems to bypass Kráľovský Chlmec completely. More widely, a clear economic disparity exists between East and West Slovakia. In 2023, unemployment in Eastern Slovakia was 10.5%, compared to 3.6% in Western Slovakia.¹² The scholarship typically frames disillusionment in the context of widespread disappointment towards post-1989 liberal transformations.¹³ However, for smaller towns in the east of Slovakia, underdevelopment appears chronic and has resulted in Kráľovský Chlmec being mired in an economic malaise that can be traced even prior to the fall of communism in 1989.¹⁴

This is further complicated by the town's minoritised and multiethnic position, whereby Hungarians form the local majority, while constituting a minority on the national level.¹⁵ Historically, Hungarians in Kráľovský Chlmec (Királyhalmec) recognised themselves as part of the majority group. The characterisation of what constitutes a minority, thus, is underpinned by the tension between local, national, and trans-national positionings, alongside historic legacies of previous empires.¹⁶ Beyond overlapping boundaries between minority and majority are the temporal fluctuations in the existence of other communities. While Kráľovský Chlmec's Jewish community may appear absent today, their past presence is imprinted on the local architectural landscape, such as in the synagogue which still stands, open-roof houses, and a Jewish cemetery in the town.¹⁷ Within Christian denominations, Catholics, Greek Catholics, and Calvinists were all present here, underlining the cultural and linguistic diversity of this small-town setting, a representative characteristic of Central Europe, and its historic empires.¹⁸ Hungarian, Slovak and Romani are still spoken here, among other languages. Everyday linguistic and administrative practice is bilingual, and schooling is available both in Hungarian (a regional minority language) and Slovak (the official state language).¹⁹ In recent years, a push has been made to uncover, and reconnect with, the town's diverse heritage. Local newspapers report on the rise of civic participation, private entrepreneurship, and regional responsibility in leading the restoration efforts.²⁰

¹² OECD, 'OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance 2024: Slovak Republic' (2024) <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-regions-and-cities-at-a-glance-2024_23b366ee-en/slovak-republic_c026e91a-en.html>, [accessed 24 March 2025].

¹³ Feffer, J. Aftershock, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2018) and Krastev, I. and Holmes, S. The Light that Failed: A Reckoning. (London, Penguin Books, 2020).

¹⁴ Novotný, L. et al, *Development Trajectories of Small Towns in East Slovakia*, (2016), p.391.

¹⁵ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 'The 2021 Population and Housing Census: Population by ethnicity and mother tongue in the SR' (2021).

¹⁶ Gal, S. 'Polyglot Nationalism. Alternative Perspectives on Language in 19th Century Hungary', *Langage et société*, Cairn, 136.2 (2011), pp.31-54 (p.34), doi:10.3917/lis.136.0031.

¹⁷ A zempléni zsidóság honlapja, 'Jewish Monuments in Zemplén: Királyhalmec (Kráľovský Chlmec)', Zempléni Regionális Vállalkozási Alapítvány (2022), <<https://zemlenizsidóság.hu/kiralyhalmec-en/#:~:text=Királyhalmec%20is%20located%20in%20the%20Bodrogk%C3%B6z%20region%2C%20now,the%20former%20district%20capital%20date%20from%20the%20mid-1700s>> [accessed 29 May 2026].

¹⁸ Interreg, Petőfi Literary Museum: 'Királyhalmec, The City That Rises from the Ashes', <<https://pim.hu/en/connecting-heritages/kiralyhalmec-city-rises-ashes>>, [accessed 26 May 2026].

¹⁹ Hogy, G. 'Királyhalmeci Emlékképek 1890-1990', *Equilibria*, p.16 (2021), and see *Official website of Kráľovský Chlmec*. 'Oficiálna stránka mesta Kráľovský Chlmec', <<https://www.kralovskychlmec.org/hu/>>, [accessed 4 April 2025].

²⁰ Újszó, 'Keresés: Királyhalmec', <<https://ujsoz.com/kereses?search-text=kir%C3%A1lyhalmec>> [accessed 7 April 2025], and, Ma7, 'Királyhalmec', <<https://ma7.sk/telepules/kiralyhalmec>>, [accessed 5 April 2025].

John Swanson's focus on micro-history is valuable as a framework for analysing small towns in Central East Europe. He uses a biography of the village Bilke [modern-day Bilky in Ukraine], which also had a large Jewish community prior to the Holocaust, to analyse how minority groups in the Transcarpathian region experienced the twentieth century, where the village illuminates the larger narrative.²¹ István Kollai's research on the 'embeddedness [...] of castles into the Slovak cultural landscape' is useful in analysing the complex process of heritage protection, and the implications of physical development on local and national memory.²² Ultimately, to form my own profile of this town, I also use a mixture of primary and secondary sources relating directly to Kráľovský Chlmec. The absence of a specific critical work I could engage with meant that I predominantly composed this landscape based on local literature (which compiles archival and historical data) and interviews. My interview with Bertalan Gönczy, the owner of Csonkavár castle, formed a substantial basis for primary research.²³ I am aware of the limitations in listening to a single voice, so I took considerable effort to corroborate with articles, historical documents and, importantly, by factoring in discussions with multiple individuals within the town and outside of it. This highlighted the veracity in Gönczy's conclusions and the many debates taking place within this micro setting of the town. For instance, how does one characterise their identity, are there pessimistic or optimistic views towards the future, and who or what is responsible for the current circumstances? From spending an extensive time in Kráľovský Chlmec, building trusted contacts, and learning Hungarian, I have developed an understanding of the key challenges and debates from varied perspectives.

A note on place names and positioning

To appreciate the physical positioning and identification of Kráľovský Chlmec within Slovakia, the labels of 'town' and 'rural area' will be used throughout this essay. The 2016 article *Development Trajectories of Small Towns in Eastern Slovakia*, defines the 'small town' in Slovakia as a town with 'between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants', slightly smaller than the population size of Kráľovský Chlmec.²⁴ However, since a 1991 classification, only the categories of 'towns' and 'rural municipalities' have existed, with a considerable variation in population size and local administrative power within them, along with divergences in their proximity to larger 'cities' like Košice and Bratislava.²⁵ The same 2016 article identifies that smaller towns in East Slovakia, partly due to hierarchical categorization of towns, are experiencing weaker socioeconomic development in comparison to West Slovakia.²⁶

Additionally, in a region where town and city names have undergone various changes, and where dual signage now features along the border, a note on place names is required. As Péter Kónya observes, the Upper Bodrog region, where Kráľovský Chlmec is located, had been inhabited long before the town's first mention in records in 1214. The Hungarian name for the town *Királyhalmec*, likely an interpretation of the

²¹ Swanson, J. 'Researching Minorities in 20th century Hungary: Tangible Belonging and Borderland Identity', (unpublished paper delivered at SSEES 6 February 2024) <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/arts-humanities/events/2024/feb/researching-minorities-twentieth-century-hungary-tangible-belonging-and-borderland-identity>>.

²² Kollai, I. 'Embeddedness of chateaux and castles into the Slovak cultural landscape' (unpublished paper delivered at SSEES 13 May 2025) <<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/arts-humanities/events/2025/may/embeddedness-chateaux-and-castles-slovak-cultural-landscape>>. See also, Kollai, I. (2019).

²³ Interview with Bertalan Gönczy, conducted in English, 24 August 2024 Kráľovský Chlmec, with consent to have his name disclosed.

²⁴ Novotný et al, *Development Trajectories of Small Towns in East Slovakia*, p.377.

²⁵ Novotný et al, *Development Trajectories of Small Towns in East Slovakia*, p.377.

²⁶ Novotný et al, *Development Trajectories of Small Towns in East Slovakia*, p.374.

original Slavic form, indicates a Slavic presence in the area prior to the arrival of the Hungarians.²⁷ Both the Slovak *Chlmec* and the Hungarian *Helmec* refer to a proto-Slavic word describing a small hill. This is a fitting description of the town's geographical positioning, situated on an elevation, raised from an otherwise flat surrounding area. In March 1919, it was decided that Királyhelmece would become part of Czechoslovakia, its name changing to *Kráľovský Chlmec*.²⁸ The final form of the town's name was decided in 1948, *Kráľovský Chlmec*.²⁹ I will refer to *Kráľovský Chlmec* in its post-1948 form, unless I refer to events taking place before 1919, in which case *Királyhelmece* will be used. This is despite many of my interviewees and Hungarian language sources referring to the town colloquially as *Helmec* in the present. Predominantly, place names will be used in their present forms, but I will reference the Hungarian translation if relevant.

It should also be noted that larger Hungarian towns in the tri-border area such as Sátoraljaújhely and Nyíregyháza have become increasingly accessible since accession to the EU through the removal of border controls. However, similarly to Slovakia, the economy in this eastern region of Hungary lags behind the west of the country.³⁰ Historically, Uzhhorod [Ungvár] in Ukraine was more reachable to inhabitants of *Kráľovský Chlmec* than Košice, but border controls and Russia's full-scale invasion have reduced traffic.³¹ *Kráľovský Chlmec*'s sense of its own peripherality has shifted with changing borders through the centuries. Perceptions of borders are certainly not static and inevitably contrasts to cosmopolitan centres will exist. However, 'in the peripheral areas of rural character, where there are no large or middle-sized towns, a kind of "cityness" is secured' by smaller towns.³²

Csonkavár, the castle which mirrors a town

Preservation of local cultural heritage matters to residents, and they take pride in the ruins of Csonkavár, the fifteenth century castle which presides over the town. The role of the castle is symbolic of *Kráľovský Chlmec*'s historical significance regionally, but also representative (particularly in its former dilapidated state) of the town's relative isolation from cosmopolitan centres. Bertalan Gönczy, who I interviewed for this paper, purchased the crumbling Csonkavár castle in 2018. Whenever I was in *Kráľovský Chlmec* I witnessed how, stone-by-stone, the castle was being unearthed. In 2024, I spoke with Gönczy to learn how the castle transformed from two lonely walls into a structure reminiscent of its original character. Importantly, I wished to understand the reconstruction process and plans for the castle's future. Gönczy undertook this project upon returning home to *Kráľovský Chlmec* after an extended period of time working in Prague. He explained emerging ideas concerning what to do with the castle, and how it can be used as a benefit to the wider community. He also prefaced our conversation with a reminder: 'we are at the end of the world, nobody is coming here so far'. A lingering sentiment for those living in this town.

²⁷ Kónya *Dejiny Kráľovského Chlmca*, p.111.

²⁸ Hoga, G. *Királyhelmecei Emlékképek 1890-1990*, p.24.

²⁹ Hoga, G. *Királyhelmecei Emlékképek 1890-1990*, p.24.

³⁰ 'Country Report – Hungary', Economy and Finance – European Commission, (4 June 2025) <https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-surveillance-eu-member-states/country-pages-including-country-reports/country-report-hungary_en>, [accessed 27 May 2026].

³¹ Finta, M. *Napunk*.

³² Novotný. et al., *Development Trajectories of Small Towns in East Slovakia*, p.375.

Indeed, in an article about the restoration of Csonkavár, Márk Finta cites Prime Minister Robert Fico's comment that 'there is nothing in the east [of Slovakia]', and that he likely had in mind towns like Kráľovský Chlmec.³³ The region's inherent pluralism in ethnicity, language and religion has often been problematised. Hana Kubátová and Monika Vrzgulová, in their study of the Holocaust in Eastern Slovakia, reflect back on how the relationship between Slovakia's centre and periphery reinforced the antisemitic and nationalist notion that the East's multiethnic character was responsible for its economic and social "backwardness".³⁴ Alongside deindustrialisation having a particularly negative impact on Eastern Slovakia, these demographic characterisations and stereotypes of this region have further added to the region's struggle to fuel socioeconomic development.³⁵ Therefore, the process to legitimise the funding of heritage projects, and the restoration of historical sites in the region has also been hindered. Despite Fico's assertion, the Košice region, which Kráľovský Chlmec is a part of, has in recent years initiated development projects to inspire more tourism in the east, such as developing cycle lanes for ecotourism.³⁶ The turn perhaps arrived in 2013, when the regional capital, Košice, was awarded European Capital of Culture. This hinted at a move to appreciate and cultivate regional cultural heritage, as projects were centred on marketing the cities' multiculturalism and on themes such as "forward to roots".³⁷ However, Kráľovský Chlmec is still a long way from recreating this callback to 'roots'; physically, financially, and psychologically. Furthermore, Kollai argues that the trend of interpreting Slovakia's castles and heritage as part of a multiethnic narrative of Slovak history is relatively new.³⁸ Traditionally, castles such as Csonkavár were often associated with non-Slovak landlord ownership. Historically, Hungarian ownership or association may have sparked hostile feelings towards these sites, interpreted as a story outside, or on the margins of, homogenised national history.³⁹

However, the castle must yield both local and external interest. Gönczy describes that his priority is to create reasons for tourists to stay longer in Kráľovský Chlmec, not only to pass through the town on a break from cycling through the surrounding areas. He proposes a 'triangle of interest' centralised around the castle, museum, chateau, and synagogue, all notable heritage sites in the town. By purchasing a ten-euro ticket, individuals would have access to each of these areas. Gönczy explains that he wishes to restore the castle to increase tourism, but importantly, in a way which will also bring practical and positive benefit to the lives of people already living in Kráľovský Chlmec. Therefore, he aims to pedestrianise the perimeter around the castle so it can be used as a park, leisure, and events space. This would need to be in collaboration with the local municipality, who have so far been supportive of efforts to spotlight heritage. Interestingly, another source of interest has been from students completing their *érettségi* (final high school exams). At the same time as visiting the nearby Andrásy chateau in Trebišov or Rákóczi's chateau in Borša for school trips, visiting Kráľovský Chlmec could be added to the day's itinerary too. When I had spoken

³³ Finta, M (2022) *Napunk*: 'keleten nincs semmi'.

³⁴ Kubátová, H. and Vrzgulová, M. 'Being "Local" in Eastern Slovakia: Belonging in a Multiethnic Periphery', *East European Politics and Societies*, 37.1 (2023), pp.249-271 (p.257), doi:10.1177/08883254211005181.

³⁵ Novotný, et al. *Development Trajectories of Small Towns in East Slovakia*, (2016), p.381.

³⁶ Finta, M *Napunk* (2022).

³⁷ Culture and Creativity – European Commission, 'Košice and Marseille-Provence: 2013 European Capitals of Culture in Slovakia and France', <<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/ga/kosice-and-marseille-provence>>, [accessed 7 April 2025].

³⁸ Kollai, I., *Embeddedness of chateaux and castles into the Slovak cultural landscape*, p.72.

³⁹ Kollai, I., *Embeddedness of chateaux and castles into the Slovak cultural landscape*, p.70.

to Gönczy, a total of thirteen buses with students had arrived from Hungary for a tour of the castle. No bus trips had, however, ever arrived from other towns in Slovakia, insinuating that the castle still occupies a larger place in the Hungarian conscience, than in Slovakia. It may be still be some time before Csonkavár is widely recognised as part of the increasingly pluralistic 'Slovak self-image'.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, the authority in charge of overseeing the practical reconstruction is the state heritage office in Košice. The project is therefore supported regionally from within Slovakia. Košice county, through their *Terra Incognita* program, is also in charge of the development of tourism in the region, including the Medzibodrožie area (Bodrogköz) where Kráľovský Chlmec is found. Gönczy explains that the state has outsourced responsibility to this regional organisation. The state, however, provides a heritage officer who comes to check each step of the process. This includes approval for the movement of 'each and every stone'. During our meeting I glimpse into architectural study plans. There are restrictions on what parts of the structure he is allowed to rebuild, and on which materials he uses. For instance, the amount of stone he can use is limited, so for this reason, the terrace on the first floor will be constructed out of wood; providing an idea of the original size and shape of the castle. Gönczy can build a roof over the ground floor. The main requirement, given by the state heritage officers, is that 'it must be really clear to everybody what is historical and medieval and what is absolutely new'. He recognises that this design may split opinion, but the priority remains the preservation of historical monuments. Many castles in the area have fallen into disrepair because the upkeep is expensive and difficult. He states that when the building passes into new hands in the future, it must have a 'function' and be able to generate an income through its usage. He believes that without this, the castle could return back to a 'bad shape' in thirty years time. Care is therefore prioritised by both local, regional and national actors, but only now that an individual has initiated the restoration process.

Inevitably, the expense of restoring a castle is great, and funding has been a necessary but difficult part of the process. The Slovak Ministry of Culture has been the main institute offering funding and support for private owners, specifically the *Obnovme si svoj dom* programme for building reconstruction. While this has been the most successful avenue, it is not enough money for everything. Gönczy describes that when funding is granted in Hungary, the state provides the money upfront. Then the individual or group can create what was approved, so long as they track their spending. In Slovakia, however, one's own money must first be spent, before it is later reimbursed. Gönczy sees this caution towards funding as understandable. It is not because the state is disadvantaging a project from this specific region, but more likely because the Slovak government has had problematic experiences with funding in the past. There are other avenues, such as the Interreg programme, funded by the EU, which strengthens cross border development and relations between Hungary and Slovakia, or the Norway grants, to preserve European heritage. Both have caveats. Gönczy must find a parallel project taking place in Hungary for Interreg, and for the Norwegian fund, Csonkavár must be on a list of potential projects the Slovak government provides to the Norwegian government every five years. Gönczy invests money where he can into small but visible steps, hoping to be on this list or eligible for other grants 'somewhere in the future'.

Sure enough, since my interview with Gönczy, Kráľovský Chlmec is on track to receive a sizable investment as part of the Interreg program. One project will account for the work on Csonkavár, while separate funding benefits a nearby manor house in the town, Lórántffy-kastély. The manor house will be restored as a cultural and tourist centre, while retaining its historic elements in its interior. It will also be a site which tells the

⁴⁰ Kollai, I., *Embeddedness of chateaux and castles into the Slovak cultural landscape*, p.81.

story of its noble origins, and the history of the town more generally.⁴¹ Both projects will culminate in greater strides towards establishing an impetus for tourists to visit the town, and for areas which were abandoned or underused to be revived. The projects also serve to benefit the partner towns of Cigánd and Karcsa across the border in Hungary (which are set to receive funding for similar projects), with the foundation highlighting the positive impact of cross border and transnational cooperation and revitalisation.⁴² Ultimately, the aforementioned projects are both supported and sometimes hindered from multiple avenues; locally, regionally, nationally and trans-nationally. The mosaic of challenges in undertaking heritage restoration is complex and cannot be explained by a single factor, even if ‘sometimes in contradiction with each other’.⁴³

Local reception to the project

I asked Gönczy what the reception has been like from the local community, and he replied that at first they were not very optimistic towards his work. He explains that there is a key reason for their distrust, he is a private owner. They wonder how it is possible that he was able to buy this piece of historical heritage. He explained: ‘Officially, by the law, the state always has the right to be the first to whom I have to offer this building [...] After thirty days, it can be sold’. The local community ‘are not used to [...] a private person is owning a castle.’ The norm, after fifty years of all ownership predominantly in the hands of the communist state, is that the state should be trusted to take care of historical heritage. However, evident in the ruinous state of the castle, the state did not assume the role to protect heritage in this part of the country. Rather, responsibility to restore the castle has been undertaken by an individual.

So, what is the implication of this bottom-up action? It may be argued that it reflects the wider neglect that the Slovak state shows (a) to Eastern Slovakia, (b) to areas with a Hungarian minority and (c) to heritage, compounded by the fact that Slovakia still lags economically. In the case of the castle, inaction by the state would have plausibly resulted in the remaining two walls crumbling by the end of the decade. While Kollai argues that the previous ‘hostility’ towards heritage in minoritised areas is lessening, would the state have been able to intervene before the castle’s collapse?⁴⁴ It may also be argued that the case of Csonkavár castle reflects the broader economic crisis. However, despite all the town’s struggles, Kráľovský Chlmec does not have an excess of boarded up shops, or any of the other signs of fatal hopelessness.⁴⁵ Indeed, there is a positive way of reading the private effort to restore Csonkavár as resilience, evident in Gönczy’s decision to invest in the castle despite challenges. Kráľovský Chlmec can inspire vibrant individuals despite its lethargic conditions. Although, Kráľovský Chlmec appears condemned to exist on the periphery and is often neglected by the centre, this can also inspire a determination by the inhabitants to take the initiative in solving the problems themselves. Revealingly, the locals do feel protective over the castle. Even with its two walls, Csonkavár was always a point of pride standing atop Kráľovský Chlmec’s hill. For every

⁴¹ Felvidék.ma, ‘Unió forrásból újul meg a királyhelmei Lorántffy-kastély’, 3 January 2026, <<https://felvidek.ma/2026/01/03/unios-forrasbol-ujul-meg-a-kiralyhelmei-lorantffy-kastely/>> [accessed 8 February 2026].

⁴² Németi, R. ‘Két ország együttműködésében folytatódik a Csonkavár felújítása’, Újszó 11 November 2025, <<https://uj szo.com/regio/ket-oroszag-egyuttmu ko deseben-folytatodik-a-csonkavar-felujitasa>>, [accessed 8 February 2026].

⁴³ Kollai, I., *Embeddedness of chateaux and castles into the Slovak cultural landscape*, p.81.

⁴⁴ Kollai, I., *Embeddedness of chateaux and castles into the Slovak cultural landscape*, p.70.

⁴⁵ Harris, J. and Domokos, J. ‘Politicians may finally be catching on: towns now hold the key to Britain’s future’, *The Guardian* 18 October 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/commentisfree/2018/oct/18/politicians-may-finally-be-catching-on-towns-now-hold-the-key-to-britains-future>>, [accessed 17 March 2025]

inhabitant it was perhaps the only thing that had not changed over the course of their lifetimes. Gönczy notes that attitudes are not as harsh as in 2018, now locals trust he has no intention to demolish the castle.

Kráľovský Chlmec's Jewish history

*Királyhalmec: here I was born, here I live,
My poverty binds me to this place,
Though I feel in my blood the burning allure
of the great world.
You are like all small towns;
You strangle our grand feverish dreams.*⁴⁶

Margit Prerau, a Jewish poet born in Királyhalmec in 1909, ended a poem with these words in the 1930s. This sobering reflection of her hometown highlights a reluctant commitment to a place which has enacted unrelenting suffering against her, first in poverty, then in persecution. Prerau consistently engaged with the hardship of the townspeople, with her pre-war writing focusing on the plight of the working class, and later centring on her experiences of the Holocaust and death camps.⁴⁷ Prerau eventually fled to the USA, the devastation and betrayal too grave, her parents among Kráľovský Chlmec's 970 Holocaust victims.⁴⁸ Kubátová and Vrzgulová explain that 'the Holocaust in Eastern Slovakia had its deep situational dimension, with local norms, experiences, and inter-group relations shaping the ousting of Jews from what was a historically shared space.'⁴⁹ This was indeed a setting which had been long shared, the first Jewish family to be recorded in Kráľovský Chlmec is the Jacoby's in 1746.⁵⁰ Thereon Jewish presence in the town became more established, particularly noticeable in 'trade, commerce and industry.'⁵¹ According to demographic statistics from 1910, out of the 2725 people living in Kráľovský Chlmec, 571 were Jewish.⁵²

Therefore, the experience of being a 'local' in this town was inherently shaped by coexistence. It may involve walking past distinct places of worships to shops owned by families of diverse ethnicities, then speaking to those shopkeepers in Hungarian, or Slovak, or a dialectical mix of the different languages present in Kráľovský Chlmec. This is a fluidity which is still perceptible today. However, the experience of the Holocaust on locals, and the shift to 'other' those who had been part of the town's fabric, will require further study. In Kráľovský Chlmec, it is quite normal to be familiar with most other families in a town, lives intertwine more frequently and intimately than in a city. It is also true that turning a blind eye to policies enacted against a group in such a local setting is impossible. In a shared physical environment, townspeople would have likely been aware of a story to emerge in the *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* [Prague's

⁴⁶ From the poem 'Királyhalmec', by Margit Prerau, translated by Aaron Ehrman (1997).

⁴⁷ Prerau, M. *Királyhalmec*.

⁴⁸ Szlovákiai Magyar Művelődési Intézet, 'Prerau Margit (költő)', CSEMADOK Dunaszerdahely, 30 June 2021, <<https://csemadok.sk/jeles-felvideki-szemelyisegek/prerau-margit/>>, [accessed 31 March 2025].

⁴⁹ Kubátová, H. Vrzgulová, M., *Being "Local" in Eastern Slovakia: Belonging in a Multiethnic Periphery*, p.251.

⁵⁰ Kónya, P. *Dejiny Kráľovského Chlmca*, p.205.

⁵¹ Ehrman, A. p.13-24 (1997) accessed through JewishGen, Inc, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kralovsky_chlmec/Kralovsky_chlmec.html#TO> [accessed 31 March 2025]

⁵² Hogg, G. *Királyhalmeci Emlékképek 1890-1990*, p.8.

Hungarian newspaper] in 1937 about the Slovak primary school in Kráľovský Chlmec. The report explains that a headmistress, already known to be antisemitic, read a poem in class which called for Jews to be thrown in the Danube - eighty percent of her pupils were Jewish.⁵³ In the same newspaper article, it is revealed that Hungarian children in the region had been refused their school grades. Reportedly, pupils in Kráľovský Chlmec had not made enough progress in Slovak language classes.⁵⁴ The rising tension between the increasingly nationalist Slovak centre and the marginalised periphery was tangible for all those living in the town.⁵⁵ However, tightening restrictions were not levelled equally and substantial changes, such as the First Vienna Award in 1938, whereby Kráľovský Chlmec was one of the towns annexed by Hungary, were also not experienced in the same way. Hoga describes how being occupied was met with 'kimondhatatlan öröm' ['unspeakable joy'] for many of Kráľovský Chlmec's inhabitants.⁵⁶ In contrast, the Munich appeasement immediately introduced the same antisemitic policies already in effect in Hungary.⁵⁷ For instance, a 1939 decree limited the number of industrial business licences which could be issued to Jews. A restriction of six percent in Kráľovský Chlmec's municipality resulted in some Jewish owners being forced to lease their property.⁵⁸

Kubátová and Vrzgulová indicate how mounting persecution was of social and economic gain for the 'majority society' in Eastern Slovakia, whereby 'neighbours watched or actively participated in this robbery'.⁵⁹ Potential collaboration with fascists and direct or indirect theft of Jewish neighbours' belongings remains a taboo topic. But being 'local' undoubtedly made the horrors more perceptible, violence was able to take more intimate, tangled forms.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the Holocaust is remembered by many inhabitants of Kráľovský Chlmec in similar ways; their Jewish neighbours were there one day and gone the next. The vague tone ultimately reflects 'the long shadows of the Holocaust'⁶¹, an ongoing sense of shame and guilt felt by a community who were at the very least passive participants in the perpetuation of mass murder. With buried trauma this deep-rooted, it may seem easier to keep the past at arm's length. However, this history is unavoidably tangible. Whether this is in Kráľovský Chlmec's enduring ethnic and linguistic diversity, and the struggle to negotiate these varied experiences, or, in more physical forms. Further research will need to be carried out to understand the degree to which responsibility and guilt is perceived and acknowledged in the town. However, in regards to the article's aim of understanding how a community responds to physical historical heritage in the present, the efforts to bring the synagogue and Jewish cemetery back into local consciousness through restoration serves to indicate that reconciliation with the past is increasingly important for locals.

⁵³ Hoga, G. *Királyhelmei Emlékképek 1890-1990*, p.38.

⁵⁴ Hoga, G. *Királyhelmei Emlékképek 1890-1990*, p.38.

⁵⁵ Kubátová, H. and Vrzgulová, M. *Being "Local" in Eastern Slovakia: Belonging in a Multiethnic Periphery*, p.256.

⁵⁶ Hoga, G. *Királyhelmei Emlékképek*, p.35.

⁵⁷ Erhman, A. p.13-24 (1997) accessed through JewishGen, Inc, <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kralovsky_chlmec/Kralovsky_chlmec.html#TO> [accessed 31 March 2025]

⁵⁸ Hoga, G. *Királyhelmei Emlékképek*, p.40.

⁵⁹ Kubátová, H. and Vrzgulová, M., *Being "Local" in Eastern Slovakia: Belonging in a Multiethnic Periphery*, p.258.

⁶⁰ Kubátová, H. and Vrzgulová, M., *Being "Local" in Eastern Slovakia: Belonging in a Multiethnic Periphery*, p.265.

⁶¹ Kubátová, H. 'Guilt, Responsibility and Trauma: Restoring the Moral Self-Image in Postwar Slovakia', *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe after World War II*. (Palgrave Studies in the History of Experience, Palgrave Macmillan: 2022), p. 213.

In my conversation with Gönczy, he mentioned his involvement in restoring the Jewish cemetery in Kráľovský Chlmec. The cemetery dates to the mid-nineteenth century, and despite its seemingly abandoned state, ‘is still being taken care of by isolated loyal Jews who live there, with the support of the local authorities’.⁶² Éva Gáti is one example. In an interview with a minority newspaper, Újszó, she gave an insight into how she came to take part in the cemetery’s upkeep.⁶³ Gáti’s father had been deported during the war, only to return to Kráľovský Chlmec later with his family, likely part of 175 of Holocaust survivors to return in 1944-45.⁶⁴ Kráľovský Chlmec’s Jewish community was one of five in Czechoslovakia to have five hundred members again by 1948.⁶⁵ Gönczy describes in the same article that, as a result of not feeling safe or no longer wishing to remain in the town, many emigrated in 1948 and 1968.⁶⁶ Gáti’s father found the cemetery in a neglected state, but worked tirelessly to preserve the site, reflective of respect both towards the community, and to his relatives buried there.⁶⁷ She has continued this legacy, with the help of other relatives. Similarly to the castle’s renovation, assistance often comes from those who visit from abroad, rather than within the town. With inscriptions on tombstones becoming less clear over time, it was important to enlist wider support. Gönczy describes that a rabbinical student in Budapest has helped to translate the tombstones, so the cemetery can be well documented for anyone who arrives. This highlights another way in which history goes on living, the responsibility of representing a community’s past in the present.⁶⁸

The willingness to ‘go across’ to Hungary in search of funds and expertise, as well as applying for funding within Slovakia, highlights how a multilingual town like Kráľovský Chlmec can benefit from its cultural diversity to tap into varied networks of support.⁶⁹ The project is not necessarily difficult because of its association to the problematised Hungarian minority. A synagogue in Bytča, in North-West Slovakia, will soon undergo renovation too, also hindered by financial difficulties.⁷⁰ Furthermore, QR codes may allow tombstones to be read in multiple languages and could provide a profile into key figures in the town’s history, such as the Braun family who owned a store. Often tourists from abroad visit the nearby Bodrogolaszi or Sátoraljaújhely in neighbouring Hungary, where notable rabbis were born. With Kráľovský Chlmec also fortunate to have significant sites of Jewish heritage, the hope is that relatives and others will be able to visit for a similar purpose. There is also evidence that sentiments within the town are changing,

⁶² Ehrman, A. (1997), p.13-24

⁶³ Németi, R. ‘Újra együtt imádkoznak és örökségük ápolásán dolgoznak a királyhelmezi zsidó hitközösség tagjai’, Újszó 13 March 2025 <https://ujso.com/regio/ujra-egyutt-imadkoznak-es-orokseguk-apolasan-dolgoznak-a-kiralyhelmezi-zsido-hitkozossege?fbclid=IwY2xjawjXuDJleHRuA2FibQIxMAABHaXYuS7MLHtyX1wO3rjC2k_T7GBE5x2u04UAlhLwwFTJQ8HvnTn3V_ydlQ_aem_M-xm5CP6ylgXr5FjOjNYyG>, [accessed 1 April 2025].

⁶⁴ Németi, R., *Újra együtt imádkoznak és örökségük ápolásán dolgoznak a királyhelmezi zsidó hitközösség tagjai.*

⁶⁵ Németi, R., *Újra együtt imádkoznak és örökségük ápolásán dolgoznak a királyhelmezi zsidó hitközösség tagjai.*

⁶⁶ Németi, R., *Újra együtt imádkoznak és örökségük ápolásán dolgoznak a királyhelmezi zsidó hitközösség tagjai.*

⁶⁷ Németi, R., *Újra együtt imádkoznak és örökségük ápolásán dolgoznak a királyhelmezi zsidó hitközösség tagjai.*

⁶⁸ Kollai, I. *Embeddedness of chateaux and castles into the Slovak cultural landscape*, p.81.

⁶⁹ Szalai, B. and others ‘Methods and Results of Two Border Researches on the Hungarian-Ukrainian-Slovakian Tri-border Area’, *Methodology and Tools for Sociological Analysis of Transborder Cooperation*, Uzhgorod, Ukraine (January 24-45, 2013), pp.60-71.

⁷⁰ Foundation for Jewish Heritage, ‘Synagogue in Bytca, Slovakia’ <<https://www.foundationforjewishheritage.com/bytca>>, [accessed 1 April 2025].

and that locals are becoming more involved. Gáti states ‘although the size of the community is small, younger generations are interested in Jewish traditions, and this gives hope for the future’.⁷¹ The *Synagogum* page on Facebook was created to track the progress of Jewish restoration projects and has recently celebrated the work of local volunteers in cleaning up the cemetery.

The synagogue is another important site, despite no longer being in use as a sacred place. The overall condition of the structure is surprisingly good, and inside it is adorned with painted walls. Currently owned by the city, Gönczy and the team working in the town’s museum are lobbying for it to be developed into a space for remembrance events and for it to be restored to a functional state. They have had the idea that it may be turned into a public library, a cultural centre for both locals and tourists. While the city approves of the museum’s restoration of the synagogue, this could take ten to fifteen years. This slow and uncertain process points, as does the slow work of restoring the castle, to a structural fault endemic of Central European towns. While motivation may be there, the local government are limited in their engagement due to financial constraints and their isolation from the networks of influence which are concentrated in the largest regional centres. The mayor’s positive, but restrained reaction to these projects reflects the institutional challenges facing a town like Kráľovský Chlmec. Lobbying for state funding is weakened by distance to the centre and perhaps to the locality’s association with the Hungarian-minority party. The money which is cultivated from low tax revenue is prioritised on maintaining critical social institutions, rather than cultural heritage. Kráľovský Chlmec’s various restoration projects are, therefore, reliant on local philanthropy. A new culture of private donations, charitable engagement and volunteer participation must be created, after 1989, almost from scratch. Moreover, most people in Kráľovský Chlmec face daily financial struggles and limited capacity to self-fund restoration projects.

Conclusion

Kráľovský Chlmec thus depends on vibrant individuals, resilient to hopelessness and committed to creatively repurposing and rethinking the history already present in the town. The idea of creating a ‘memory point’ to reveal the local Jewish history in Kráľovský Chlmec, an entirely bottom-up idea, highlights innovation not only in the search for funding but also the wider effort to rethink the town’s history. When I was last in Kráľovský Chlmec, I joined a call for volunteers to help clear out the synagogue of material and earth which had accumulated after over fifty years of unuse. The group included locals who had previous engagement with other projects in Kráľovský Chlmec, and those who had only ever seen the synagogue from its façade and were therefore intrigued by what was always behind closed doors. The local mayor also got involved, representing the municipality which now owns the site.⁷² We uncovered historical objects bearing witness to a once lively religious and cultural centre, such as a document corresponding family names to a seating plan. I was also interviewed by journalist Tünde Tomojka, who was covering developments in the area for the Hungarian-minority in Slovakia. These projects are local in character and drive, however, the interest in the town from ‘outsiders’ can indeed be utilised to prove that the reach is surprisingly far - if ‘even’ a student from London is getting involved. From a peripheral position, attention is difficult to amass. Local activists are concerned with how they can convince both inhabitants of the town, and those beyond it, that the work being done matters and is deserving of symbolic and material support.

⁷¹ Némethi, Újszó (13 March 2025) [“Bár a közösség létszáma kicsi, a fiatalabb generációk is érdeklődnek a zsidó hagyományok iránt, és ez reményt ad a jövőre nézve.”].

⁷² A zempléni zsidóság honlapja, ‘Jewish Monuments in Zemplén: Királyhelmece (Kráľovský Chlmec)’, Zempléni Regionális Vállalkozási Alapítvány (2022).

Drawing attention to heritage sites encourages a conversation about a previously buried past specific to Kráľovský Chlmec. Kubátová and Vrzgulová highlight the limitations of Slovak institutional sources on the Holocaust in Eastern Slovakia, including that they tend to view the borders and identities as 'static' and that national narratives tend to be favoured over local testimonies.⁷³ Therefore, just as institutional sources cannot convey multitude of histories in this region, state-led projects struggle to compare to the sensitive and distinct impact local activists can provide. These individuals, as has been witnessed in Kráľovský Chlmec, are able to cater projects to the nuances and complexities of the town. Certainly, this has limitations, and not merely regarding how to finance such creative endeavours. Rather, engagement with the past is a complicated challenge which requires locals to reconcile with deep-rooted taboos, shame, and complicity in the horrors of their history. While there is hope and already evidence that the action undertaken can incentivise a virtuous cycle of civic engagement and participation, whereby pride in this town may encourage people to get involved in its development, there remains a huge amount of cultural heritage to be uncovered. Furthermore, there is still a lack of signage directing potential tourists to heritage sites, or plaques commemorating the Jewish past. Evidently, when reconciliation with the past forces locals to confront their accountability and guilt, the rich Jewish heritage of Kráľovský Chlmec becomes incredibly difficult to celebrate.

When I began my study of Kráľovský Chlmec, I was struck by the individual ways in which it was negotiating its own past. There is a rich potential to cultivate the existing heritage, but development faces setbacks at every angle, resulting in stark limitations. While the story of Csonkavár and the Jewish cemetery and synagogue highlight the ability to overcome inherent obstacles to produce critical first steps, the challenges ahead remain immense. These stories follow a similar trajectory. Csonkavár, as a representation of the Hungarian nobility, was a site the Czechoslovak state was passively pleased to see disappear. Following the Holocaust, the state narrative focused on moving forward, a lack of reflection or responsibility which suited Kráľovský Chlmec's locals. The case studies highlight not only a marginalised town suffering with its economic and political circumstances on the periphery, but also a local community struggling to make sense of its own past and its pluralistic identities.

By positioning a micro example of one town in a wider context and timeline, I hope to have provided a clearer picture on the roots of isolation and complex sentiments. Practical and perpetuated disconnect has resulted in the town struggling to negotiate its historical identities and pragmatic setting. However, local patriotism and nostalgia towards the past can transform into development and a coming to terms with history, as seen in the project to restore the castle and Jewish heritage sites in the town. This is met with pessimism and doubt at every stage, even by the same activists who sparked this action. But, from interviews and sources I have acquired, this sentiment also appears to drive commemoration in ways which are realistic, sensitive and above all, personal to the town's multifaceted character. Ultimately, while these innovative developments are specific to Kráľovský Chlmec's context, the micro study highlights that it is possible to inspire civic participation in a place characterised by disillusionment and stagnation. It also demonstrates that engaging with heritage and historical sites can enable local communities to feel as though they have agency over their circumstances, experiences, and the place they live. Therefore, in complex reconciliation efforts, Kráľovský Chlmec reflects simultaneous negotiations of both doubt and hope, ongoing in a swathe of small towns across Central Europe and beyond. Perhaps Prerau's twentieth century impressions of the small town struggling with its great dreams will be prophetic, but for now, Kráľovský Chlmec's efforts to

⁷³ Kubátová, H. and Vrzgulová, M. *Being "Local" in Eastern Slovakia: Belonging in a Multiethnic Periphery*, p.262 and p.252.

restore its heritage sites hints at a strengthening optimism which is measured and representative of the locality.

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Interview

Interview with Bertalan Gönczy, conducted in English, 24 August 2024 Kráľovský Chlmec, with consent to have his name disclosed.