

From Migrant Group to Ethnic Minority Group: Internal Perspectives on the Formation of the Vietnamese Diaspora in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: Utilizing the statistical database of the Czech Republic (CR), Czech census data in 2011 and 2021, along with the participant observation method, this paper aims to indicate the formation and development of the Việt Xù diaspora in the CR from the 1950s until now. The influx of Vietnamese migrants began with labor agreements between two socialist countries, leading to an increase in their population and contributions to the local economy through retail trade, culinary and beauty services, transforming their status from migrants to the national minority. Vietnamese community continues to face challenges related to integration into mainstream Czech society, namely language difficulties and instances of racism. The younger generations are masters in the Czech language and cultural integration successfully though they face challenges in balancing their cultural heritage with the pressures of assimilation. Their experiences reflect broader themes of migration, assimilation and identity formation in contemporary society. The findings of this study hold significant implications for diaspora research.

Keywords: Vietnamese diaspora, Việt Kiều, Czech Republic.

Subject classification: Cultural studies.

1. Introduction

During my early days in Brno, the Czech Republic (CR), a remark made by a compatriot at a local Vietnamese restaurant caught my attention and has since shaped the direction of this inquiry: “There is a new Xù at our restaurant”. The comment prompted a deeper reflection on the Vietnamese diaspora of which I was becoming a part. While the term Việt “Kiều” is widely used to refer to overseas Vietnamese communities globally, the Vietnamese community in the CR often identifies with the term Việt “Xù”, a locally grounded label that reflects distinct

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historical, social, and cultural dynamics. Motivated by this distinction, I aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Vietnamese migration and diasporic identity in the Czech context.

The period between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century witnessed a significant wave of Vietnamese international migration (Đặng Minh Khôi, 2020). The Vietnamese diaspora has formed in Western nations and countries once part of the Soviet Bloc.

After 1975, Vietnamese migration into several Western countries such as the United States of America (the USA), Australia, Canada and European countries emerged. In the USA, the large-scale migration flow from Vietnam was attributed to American involvement in the Vietnam War. Subsequently, they formed a Vietnamese diaspora, referred to as Viet Kieu (Thai, 1999; Le, 2007; Hanh Nguyen, 2020). Currently, the Vietnamese diaspora ranks among the six largest diaspora populations and the fourth largest groups among Asian Americans in the USA (Kochhar et al., 2013).

In France, the designation “diaspora” is predominantly associated with Vietnamese who left Vietnam after 1975, whereas Vietnamese people migrated to France earlier during French colonialism in the 1900s (Thompson, 1952; Newgeography, 2011). Today, the Vietnamese community in France continues to expand as a result of a recent surge in migration from Vietnam (Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

Similar to France, Vietnamese mainly came to Canada before 1975. These people included students, former students and their offspring who lived in the Francophone province of Quebec (Bun & Dorais, 1998). However, the period of two years from 1975 to 1976 marked the commencement of a significant influx of Vietnamese entering Canada (Bun & Dorais, 1998; Dorais, 2009). In the 21st century, the migration of Vietnamese people to Canada persists in a gradual upward trajectory. Consequently, the Vietnamese diaspora here is the fifth largest non-European ethnic group in Canada (Lindsay & Division, 2001).

In Germany, the Vietnamese diaspora encompassed students and contract workers. Vietnamese students came to Germany in the early 1960s (Hahn & Nadel, 2014), the rest mainly came to West Germany in 1978 (Röttger-Rössler & Lam, 2019). The influx of contract workers transpired in the years 1988 and 1989, facilitated by a bilateral government agreement (Röttger-Rössler & Lam, 2019). Presently, the Vietnamese diaspora constitutes the most substantial Asian community within Germany.

In Australia, after 1975, the Vietnamese diaspora developed quickly (Mellor, 2004; Ben-Moshe et al., 2016; Loretta et al., 2017). Vietnamese diaspora now is the sixth-largest migrant community and the largest community in Australia (Baldassar et al., 2017).

While a significant portion of Vietnamese diaspora communities in the USA,

Canada, Australia, Germany, and France predominantly originated from southern Vietnam after 1975, the United Kingdom (the UK) received several from Northern Vietnam. A smaller portion of Vietnamese people came from southern Vietnam (Barber, 2015). The Vietnamese diaspora within the UK can be systematically categorized into four distinct cohorts: immigrants and their descendants who migrated from the former state of southern Vietnam during the 1970s; individuals who migrated from northern Vietnam in the late 1970s or early 1980s; Vietnamese migrants from northern Vietnam during the 1990s; and international students arriving since the early 2000s (Barber, 2017).

In contrast to the formation of the aforementioned Vietnamese diaspora communities, the Vietnamese diaspora communities in former Soviet bloc countries such as the CR, Poland and Hungary were established through the interrelations among socialist countries. Vietnamese people who migrated from Vietnam to these socialist countries were either students or labor migrants.

In Poland, the presence of Vietnamese people, specifically students, was documented in the 1950s. After their graduation, a number of these Vietnamese students opted to permanently reside in Poland and facilitate and bring their family members to Poland (Bodziany, 2017). The 1990s witnessed another significant influx of labor migration from Vietnam to Poland (Nowicka-Rusek, 2014). Today, the Vietnamese diaspora is still growing in Poland because of new waves from Vietnam to Poland.

In Hungary, the first wave of Vietnamese migration can be traced back to the 1960s, attributable to bilateral agreements between socialist countries. In the next decade, Vietnamese people continued coming to Hungary for educational purposes. As same as Vietnamese students in Poland, many of these students decided to stay in Hungary after their graduation and contributed to the formation of the Vietnamese diaspora community in Hungary. The flow of Vietnamese migration to Hungary has persistently increased owing to family reunification and economic motivations.

As a former member of the Soviet Bloc, the Czech Republic (CR) has been a significant destination for Vietnamese people since the 1950s. Over seventy years of establishment, the Vietnamese diaspora in the country continues to grow in population and enhances the general quality of life. The CR has ranked 12th among 108 countries worldwide where Vietnamese people reside (Tran, 2006; Čada et al., 2016). The Vietnamese diaspora represents one of the largest foreign groups and is the leading Asian diasporic community in the CR. They are now spatially scattered throughout the whole country, largely due to their retail enterprises. More importantly, they have established their own commercial enclaves in particular cities within the CR. This visibility of the Vietnamese diaspora in the CR surpasses that of Vietnamese diasporas in other countries such as the USA and the UK (Pham & Kraus, 2024). However, currently, there are fewer studies focused on the Vietnamese diaspora in the CR compared to well-known migration countries such as the USA. Therefore, this study aims to explore the formation and development of

this diaspora in the CR to enrich the existing literature on Vietnamese diasporas.

2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, drawing on comprehensive quantitative data from the Czech Republic's national censuses of 2011 and 2021, as well as statistical data from the Czech Statistical Office. The primary objective is to undertake an in-depth analysis and comparative assessment of the socio-demographic characteristics of the Vietnamese diaspora residing in the CR. The analysis focuses on key indicators, including population size, spatial distribution, and economic activity, covering the period from 2011 to 2024. By integrating these robust datasets with existing literature on Vietnamese diasporic communities, the research aims to illuminate the formation, transformation, and life-course experiences of the Vietnamese diaspora within the Czech context.

In addition to the quantitative component, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted through participant observation within Vietnamese communities in Prague and Brno the two largest urban centers in the CR between June 2011 and November 2022. These cities, known for their ethnically diverse populations and vibrant labor markets, have become important destinations for migrant populations, including Vietnamese people. Fieldwork included active participation in community life through engagement with various Vietnamese organizations and associations. These included *Huong Sen* (a Vietnamese women's group in Brno), the Vietnamese Association in Brno and South Moravia, the Young Vietnamese Entrepreneurs Association (AYVE) in Prague, and *Viet Heart Cz*, the Vietnamese Youth Association in the CR. Participation in community events organized by these groups provided opportunities for direct observation and informal conversations, facilitating a deeper understanding of everyday experiences, identity negotiation, and community dynamics among Vietnamese migrants in their new socio-cultural environment.

Data collected through ethnographic methods were systematically analyzed through thematic coding of field notes, enabling the identification of key patterns and themes relevant to the lived experiences of the Vietnamese diaspora.

This research was conducted in full accordance with the ethical standards of Palacký University Olomouc and adhered to the ethical principles articulated in the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were thoroughly briefed on the aims of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any point.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Việt “Xù”, not Việt “Kiều”: the unique name of Vietnamese diaspora in Czechia

When discussing overseas Vietnamese, especially those in Western countries such as the USA, Australia, and Canada, the term Viet “Kiều” is frequently mentioned. However, within the CR, the Vietnamese diaspora has adopted their term, known as Việt “Xù” or simply “Xù”.

The term “Xù” combines Czech and Vietnamese elements and is used to describe Vietnamese people living in the CR. It is derived phonetically from the genitive form of a Czech word, Vietnam- củ, which Czech people use to refer to Vietnamese in the CR (Štreit & Cao, 2020). Over time, the Vietnamese diaspora here has embraced this term to identify themselves, adapting it to the phonetic style of Vietnamese as “Xù”. Indeed, from our observation and interactions with the diaspora, it is common to hear the term “Xù” used, and most Vietnamese who have lived here for over five years are familiar with it in reference to their compatriots.

At present, the life of Việt Xù in the CR is improving and has been better than before. To do so, they have gone through a long journey of formation and development of their diaspora in more than seventy years since two socialist countries signed the first diplomatic relationship in 1950. Vietnam and Czechoslovakia established the first diplomatic ties on 2nd February 1950, and four years later, on 30th December 1954, the Czechoslovakia Embassy commenced operations in Hanoi. A year after that, the Vietnamese Embassy began its functions in Prague (Alamgir, 2014). Thus, the formal migration waves from Vietnam to Czechoslovakia - now the CR - began.

3.2. The arrival of Vietnamese migrants in the CR: key events and milestones

In the Czech Republic, the first Vietnamese people who came to the country were individual communists who escaped from France, where they were under scrutiny by the French secret police, known as Sureté, due to their political activities (Nožina & Kraus, 2020). Unfortunately, these people do not appear in the official statistical records of the CR, which complicates the understanding of their contributions to the Vietnamese diaspora.

Actually, the migration influx from Vietnam to the CR became particularly noticeable in the early 1950s, a period marked by the burgeoning relationship between the two socialist countries. We agree with Drbohlav et al. (2009) that the migration influx from Vietnam to the Czech Republic could be divided into two phases: The first phase is pre-1989. The phase was governed by agreements between the two countries. The second phase is post-1989. This second phase could be seen as independent migration because migration was based mainly on individual demand, the changes of two economies, and social networks rather than the agreements between two governments.

The first phase of Vietnamese migration to Czechoslovakia began with an important milestone in September 1955, when the two countries formalized their relationship through an agreement focused on economic and technical assistance. This agreement laid the groundwork for deeper ties and facilitated the movement of individuals between the countries. A pivotal moment in this relationship happened

one year later, in 1956 when a hundred Vietnamese orphans were sent to the town of Chrastava (Prokopová, 2015). This group marked the first organized wave of Vietnamese migrants to Czechoslovakia, representing a unique intersection of humanitarian aid and international cooperation. These orphans came to the city with their teachers and stayed in a building that is now a building of an educational institution in Chrastava. The group of orphans spent four years in Chrastava where they completed their elementary education. After finishing their studies, they either continued studying or returned to Vietnam. Nonetheless, there remains a lack of official statistics detailing how many of these children returned to Vietnam versus those who decided to stay in Czechoslovakia.

The migration wave from Vietnam during the 1950s was not limited to orphans, it also included an influx of Vietnamese students. Thousands of young and excellent students were selected to travel to Czechoslovakia for educational opportunities. Many of them have familial ties to the Vietnam War, as they or their relatives had fought for the country, which facilitated their access to study in Czechoslovakia (Drbohlav & Dzúrová, 2007; Krebs & Pechova, 2008; Nožina, 2010).

In the 1960s, the relationship between the two countries deepened with the signing of further agreements concerning labor exchanges. The first of these agreements, established in 1966 and 1967, allowed Vietnamese trainees to come to Czechoslovakia for work-related training that typically lasted for between three to five years (Alamgir, 2017). This trend of labor migration persisted, peaking in the 1980s when the numbers of Vietnamese migrants reached about 35,000 people, two-thirds of whom were laborers (Martínková, 2011). During this period, Vietnamese people maintained strong connections with their families and friends, both in Vietnam and within Czechoslovakia. They sought various avenues to improve their financial situations, often engaging in informal trade of scarce and desirable goods.

The second phase unfolded in 1989. Following this change, the government of the Czech Republic made a decisive move to sever both political and economic ties with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This shift led to the repatriation of Vietnamese workers who had been part of the labor force before. Despite this official termination of relations, a significant number of Vietnamese people sought to stay in the CR, with many opting to stay with illegal status. From 1990 to 1992, the Czech political system underwent substantial reform, characterized by the establishment of progressive migration policies. These reforms allowed for the creation of migration structures that were more accommodating to foreign people. As a result, Vietnamese people who had remained in the country found chances to regularize their status, enabling them to engage in business activities and reside legally in the CR.

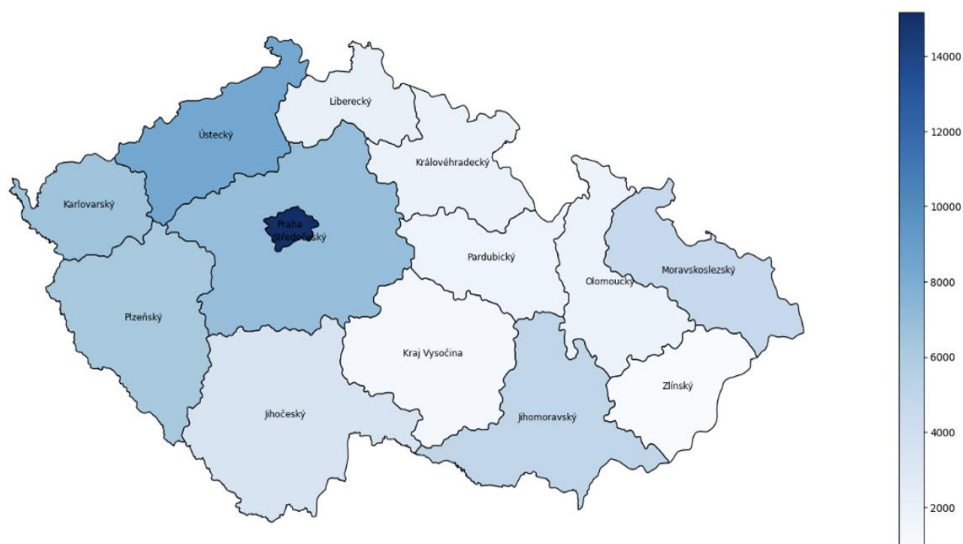
This new formed legal status marked a turning point for the Vietnamese diaspora, as it supported the integration of those who had previously lived in the shadows of illegality. The ability to conduct business legally not only enhanced their economic prospects but also laid the base for the next waves of migration from Vietnam to the CR. Throughout the 1990s and beyond, these early settlers played a

crucial role in forming a vibrant and resilient Vietnamese diaspora, which has since flourished and become an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of the CR.

3.3. Settlement and development: Vietnamese spatially scattered all through the CR

In the CR, the Vietnamese community represents the third-largest group of foreigners, following Ukrainians and Slovaks. According to the results of the Czech Census 2021, the Vietnamese population in Czechia stood at 54,256 people, accounting for approximately 0.52% of the national's total population (CZSO, 2021). There is a significant concentration of Vietnamese people living primarily in the capital city of Prague and the surrounding Středočeský region (Figure 1). In addition to these urban centers, Vietnamese communities have also established a presence in several border regions, including Ústecký, Karlovarský, and Plzeňský. A comparative analysis of the 2011 and 2021 Census data reveals a noteworthy shift in the distribution of the Vietnamese population. Specifically, there has been an increase in their numbers in the Jihomoravský region by 2021, suggesting a diversification of settlement patterns over the past decade. From our observations, it is evident that Vietnamese people have become an integral part of the social fabric of the CR. Their presence is ubiquitous, spanning from small rural villages to bustling urban areas, making it increasingly common to encounter Vietnamese people in various settings throughout the country.

Figure 1. Distribution of Vietnamese people in Czechia 2021

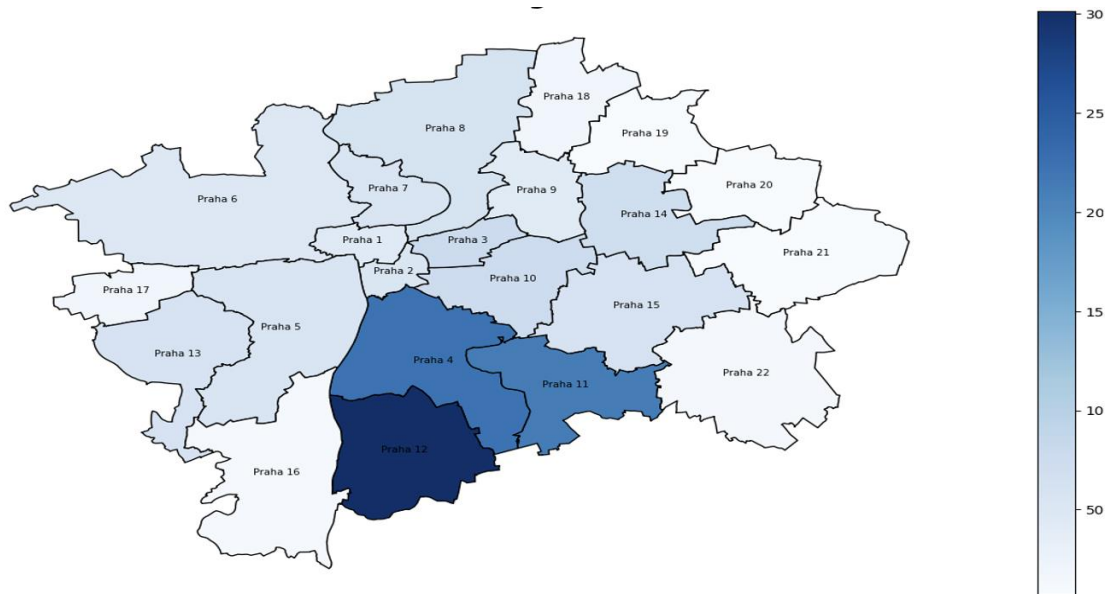


Source: Data of CZSO (2021), Mapping: Authors.

Prague has emerged as the primary hub for international migration within the CR (Drbohlav & Čermáková, 2016). This city attracts a diverse array of foreigners, with the most significant groups represented by citizens from Slovakia, Ukraine, Russia, and Vietnam (Drbohlav et al., 2009; CZSO, 2022a, 2022b). For the

Vietnamese diaspora, Prague holds particular significance as a crucial entry point into Europe, largely due to the unique ethnic-specific business activities and large diasporic community.

Figure 2. Distribution of Vietnamese People in Prague, 2021



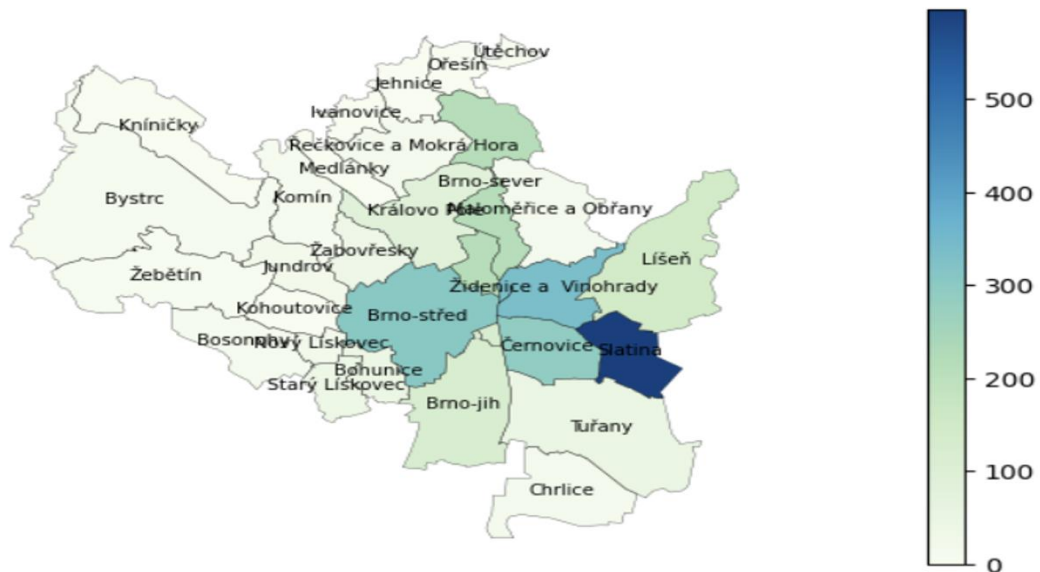
Source: Data of CZSO (2021), Mapping: Authors.

As reported by CZSO, in 2021, there were 14,629 Vietnamese living in Prague, representing 22.6% of the overall Vietnamese community in Czechia. The Vietnamese diaspora typically clusters in the southern areas of the city. More specifically, they often live near the Sapa market located in Prague 4 (Martínková, 2011; Janská & Bernard, 2018). During the previous regime, Vietnamese primarily gathered in the lodging facilities of the Hotel Košík in Prague 4 - Chodov, Libuš. Until now, they have settled here for the connection with the Sapa market.

Brno, located in the Jihomoravský region, stands as the second-largest city in the CR, both in terms of population and economic significance. Nowadays, Brno has earned the distinction of being likened to the Silicon Valley of the CR (Korotkova, 2018). As of 2022, the city's population was recorded at 379,466 inhabitants (CZSO, 2022c). The demographic composition of Brno is predominantly Czechs, with significant populations of Moravians and Silesians. Additionally, Brno is home to a variety of migrant communities reflecting a dynamic and diverse urban landscape. Among the most notable migrant groups are Slovaks, who share historical ties with Czech people, Germans, who have a long-standing presence in the region, Ukrainians, who have increasingly settled in the city recently, and Vietnamese, who have formed a vibrant community contributing

to the local economy and cultural diversity.

Figure 3. Distribution of Vietnamese People in Brno, 2021



Source: Data of CZSO (2021), Mapping: Authors.

The Vietnamese diaspora in the Jihomoravský region has experienced a significant increase in population, with Brno emerging as the most densely populated city for this demographic (Figure 6). In 2021, there were 2,864 Vietnamese in Brno, which constituted an impressive 57.25% of the total Vietnamese population within the region, according to data from the CZSO (2021).

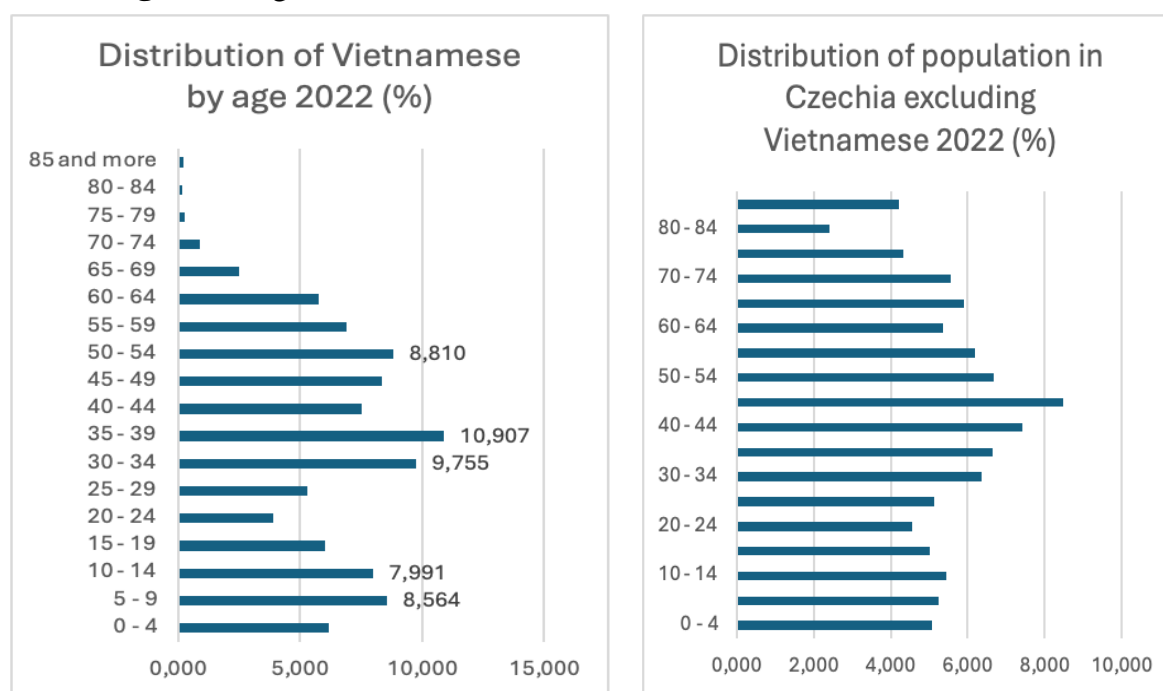
Furthermore, the demographic structure of Vietnamese in the CR has undergone transformations since the 1990s. Prior to this decade, most Vietnamese were young men, primarily drawn to the country for labor opportunities. However, the post-1990 era posed a change, dominantly driven by family reunification policies. This change resulted in a substantial increase in the number of women and children within the Vietnamese diaspora, as families sought to unite and establish their lives together in the CR (Drbohlav et al., 2009).

By 2022, the demographic profile of the Vietnamese population in Czechia was characterized predominantly by individuals of working age (Figure 5). This trend has aligned with a broader pattern observed among various migrant communities in the CR, as many Vietnamese migrated to Czechia in pursuit of employment opportunities. As such, the working-age population has been significantly represented within this demographic.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the age distribution among the Vietnamese community is their relatively progressive demographic structure when compared to other migrant groups. This is highlighted by a remarkably high proportion of children under the age of 14, indicating growing future generations

within the Vietnamese diaspora (Drbohlav et al., 2009; Souralová, 2014; 2020). This youthful demographic suggests a potential for long-term integration and community development in the CR.

Figure 4. Age Distribution



Source: CZSO (2022b; 2022d).

Figure 5 reveals an important demographic trend, particularly within the age groups of 5-9 and 10-14 years. This trend indicates a substantial presence of young Vietnamese couples who are in their prime reproductive years, leading to a notable increase in the birth rate of Vietnamese children within the CR. As a result, the population of young Vietnamese people is on the rise, contributing not only to the Vietnamese community but also to the overall demographic structure of the CR.

3.4. Economic contributions of Việt “Xù” to the Czech society: from labor to entrepreneurship

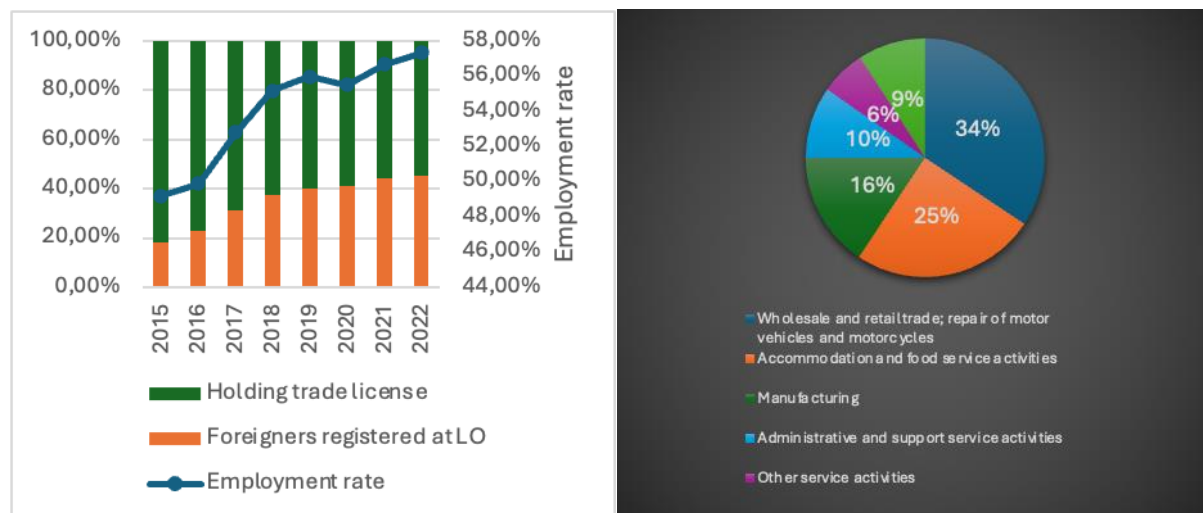
In the late 20th century, Czechoslovakia underwent a political and social restructuring, ultimately leading to the emergence of two independent countries, namely the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic (or Slovakia). In this new scene, the CR implemented revised migration policies that opened the door for many Vietnamese migrants, granting them a unique opportunity to obtain business licenses and operate legally in the CR. In the initial phases of their entrepreneurial journey, Vietnamese traders built stalls and set up open-air markets in many cities across the CR. Despite facing challenging working conditions - particularly during the harsh winter months - this period became known as the “golden rain” of

Vietnamese (Nožina & Kraus, 2020), as they capitalized on the scarcity of essential products in the local markets. Their adaptability and resourcefulness allowed them to thrive economically, as they filled a vital gap in the marketplace.

Later on, the era of open-air markets gradually came to an end, but business activities still are the main strategies of Vietnamese people. They adeptly changed their business strategies to align with the evolving demands of the local population. Over the years, the primary business activities within the diaspora transitioned from informal street trading to more structured enterprises, including retail and “stone buildings” such as hair salons and nail studios. Recently, a notable tendency has emerged within this community: the proliferation of Vietnamese restaurants, which have become increasingly popular in the culinary market (Drbohlav et al., 2009).

Current statistical data from the Labor Office reflects this tendency and illustrates the growing presence of Vietnamese employees in the Czech workforce. The number of Vietnamese registered with the Labor Office surged dramatically, rising from 18.19% in 2015 to an impressive 45.45% in 2022 (Figure 6). Among those who have secured registered employment, 34% were engaged in the wholesale and retail trade sector, 25% were involved in accommodation and food service activities, 16% were working in manufacturing. This remarkable flexibility and willingness to adapt have contributed to a gradual increase in the employment rate of Vietnamese workers, which rose from 49.20% in 2015 to 57.32% in 2022 (Figure 6). This evolution reflects the resilience of the Vietnamese community and their significant economic integration into the Czech economy.

Figure 5. Employment of Vietnamese, 2023



Source: CZSO (2023).

Actually, retail stores owned by Vietnamese people, in the Czech language called “potraviný” or “večečka”, appear in every corner of the country, from small villages to big cities such as Prague and Brno. Nowadays, Vietnamese have

dominated the retail sector of the CR, significantly shaping the structure of local commerce. In addition to the retail sector, there has been a notable expansion of Vietnamese businesses into the food service industry, with a growing focus on establishing Vietnamese and broader Asian cuisine restaurants.

It is important to highlight that the Việt “Xù” community functions as a tightly knit social network. Within this diaspora, individuals leverage their social capital and extensive networks to enhance both their business endeavours and their daily lives in the CR. Numerous Facebook groups such as *Hiệp hội Potraviny* (group of retail traders), *Hiệp hội Nail Cz* (group of nail salons’ owners and workers), *Hội doanh nhân trẻ Việt Nam* (Young Vietnamese Entrepreneurs Association), *Lamchame Cz* and *Hội Mẹ và Bé Cz* (Groups of Vietnamese parents in the CR), along with various local Vietnamese associations present in different regions of the CR, play a crucial role in fostering this social cohesion. These platforms not only provide support and resources but also reinforce the economic activities of the diaspora, which often see Vietnamese employees working for Vietnamese employers, typically family members, relatives or acquaintances. Nevertheless, this strong sense of community can also pose challenges to social integration into the mainstream. Việt “Xù” is commonly perceived as a closed diaspora, leading to a situation where Vietnamese individuals may struggle to integrate as effectively as other migrant groups (Drbohlav & Dzúrová, 2007; Pham, 2022b). Among several barriers to the integration of Vietnamese into the Czech society, the Czech language stands out as the most significant obstacle (Pham, 2022a). However, it is essential to indicate the success of Vietnamese people in achieving economic integration in the Czech economy. Their entrepreneurial spirit has led to the establishment of vibrant markets such as the Sapa market in Prague and Vinamo in Brno which serve as cultural and economic hubs for the Vietnamese community. These markets play a vital role in the formation and development of Vietnamese enclaves in the two largest cities of the CR.

3.5. Vietnamese Enclaves: Sapa and Vinamo

In the context of the Vietnamese diaspora, the “Little Saigon” market located in California, the USA, serves as a quintessential example of a Vietnamese enclave. Collet & Furuya (2010) considered Little Saigon as an enclave because of its concentrated demographic composition, where Vietnamese culture, traditions and businesses flourish within a defined geographic space. This marketplace has evolved into a focal point for the Vietnamese diaspora, often referred to as Việt Kiều, since its emergence in the 1970s. This area has become an important cultural and economic hub for Vietnamese migrants and their descendants. While Little Saigon stands out as a prominent example, it is important to confirm that similar Vietnamese markets have also emerged in other countries including Australia, Canada and Germany. However, scholarly attention on these markets as Vietnamese enclaves has been relatively limited.

In the CR, the Việt Xù diaspora has contributed to the formation of various markets and economic zones throughout the country. Freidingerová & Nováková (2021) indicated that certain areas along the Czech borders with Germany such as Železná Ruda and České Velenice have emerged as ethnic enclaves for the Vietnamese diaspora. These enclaves are characterized by a notable concentration of Vietnamese people, entrepreneurs, businesses and employees which create vibrant economic hubs that reflect the cultural identity of the community (Freidingerová & Nováková, 2021). Martínková (2011) also confirmed that one of the most important enclaves for Vietnamese people in the CR is Sapa market in Prague. However, Drbohlav & Čermáková (2016) presented a contrasting viewpoint, arguing that Sapa should not be classified as an economic or business enclave. These authors asserted that its primary function is being a wholesale center which caters to the Vietnamese diaspora, rather than a residential area with a high density of inhabitants. We find ourselves in disagreement with Drbohlav and Čermáková (2016) assessment. Through our observation and active participation within Việt Xù diaspora, we firmly believe that Sapa could be seen as an enclave. We agree with Martínková (2011) that Sapa market and its surrounding serves not merely as a commercial center but also as a living space for many members of the Vietnamese diaspora.

Additionally, the Vietnamese diaspora has established another significant enclave in Brno known as Vinamo. Together, these two markets - Sapa in Prague and Vinamo in Brno - are essential hubs for Vietnamese people, with both areas experiencing a high concentration of Vietnamese residents.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate the substantial number of Vietnamese individuals living in the surrounding neighbourhoods of Prague 4, Prague 12 and Slatina where Sapa and Vinamo markets are located. Beyond their economic functions, these enclaves play a vital role in cultural preservation, supporting the Vietnamese community to preserve and celebrate their heritage. Many Vietnamese people have expressed to us that stepping into Sapa or Vinamo evokes a sense of belonging, akin to returning home. In essence, both markets represent a microcosm of Vietnamese society, encapsulating the rich cultural tapestry and communal spirit of the diaspora within the CR.

Sapa - the gateway of Vietnamese in Prague. Sapa is a pivotal marketplace and cultural enclave for the Việt Xù diaspora in the CR. Spanning 35 hectares, Sapa is home to a diverse array of establishments including shops, restaurants, schools, health clinics, car services, exchange services and a pagoda. The name of Sapa draws inspiration from Sapa, a town nestled in the Northwest Mountain of Vietnam, known for being one of the only few regions in Vietnam that experiences snowfall. This unique characteristic of the town impacted the owners' decision to name the market, embracing a connection to the homeland. The market also is affectionately referred to as Little Hanoi by Czech people (Čada et al., 2016).

Historically, the area was utilized as a meat factory and poultry farm. The transformation into a Vietnamese wholesale market began in the late 1990s when a small section of the site was repurposed to cater to the growing Vietnamese community. In 1999, the property was acquired by a Vietnamese joint-stock company named Sapia, initially designed to serve wholesale and warehousing needs. However, in 2008, the market underwent an important change when its owners decided to lift entry restrictions, making it accessible to all visitors. Despite this move towards inclusivity, Sapa has faced challenges, including negative perceptions stemming from occasional illegal activities within its vicinity, which have affected local discourse surrounding Sapa (Čada et al., 2016). Beyond its commercial significance, Sapa plays a crucial role in the socio-economic landscape for Vietnamese diasporas not only in the CR but also in neighboring countries such as Poland and Germany (Čada, et al., 2016). Moreover, Sapa functions as a vital meeting point for ethnic celebrations and spiritual activities, serving as a cultural center for the Vietnamese diaspora (Drbohlav & Čermáková, 2016; Freidingerová & Nováková, 2021). Furthermore, Sapa has several private schools dedicated to educating the next generations of Vietnamese in the CR. These schools not only focus on academic subjects in the Czech academy but also emphasize the importance of teaching Vietnamese language and culture, ensuring that the rich heritage of their ancestors is passed on to future generations. In this way, Sapa stands as an enclave for the Vietnamese diaspora, embodying both a place of commerce and a sanctuary of cultural identity

Vinamo market - an important market for Vietnamese in the Moravia region and neighboring countries. Vinamo is another vibrant Vietnamese market located in Brno, that serves as a vital hub for the Vietnamese community in the Jihomoravský (or Moravia region) as well as neighboring countries such as Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Austria. The name Vinamo is an acronym that cleverly combines the abbreviation of words: Vietnam in Moravia, signifying its identity and geographical roots. The market comprises two distinct locations, specifically at Olomoucká 61 and Olomoucká 65. Historical accounts from some old vendors reveal that these sites were once lodging houses for Vietnamese individuals who came to the CR for apprenticeship opportunities in the early 1990s.

While it is smaller in scale compared to Sapa in Prague, Vinamo operates with a remarkably similar structure and purpose, primarily as wholesale stores. In 2005, a significant milestone was reached when Tamda Food, a prominent hypermarket chain owned by three Vietnamese entrepreneurs, established a branch within Vinamo at Olomoucká 61. The following years, in 2017, marked the opening of the Việt Palace restaurant in the elegantly designed building at Olomoucká 65, further enriching the market's culinary landscape. By 2018, Vinamo underwent a substantial renovation of its main building, which included the creation of a dedicated space for Vietnamese cuisine, enhancing the market's appeal as a culinary destination. At the heart of the market lies the Giác Nguyễn pagoda, a serene space

that symbolizes the spiritual and cultural essence of the Vietnamese community. Similar to Sapa, Vinamo is seen as a meeting point for Vietnamese living in the Moravia region and a space where Vietnamese can preserve their culture and traditions.

To sum up, many Việt Xù told us that whatever they need, they can find in Sapa and Vinamo. These enclaves also play a significant role in fostering economic opportunities for Vietnamese entrepreneurs and facilitating business activities both within the enclaves and beyond. In addition, Sapa and Vinamo serve as crucial bastions for cultural preservation, nurturing a sense of belonging and ethnic identity among first and second generation Vietnamese in the diaspora. These enclaves have established their support systems or services tailored to the needs of their Vietnamese community members, thereby reinforcing social bonds and solidarity among them.

While Sapa and Vinamo provide essential support and connections among Vietnamese individuals, they can also inadvertently lead to marginalization or exclusion from mainstream Czech society. I met several Vietnamese who have been living in the CR for over a decade yet remain largely unaware of the broader Czech society. Some have even expressed a lack of interest in learning the Czech language and Czech society, feeling that their needs are sufficiently met within the confines of the enclaves. Their daily lives revolve around the activities and interactions within Sapa and Vinamo, creating a self-contained life that often limits their exposure to the surrounding culture.

4. Conclusion

This paper provides an in-depth exploration of the Vietnamese diaspora in the CR, referred to as Việt “Xù”. It examines the historical trajectory, economic contributions and integration of this community within the broader waves of migration that have shaped the Czech society as well as Europe. By using a mixed-methods research approach, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics that characterize the Vietnamese diaspora in the CR. The qualitative findings of this study illustrate the personal stories of Vietnamese individuals within the Việt Xù community, revealing a vibrant picture of the struggles and successes of the Vietnamese diaspora in the CR. These narratives not only reflect the challenges faced by Vietnamese migrants but also celebrate their resilience and determination to forge new lives in the Czech land. Complementing these qualitative insights, the quantitative data provides a macro-level perspective,

showcasing significant trends and patterns that have defined the evolution of the Vietnamese diaspora in the CR over the decades.

Over 70 years, the Việt “Xù” diaspora has made substantial economic contributions, primarily through entrepreneurial ventures in retail, culinary and beauty services. These businesses not only create stable employment opportunities for community members but also stimulate the local economy, fostering multicultural interactions and exchanges. Moreover, the development of Vietnamese enclaves in several regions in the CR enhances the quality of Vietnamese lives. The enclaves serve dual purposes as economic centers and cultural hubs. These enclaves play a crucial role in preserving and disseminating Vietnamese traditions, thereby enriching the culture of the CR.

Furthermore, the Việt “Xù” diaspora has significantly contributed to the multicultural makeup of Czech society as their status of national minority. In the late 1990s, several Vietnamese representatives made efforts to achieve national minority status. Due to traditional policies distinguishing between national minorities and foreigners, their efforts were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the emergence of second generation Vietnamese challenged these criteria, leading to a reconsideration of a status that the Vietnamese diaspora tried to obtain. In the summer of 2013, Vietnamese representatives were included in the Government Council for National Minorities, marking a critical step toward the official recognition of the Vietnamese diaspora. Subsequently, the Vietnamese community were recognized as a national minority, placing them alongside traditional European groups such as Germans, Poles and Roma (Sloboda, 2016). This recognition has granted Vietnamese minority rights including representation in local government, access to cultural grants and the ability to hold dual citizenship which has greatly benefited both first and next generations.

Despite these advancements, the Việt “Xù” community continues to face challenges related to integration into mainstream Czech society. The diaspora is often perceived as a closed community due to several barriers such as language difficulties and instances of racism. However, the next generations, who were born in the CR or migrated at a young age, are masters in the Czech language and cultural integration successfully. They often identify more closely with Czech society rather than their parents’ country, which may lead to future challenges in balancing their cultural heritage with the pressures of assimilation.

In conclusion, the Vietnamese diaspora in the CR exemplifies the resilience and adaptability of migrant communities. Their experiences reflect broader themes of migration, assimilation and identity formation in contemporary society. The findings of this study hold significant implications for diaspora research within the European context. Further studies should continue to explore the evolving dynamics of migrant diasporas, particularly in light of changing socio-political environments, to enhance our understanding of how diasporas influence and shape host societies.

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