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Socio-environmental justice, participatory development, and empowerment of segregated urban Roma: Lessons from Szeged, Hungary

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Abstract: This paper aims to deepen current understandings of the ways in which historical power differentials and stigmatization shape the injustices faced by urban Roma populations. It argues, firstly that spatial segregation cannot be analytically separated from social and environmental factors that marginalize and disempower this vulnerable community; and secondly, that a multi-scalar approach is necessary to capture the ways in which stigmatization acts both within the affected community, and at the levels of local policy, national policy, and wider culture. The authors then consider the advantages and the pitfalls of using participatory processes to empower Roma segregated communities, drawing on the experience of a participatory action research process carried out over an eight-year period in the city of Szeged, Hungary. The findings suggest that it is necessary to be attentive to the paradoxes, dilemmas, and conflicts that surround the attempt to empower a highly stigmatized group as citizens, in a culture where exclusion and racism still dominate. The conclusions call for a comprehensive raft of policy measures to tackle Roma stigmatization, and for a continuous process of reflection on the moral and practical problems associated with participation in a context where power differentials still dominate.

Introduction

Recent research on Roma in Europe has tended to focus on specific forms of injustice, often emphasizing socioeconomic marginalization with regard to a range of issues, including lack of access to well-paid, legal and safe work (van Baar, 2012; Messing & Bereményi, 2017); barriers to gaining a high-quality education (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2015; O’Nions, 2010); and socio-environmental segregation (Boros & Nagy, 2014; Harper et al., 2009; Steger, 2007; Steger & Filcak, 2008). A particularly influential stream of research analyzes the ways in which historical power differentials have led to the stigmatization, dehumanization, subordination, and spatial segregation of Roma (Powell, 2008; Powell & Lever, 2017; Powell & van Baar, 2018). This suggests that political pragmatism tends not to yield beneficial outcomes for Roma (Marinero, 2003), and that their marginalization can only be overcome via a combination of deliberate empowerment and representation (Steger, 2007). However, research on the potential difficulties and dilemmas involved in achieving this in practice is scant, despite a plethora of current literature documenting the pitfalls of participatory development processes aimed at empowering marginalized groups more generally (Bereményi & Lagunas, 2017).

This paper has two main aims: to enhance understandings of the marginalization of Roma people by bringing together notions of social and environmental justice and segregation under a single analytical framework; while also critically exploring the opportunities, dilemmas, and contradictions related to the empowerment, participation, and representation of segregated urban Roma within political decision-making processes. Both aims will be considered from a historically-informed perspective that is capable of capturing the full complexities of a longer narrative of Roma marginalization and disempowerment. Accordingly, two research questions are posed: 1) What are the dynamics of the social and environmental injustices suffered by segregated urban Roma? And (2) what are the roles, contradictions and challenges of

overcoming this marginalization and lack of social power via participation and representation within urban decision-making processes? Through its analysis of these two questions, the paper aims to contribute to the better understanding both the potential and the contradictions of participatory development and participatory action research (PAR) in general. Its findings are relevant to the use of participatory methodologies to assist other marginalized and segregated social groups living in spaces and contexts beyond those studied here.

This paper's analysis is based on long-term engagement with two segregated, urban Roma communities in Szeged, Hungary through a participatory action research (PAR) process (Author et al., 2018b). The paper connects the particular field of Roma studies to wider global debates on urban empowerment, segregation, socio-environmental marginalization, and insecure/informal housing; and literature on participatory development processes in the social sciences. Bringing these factors together in a single analytical framework avoided the artificial distinction that is sometimes made between the social and environmental aspects of Roma segregation, instead enabling a dynamic understanding of the ways in which the social and the spatial are interwoven in histories of exclusion. The action-oriented stance of PAR also enabled a detailed investigation of both the empowering potential and the limitations, the dilemmas and the contradictions, of using participatory processes to challenge segregation and marginalization.

This paper starts by reviewing existing literature on the injustices faced by Roma, before introducing the PAR methodology. Findings concerning the artificiality, fluidity and multi-scalar nature of environmental and social disadvantage in the lives of segregated urban Roma are then discussed, before the merits and limits of participatory development approaches in counteracting these are reflected upon. A series of policy recommendations are then presented in the concluding section.

Socio-environmental justice, segregation, and empowerment of urban Roma

The social injustices faced by segregated urban Roma communities in terms of discriminatory social attitudes are well-documented. Roma face varied and serious disadvantage across a range of areas of life, including access to education (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2015; O’Nions, 2010), and work (van Baar, 2012; Messing & Bereményi, 2017). Existing social policies often offer little support in overcoming these issues, and sometimes actually exacerbate discrimination and segregation. More recently, the spatial and environmental inequalities faced by segregated Roma neighborhoods have been the focus of scrutiny (see Boros & Nagy, 2014; Harper et al., 2009; Steger, 2007; Steger & Filcak, 2008) with research on issues such as higher levels of exposure to environmental pollution, and segregation, characterized by a “calculated informality” (Marinaro, 2017, p. 550) or “beyond the pale” nature (Harper et al., 2009) that ensures that the space is “not subject to the same rules or norms as much as the surrounding area” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 13).

A further stream of analysis investigates the lack of power and stigmatization of Roma regarding spatial segregation and discriminatory policies (Powell 2008, Powell & Lever, 2017, Powell & van Baar, 2018). Powell (2008) shows how societal power differentials lead to disidentification and stigmatization of Roma. Historical disidentification and stigmatization processes cause spatial segregation, maintaining social divides, mutual distancing, disidentification, and stigma (Powell & Lever, 2017). Furthermore, racism and stigmatization function differently in different cultures, and societies (Powell & van Baar, 2018) and change with time. The invisibilization of anti-Roma racism recently led to de-politicization of root causes and historical Roma marginalization processes.

Community empowerment, participation, and representation are considered vital for countering Roma marginalization (Steger, 2007), but the processes effectuating this are unlikely to arise naturally in a context of ingrained long-term discrimination (Marinaro, 2003). Political decision-makers are predominately characterized by vested interests in Roma issues, such as re-election (Powell, 2008). In a context of considerable uncertainty about the best means to tackle spatial segregation and socio-economic inequality, participatory development processes have been suggested as an approach to the empowerment of marginalized individuals. However, the relationship between participatory development and empowerment is far from automatic (Bereményi & Lagunas, 2017); indeed, participatory development processes can actually reinforce oppression, potentially focusing on local aspects instead of understanding and challenging wider structural and institutional factors of oppression (Cook & Kothari, 2001). Furthermore, project-focused approaches to participation, which view it as a technical and instrumental method and not as a political process focused on empowerment, can potentially depoliticize the development process, disempowering vulnerable communities. As a consequence, certain forms of participation may profoundly misunderstand the roles of structure and agency in producing social change; and fail to grasp both how power operates, and how empowerment occurs (Cleaver, 1999; Cook & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004).

Participation has been a key element within European Union programs and policies pertaining to marginalized social groups, including those aimed specifically at increasing the social inclusion of immigrants and Roma people. However, in practice these forms of participation often fail to reach the theoretical ideal (Bereményi & Lagunas, 2017). Several critiques have pointed to the ways in which top-down, project-focused, participatory rural-appraisal (PRA) processes fail to understand or tackle existing social power structures and

political systems, and therefore do not succeed in providing ‘the basis for moving towards a more transformative approach to development’ (Hockey & Mohan, 2004, p. 5.). As Powell argues, an in-depth understanding of power and politics is necessary to counteract Roma stigmatization and marginalization (Powell, 2008). To grasp the plight of Roma communities, it is therefore necessary to bring together notions of social, economic, political, and spatial justice in a single, historically informed analytical framework, and to recognize that participation must critically address all of these dimensions if it is to succeed in empowering and representing segregated urban Roma.

The specific case of Szeged

The participatory development process

The PAR process that is the subject of this paper began in 2010 (see Table 1), when middle-class researcher-activists started to work with local Roma leaders and families living in local segregated areas in Szeged. Originally an EU initiative, and therefore program-related and project-focused (like the aforementioned examples of participatory development), the PAR process shifted over time, gradually becoming a much “broader project of social justice and political change” (Hickey & Mohan, 2004) with the more ambitious aim of empowering local poor and segregated Roma as citizens. As such, its scope extended to include a wider range of actors and areas, who were organized in an action-orientated participatory manner (for a reflexive analysis of the process, including its dilemmas, contradictions, and limitations, see Author et al. 2018b.).

The Roma leaders who are involved include individuals interested in political participation and interest representation; other community members include those working and

participating in local politics through these leaders, a situation characteristic of many local decision-making processes (see Hickey & Mohan, 2004). The representation of segregated Roma interests within PAR is based on participatory processes, with Roma leaders and researcher–activists maintaining day-to-day relationships with families residing in segregated areas. Building on these relationships, researcher–activists are able to serve as Roma leaders’ partners and consultants concerning political issues, and to gain access to views and opinions of the wider community. The direct commitment to empowerment and cooperative action for social change that is built into PAR allows a ‘partner perspective’ to replace conventional ‘researcher vs. subjects’ roles, further enabling these marginalized voices to be heard (Bradbury & Reason, 2003), as well as creating opportunities for closer researcher observation of the community’s socio-environmental struggle for recognition.

Experiences of the cooperation have been recorded in three scholar–activist research diaries, which captured a varied range of interactions in Roma community centers, local segregated neighbourhoods, and familial homes. Researcher-activists participate in and observe community group discussions (both small and large, formal and informal), as well as planning meetings, and municipality committee meetings. 25 semi-structured interviews with inhabitants of a local segregated community were also conducted by two researcher–activists, as part of their PhD research. Topics included interviewees’ personal stories, daily activities, life in the segregated area, important places and activities, relationships to public institutions (e.g., education, healthcare, police), and social relations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed (for more information, see Author et al., 2018a). Qualitative content analysis was undertaken on all of the data, including the researcher diaries, to explore the research aims. To create an open data

analysis process, we defined ‘socio-environmental’ factors very broadly, and interpreted ‘injustice’ on the basis of Roma community members’ own perceptions.

Recent outcomes of the project suggest that it has produced and supported social change. For example, the municipality has offered city-owned buildings and other contributions to Roma leaders to establish community centers and afternoon schools, and has also begun to spend money on Roma issues, according to the suggestions of local Roma leaders (Table 1). Behind these outcomes, there is increased awareness amongst the political community of the segregated urban Roma community’s problematic socio-economic status, which now features on the local political agenda. A concomitantly stronger role has emerged for local Roma leaders within the municipality, who now occupy a “provided space” instead of the previous “claimed” (Hickey & Mohan, 2004) one.

The History and Urban Social Context of Szeged

Roma are not mentioned in Szeged’s well-documented history. According to information we obtained, between five and ten Roma families arrived at Kiskundorozsma (subsequently attached to Szeged) at the end of the 19th century. Originally, these Roma constructed an informal settlement using adobe bricks, waste tin, and wood and by digging holes near their main workplace, a local brickyard. The community was engaged in traditional Roma businesses, including *drótos* (wireman fixing household tools), *woodvorkers* (making wooden household tools), and *vályogvető* (preparing adobe bricks).

Szeged’s Roma population subsequently began to grow in the 20th century. After World War Two, the Roma moved to a nearby marshy area and established a so-called ‘*nagy putri*’ (large gypsy area), using the same infrastructure as their earlier informal settlement (Figure 1).

Throughout the socialist period from 1945 to 1989, full and mandatory employment was provided, with most Szeged Roma performing unskilled labor in traditional and new industries established by the socialist regime.

The demolition and resettlement of the *nagy putri* began in the 1970s, with the Roma evicted to four main areas. Firstly, the five wealthiest Roma families were allowed to build houses and block apartments on a local street called Búza utca, where a smaller segregated area still stands. Beside, block-apartments were also constructed on Búza utca by the municipality and served as social homes for relocated Roma families, with ten or twelve people often living together in a small flat of only 28-30 square metres. Secondly, approximately ten families were resettled to Cserepes sor, where a larger segregated area is still situated today. Subsequently, several more Roma families from within and outside Szeged moved to this second area, including those from a short-lived, third segregated area established after the demolition of the *nagy putri*, known as Reptér. Simultaneously with the establishment of Cserepes sor, non-Roma left the area in a process of “white flight” (see Powell and Lever, 2017).¹ The fourth and final destination for *nagy putri* families was Öregrókus, an area close to Szeged’s city center (Figure 2). However, in the early 1980s, the houses built on Búza utca were declared a health risk, and new social houses were constructed in nearby Árpá utca between 1982 and 1983. All are now owned by a local property company. This research focuses on two main segregated areas for Roma families: Cserepes sor and Árpá utca.

During the socialist era, Roma children attended segregated schools in Szeged, where they received a poor-quality education. Today, most adult Roma in Szeged have only an

¹ The ‘Reptér’ segregated area was demolished in 2005. The city council hired an association to persuade this community to accept houses outside of Szeged, often farmsteads 60–70 kilometers away, offering the incentive of a cash payment for removal, in exchange for the apartments. 17 families, a total of approximately 70 people, had previously been living in 11 apartments measuring 28–30 m² each. However, most families could not adapt to the new environment and returned to Szeged, some after a few weeks, others after several years.

elementary education and many are illiterate. Szeged's last segregated school closed as late as 2007. After the events of 1989, Eastern European Roma were among the first to lose jobs, with many becoming reliant on social aid or on informal economic activities to survive (see Powell & Lever, 2017).

At present, approximately 300 Roma live in the city's two segregated Roma neighborhoods: the smaller area, Árpá utca, has approximately 125 inhabitants in four buildings (16 apartments); the larger, Cserepes sor, now houses app. 160 people, but was around 150% larger until areas of it were cleared in 2017 (see below).

Mapping the socio-environmental injustice suffered by segregated urban Roma in Szeged

This study corroborates problems identified by existing researches on Roma and environmental justice (EJ). Communities at hand face injustice in three essential areas: access to essential public services, access to work and to goods, and access to decent-quality housing. In terms of the first of these, public services, public transport is often absent or unaffordable, while the provision of medicine, including basic medical aids, is lacking. In the sphere of education, Roma children now attend integrated elementary schools, but these frequently fail to compensate for their educational disadvantages, hindering social mobility. Poverty and prejudice reinforce the social exclusion of Roma students, who feel unable to participate in school activities, cultural programs, and class holidays: "I do not go to school but stay at home next two days because the others go on class holiday" (Roma boy, 10, living in segregated area). Similar situations are familiar to Roma parents: "When I saw others come to school, I always felt ashamed and lost my

motivation. I did not have proper clothes like they had.” (Roma man, 35, living in a segregated area).

A further set of problems concerns a lack of access to work, and to basic goods in Roma communities. Stigmatization and poor education make it extremely difficult for poor urban Roma to find legal, stable employment, as one interviewee complained: “You know how they [Hungarian employers] relate to our kind...” (local Roma woman, 38 years-old). Most Roma have little option but to take low-waged, semi-illegal, short-term jobs, often involving hard physical-labor, or to enter state-run public work programs (Messing & Bereményi, 2017; on ‘activation work’ in Slovakia, see van Baar, 2012). These jobs pay far below the Hungarian subsistence level, limiting the ability of these individuals to achieve material security in the present, let alone in future. Access to regular subsistence goods is also consequently restricted, which results in inadequate provision of food and clothes, insufficient furniture and household devices, and a lack of firewood. These problems are compounded by the fact that Roma are not able to use integrated places within the city: insufficient financial resources and stigmatization make privately owned, market-based urban spaces (e.g., cinemas, cafes, bars, restaurants) inaccessible. Consequently, most families cannot participate in free, urban recreational events/feasts because costs of commuting and/or private services (e.g., food, games) (Author et al., 2018a).

A crucial set of concerns surround housing. Most flats in segregated areas are now under the control of a public property company, owned by the local city council. They are places of calculated informality, in which a lack of investment by the local state has serious spatial consequences: “it is not good to play hide-and-seek because of the garbage all around”, said a 9 year old Roma boy, living in *Árpa utca*. Roma complain about several features of segregated

neighborhoods: the lack of privacy, intimidation from self-declared bosses who “although no one chose them, oppress people” (segregated Roma woman, 33), and the “inability to raise children in a normal way” (segregated Roma woman, 41). Four groups of Roma inhabitants live in the areas of segregating housing, each with a different type of housing tenure: (1) apartment owners; (2) tenants renting apartments from the local public property company; (3) families legally residing in their apartment, despite loss of legal status due to unpaid rent/overheads; and (4) illegal squatters who remain in their own apartments, and illegal squatters in empty apartments. Though tensions existed between the four, all groups were concerned about the lack of transparent communication about their housing issues, and non-fulfillment of apartment renovation duties by the local property company.

The larger segregated area, Cserepes sor, has been scheduled for demolition by 2027. The community there is characterized by tensions between different groups, to the extent that “those who have property or legally rent here would literally kill illegal squatters” (Roma woman, 40, living in the segregated area). Those legally living in apartments are eager to leave the area by selling their flats to the municipality due to certain behaviors (e.g. criminal activities) and the local atmosphere attributed to illegal squatters (Author et al., 2018a). However, families without legal status and illegal squatters now face complete uncertainty and desperation, since they are ignored by the local state in all official planning documents and political decisions. “We have no idea what is going to happen to our homes tomorrow”, said one 65-year-old Roma man living in the area. Since evictions began in 2017, 6 of the 16 houses (containing 64 apartments) have been demolished (Figure 3). Most evicted Roma have moved to abandoned apartments or nearby abandoned garages, or are now living with relatives; one lives in a nearby homeless

shelter, several are homeless. Among segregated urban Roma, these illegal squatters are the most vulnerable marginalized group.

The smaller segregated area, Árpá utca, is not designated for demolition. However, residents there who do not have legal status are constantly afraid of eviction, a fear that also prevents them from improving their homes. Most of these families lost their secure tenancy status due to post-1989 economic processes: large amounts of back rent are owed on almost every apartment (often between 18,000 and 35,000 EUR per apartment), and residents are unable to legalize their housing status because their incomes are far below Hungarian subsistence standards. The municipality has not sought a solution to these problems, despite the fact that the value of the back rent is small compared to Szeged's budget, and despite campaigning by local Roma representatives for debt cancellation and legalization of living conditions.

Procedural Justice

Formal political representation of Roma on the city council is non-existent, and the segregated local Roma community generally believe that local politicians have deliberately neglected their problems. No local municipal public investment and no significant programs benefitting segregated Roma were implemented before 2013. The municipality “did nothing for Roma integration” (local Roma leader, male, 40), a point admitted by Szeged's previous mayor in 2013. This clearly indicates that Roma have little purchase on the political agenda (Powell, 2008), reflecting their historically low social status (Powell & Lever, 2017).

Recently, local politics has adopted a more inclusive attitude to local Roma leaders (Table 1). City councilors, even those in top positions, have become more accessible to Roma, responding to their concerns in a more timely and cooperative manner: “The vice mayor invited

me and told me to be partners instead of being enemies, as it was earlier” (local Roma leader, male, 55). However, Roma representatives agree that their inclusion is far from complete, and remains subject to strict city council limitations. Creating socio-environmentally equitable urban environments demands far greater commitment to institutional solutions to educational inequalities, labour market discrimination, and housing struggles than the current local political system has demonstrated. One local Roma leader concluded: “they [leading local politicians] have come to an agreement that they will not deal with serious issues but only give us [local Roma] crumbs” (local Roma leader, male, 40).

The PAR process involved committed political activism by local Roma leaders, allied with local researcher-activists, including lobbying local representatives, insertion of articles in the press, and local awareness-raising events. These have increased the local and national visibility of local Roma issues, resisting ongoing political neglect of the community’s plight. Roma issues have been put on the local political agenda. This cooperative shift and increased support has resulted in political leaders, who expect that Roma leaders remain silent regarding problems and successes of local Roma. Recounting his dealings with a city council member, one Roma leader stated: “She even told me that I will not get even the support for running community centers if I make too much noise about this problem” (local Roma leader, male, 55).

Discussion

Socio-environmental injustice, power, stigmatization, history

As several EJ researchers have pointed out, the injustices faced by segregated urban Roma extend beyond those of physically segregated environments (Harper et al., 2009; Steger, 2007). The discrimination faced by the community is both spatial and social, and occurs both within and outside of segregated areas: consequently, the distinction between ‘environmental’

and ‘social’ factors becomes fluid and artificial. Power differentials and stigmatization (Powell, 2008) impact every aspect of a segregated Roma’s life: “You know how it is. If one Roma does something, all of us are blamed for that.” (local Roma, male, 38). Untidy segregated environments both result from, and perpetuate, forms of stigmatization and discrimination that have historical, cultural, economic, and social causes (Powell & van Baar, 2018), so that it quickly becomes impossible to distinguish meaningfully between ‘environmental’ injustices (lack of healthy food or heating during winter) and wider social processes.

One area where the interconnectedness of the environmental and social dimensions is particularly clear is that of health. The effects of environmental injustice on the health of segregated Roma communities have been analyzed within the EJ literature (Steger, 2007), but such analyses must also pay attention to social dimensions of illness. For example, extreme poverty may exacerbate mental health issues, such as unhappiness, depression, anger, continuous anxiety, stress, with impacts in the form of reduced life expectations, negative self-evaluation, and demotivation (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014). Accordingly, Roma in Hungary face poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancy than average Hungarians, an injustice that is exacerbated by their limited access to health services. Thus, ‘environmental’ and ‘social’ categories are strongly overlapping and interdependent, while power differentials and stigmatization serve as background root causes.

As it has been shown above, environmental injustices are multi-scalar. Scales include: (1) inner-community phenomena (e.g., oppression within the community); (2) local policies (e.g., housing policy); (3) national policies (e.g. education, labor policies); and (4) socio-environmental issues beyond and behind policies, and spatial and institutional scales (e.g., stigmatization).

The history of the Roma in Szeged reveals how spatial and social exclusion extend back through time, with their roots in long-term historical processes (Powell & Lever, 2017). The present situation is a result of long-standing cultural attitudes, which have been enforced by local and national policy since at least the socialist era. Many of these policies, including e.g. labour and educational discrimination, and absence of economic support after 1989, are comparable to those enacted in a Slovakian context (Powell & van Baar, 2018).

Procedural issues – participation, representation, and empowerment

“Access to representation” (Steger, 2007, p. 54) is a challenge within a multi-scalar context of stigmatization. Political pragmatism (Marinero, 2003) results in politicians having vested interests concerning Roma representation and empowerment.

However, historic patterns of discrimination and political resistance to change do not mean that there is no “room for maneuver within the local” (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 15), or that participatory development efforts will necessarily fail. The PAR project that is the subject of this research effectively transformed local Roma leaders from grassroots activists to partners and consultants of municipal leaders, creating meaningful gains for their community. While there remains much work to do, this shift demonstrates the possibility of changing the political situation of the Roma in the city.

Participatory processes are criticized for imprecise operationalization of empowerment and assuming an automatic relationship between participation and empowerment (Bereményi & Lagunas 2017). Clearly, empowerment should not be defined as a technical, project-based instrumentality, but rather as multi-scaled citizenship (Hickey & Mohan 2004, 12). Accordingly, marginalized groups are better positioned to critically understand their political environment,

formulate and articulate their needs, plan and make decisions (Bereményi & Lagunas, 2017), be aware of their resources and increase their self-reliance, while also possessing increased problem-solving capacity (Arieli et al., 2009).

Even within this conceptualization of citizenship-based empowerment, the participatory process clearly empowers segregated Roma leaders by facilitating critical involvement in local politics, formulating and articulating needs, planning and decision-making, and supporting segregated urban Roma in various aspects of their lives: “Before 2010 there was nothing. But by now we are able to support them [people living in local segregates] in so many ways” (local Roma leader, male, 55).

Although political processes of empowerment need time to mature, catalytic moments are essential to begin participatory processes’ transformation (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Legitimate public claims advantaging Roma, presented in conflict with the interest of the city council, are vital for empowerment. Roma community centers gained material support shortly after publication of critical articles about Roma leaders' struggle to finance these because the lack of local political support. After articles on the city council’s long-term failure to combat the social and economic forces furthering segregation, spending on Roma issues increased. Partnerships between local Roma and political leaders manifested with the publication by a popular national newspaper of an article covering the poor living conditions within segregated areas, and their effects on dozens of children. Such catalytic moments can change power relations, as it is validated by allies of Roma representatives within the city council.

As Powell & Lever (2017) show, the media representation of Roma plays a crucial role in maintaining disidentification from Roma on the part of non-Roma. Our results show that media representations that challenge these barriers can also contribute to identification and political

change: “It is the media that they [politicians] are afraid of!” noted a local Roma leader (male, 55). In this area, Roma leaders act as political entrepreneurs who “attempt to mobilize one or another structure of identification, defining and redefining their appeal until they hit upon a version that works” (de Swaan, 1995, p. 27.). In relation to the participatory process under scrutiny here, Roma leaders consciously framed their position in two ways. The first drew attention to the poverty and marginalization of children, whose vulnerability is difficult to culturalize, securitize or individualize. “We have to show how many children live there in extreme poverty. People do not blame children but feel sorry for them!” (local Roma leader, male, 55). The second provided publicity to initiatives that promoted the system integration of Roma (see Author *et al.*, 2017), for example campaigns to improve educational standards and opportunities (not an issue without its contradictions, as we shall argue below). These were presented as efforts made by Roma to leave behind the negative group characteristics associated with them through stigmatization.

The changed position of Roma leaders may also incur pitfalls. Participatory development efforts were afforded much-needed material support by political decision-makers, but powerful actors often expected ‘cooperation’ and ‘silence’ in exchange. “He [a local political leader] told me not turn to the press. Not even with our successes” explained a local Roma leader (male, 45). This is partly due to a wider climate of discrimination: Roma issues are not politically popular because of the community’s stigmatization, so that even stories about improvements to the community could draw criticism. In such a context, speaking out would have meant “risking everything that we have achieved thus far” (Roma leader, male, 55), since withdrawal of support could create significant financial problems for initiatives counteracting marginalization.

This illustrates the fact that empowerment and disempowerment may go hand-in-hand in real-world participatory processes, creating inescapable dilemmas. How to relate to the trade-offs of an increase in the welfare (reduced vulnerability and marginalization) of the marginalized versus losing the ability to confront and critique? Does that mean that the participatory process contributed to empowerment or is it politically co-opted (Cook & Kothari, 2001), serves as a tool of coercion and control (Hickey & Mohan, 2004)?

Similarly, how is enhanced system integration (e.g. improved performance within mainstream education) that facilitates greater social integration within an oppressive and unjust system—thereby reducing marginalization within that system (considering the “empowerment for what” dilemma (Cook & Kothari, 2001))—to be related within participatory development? Does enhanced system integration (Author et al. 2017) mean greater wellbeing and easier lives for the marginalized, reduced marginalization, or subordination to and reinforcement of existing oppressive structures? Alternatively, might it mean both as another paradox of participation? Regarding a dilemma in PAR, does greater ‘pragmatism’ or ‘critique’ lead to enhanced citizenship and empowerment of oppressed groups in the long term (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008)? Provided spaces (Hickey & Mohan, 2004) present opportunities for marginalized groups to further their goals though they remain under the influence of the providers’ power and interest.

Participatory development processes are criticized for focusing on local, rather than wider structures, and thus of failing to touch the real origins of oppression and injustice (Cook & Kothari, 2001). Clearly, the transformative potential of localized participatory approaches (Hickey & Mohan, 2004) can be limited by power differentials, stigmatization, and broader social and political processes. For instance, the invisibilization of anti-Roma racism and post-

racial reversibility (Powell & van Baar, 2018) may reduce the empowering potential of local participatory processes, influencing and pressurizing politically pragmatic decision-makers.

Moreover, the potential of local participatory processes depends on wider national structures, and on the ways in which tasks are divided among local and national institutions (e.g. the degree of centralization or decentralization in the decision-making process). The current PAR process focuses on local political participatory interest representation as its “reachable” sphere of influence, but this may reduce the ability of segregated urban Roma to affect major institutions and policies. For example, in Hungary, education and labour policies are created and implemented at a national level, making it extremely difficult for local actors to influence this process.

The element of representation in participation (Hickey & Mohan, 2004) further complicates issues around empowerment. The “myth of community” (Cleaver, 1999), whereby communities are represented as “homogenous, static and harmonious units within which people share common interests and needs” (Cook & Kothari 2001, p. 6) tends to oversimplify the complexity of real communities, which are often characterized by differences of interest and opinion. Segregated urban Roma communities are characterized by internal power differentials, hierarchies, conflicts, diverging interests, and intra-community disidentification (Author et al., 2018a,b). For example, the desegregation process in Szeged’s larger segregated area entailed considerable stress, challenge, and danger for the most marginalised illegal squatter families. Owners and tenants were more content, their interests acknowledged by the city council, whereas most illegal squatter families faced not only serious socio-economic problems (e.g. learned hopelessness, disabilities, addiction), but also the fact that their very existence was denied by the

municipality. Subject to expulsory racism (Powell & van Baar, 2018), they have no control over their own environment.

Currently, the municipality is disengaged from Roma leaders' recommendations concerning the interests of illegal squatters. Roma leaders have even been threatened for raising this: one municipality official declared that they would "cancel the partnership and even stop the whole desegregation process in case we make too much noise around illegal squatters" (municipality official, female, 53). For Roma leaders themselves, the municipality is simply interested in "getting the area [of the segregated community's housing] as cheaply and quietly as possible" (local Roma leader, male, 40). Thus, Roma leaders' attempts to use publicity to create catalytic moments that can change the discourse on illegal squatters' interests not only runs the risk of losing their influential political position in the municipality, but actually of generating further precarity for segregated Roma owners and legal tenants.

What if representing every single community members exceeds community representatives' power within participatory processes, through diverging inner-community and vested political interests? How should different community subgroups' interests be weighed? Should representatives attempt to represent the most marginalized within the marginalized without any guarantee of success risking the interests of the wider marginalized group? Or should representatives "stay quiet", leaving the most marginalized, resulting (unintentionally) even in legitimizing negligence and expulsory racism? Regardless: "In case we are loud, they will stop the process that provides opportunities for a better life to owners and tenants. In case illegal squatters get homeless, it's my responsibility. I will be the scapegoat anyway." (local Roma leader, man, 55). This is a moral, as well as a political dilemma for those tasked with

representing their vulnerable community, in a context where those institutions and actors with power are unwilling to provide ‘strings-free’ support for the stigmatized and powerless.

Furthermore, the representatives–represented relationship can alter over the course of participatory processes. Working with dominant and powerful institutions to improve the status of the Roma community could paradoxically lead to a loss of trust in leaders from that community, resulting in reduced legitimacy. Successful participatory processes that lead to the empowerment of community representatives can ultimately damage faith in those leaders, which in turn can diminish the ways in which their community shares information with them, thus limiting their ability to represent others, and reducing the quality of collective participation.

Conclusions

It may seem contradictory for a paper that criticizes dominant political actors for their failure to empower Roma communities to offer policy recommendations for those same actors in its conclusions. However, while this research argues the need to be attentive to the dilemmas and contradictions of participation, it has also shown that participation has the capacity to produce genuine change for the better. As such, it agrees with the findings of Hickey and Mohan, that there is “room for maneuver within the local, and that not all local elites and power relations are inherently exclusive and subordinating” (Hickey & Mohan 2004, p. 15). While our findings are critical of top-down project-based participatory approaches (Hickey & Mohan 2004), the insights produced by observation of, and participation in, the bottom-up processes described here may interest actors (including academics, practitioners, and political decision makers) with an interest in PAR or participatory development. Furthermore, our conclusions are applicable to other marginalized and segregated social groups than urban Roma, and to spaces and contexts beyond the city of Szeged.

Firstly, solutions need to be attentive to the interconnected nature of the environmental and social disadvantage suffered by urban Roma, as well as to the multi-scalar nature of the discrimination that they face, and its deep historical roots. A raft of interventions at different scales, from the individual to the structural, are therefore to support both social and environmental change to counteract marginalization, across a variety of areas, including education, work, health, and housing, and at several scales simultaneously (intra-community, local, national, and cultural/social). Instead of being project-focused, policies should aim toward empowerment through citizenship.

Secondly, earlier policies have to be supported by anti-stigma policies. Roma marginalization is a historical process based on long-term power differentials, where stigmatization shapes day-to-day lived realities (Powell & Lever, 2017). Political empowerment cannot be conceived independently from challenges to long-standing oppressive structures, including those that support racism (Bereményi & Lagunas, 2017); Roma empowerment demands fighting (counteracting) stigmatization. Such cultural (and power) shifts do not transpire easily or quickly (Powell & Lever, 2017), with the result that marginalized Roma recognition will not be attained in the timeframe of a democratic election cycles or a development project. Functional democratization (Kilminster, 2006) – the gradual process of lessening of power imbalances between different groups in society - may seem unplanned and immanent (see Hickey & Mohan, 2004), though not necessarily automated, as evidenced by historical stigmatization and marginalization of Roma, demanding long-term anti-stigma policies.

Thirdly, top-down development approaches are often based on oversimplified perceptions of power, and are therefore incapable of mounting a real challenge to Roma marginalization and

segregation (see Powell, 2008). Instead, development should centre on flexible approaches that “place local realities in the heart of the development interventions” (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 11). Accordingly, participation and cooperation are crucial regarding policies for the societal inclusion of Roma.

Fourthly, despite our optimism concerning the role of participation per this inclusion, challenges remain regarding participatory processes. Participatory processes need to operationalize empowerment as citizenship, ignore project-orientations and time-frames, integrating life experiences, functioning, and norms of segregated urban Roma, and define participation as a right, not an obligation. Primarily, initiators and participants of participatory processes must be aware it is no panacea for solving moral and practical problems (dilemmas) of power, empowerment, and development. Such dilemmas must be transparently revealed, discussed, and reflected upon within participatory processes, especially concerning problems related to (unintended) subordination as existing power differentials necessarily impact participatory processes (see Author et al., 2018b). The potential influence on provided spaces by those who provide such spaces, contradictions stemming from the complexity of operationalizing empowerment, potentially divergent inner-community interests, further marginalization within marginalized groups, and the presence of parallel empowerment and disempowerment processes are examples in this case. For instance, how to relate to the disempowering expectations of pragmatist politics concerning silence regarding the problems and successes of the marginalized – a price that has to be paid for enhanced political representation and resources (as elements of political empowerment) in present case? There is no clear-cut, pre-given and universally valid answers to such dilemmas of power and empowerment.

Fifth, understanding participation as right and respecting community norms shows representation to be crucial for participatory development policies, specifically concerning segregated urban Roma communities. Nevertheless, if community representatives are embedded within these communities, their perspectives necessarily comprise personal judgements concerning moral and practical dilemmas related to community representation and empowerment inherent to any representation process. Thus, working with embedded representatives requires supplementation with participatory “reality checks” involving community members, and permitting their communication of authentic preferences concerning development processes and prominent issues.

Ultimately, this research suggests there are no pre-defined ways forward, nor clear answers concerning the use of participation to empower a vulnerable urban community. If the multi-scalar nature of the problem suggests that interventions at a range of scales will be necessary, then the historically-embedded and culturally-specific nature of marginalization and stigmatization suggest that solutions will need to respond to the long-term ideas that underpin marginalization, while also being localized and context-dependent, theories of change based on local practical knowledge are also requisite for underpinning these issues (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008). Although not suggestive of large-scale, structural change-oriented social policies’ futility, significant uncertainty is probably unavoidable in the actual realization of any (participatory) empowerment policies for the marginalized and stigmatized.

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