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SPATIAL CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN POLICIES  
FORMING A ROMA GHETTO

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#### ABSTRACT

The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork in a neighborhood situated at the edge of a small town inhabited by the local poor for decades. The neighbourhood that was once connected to the town through a set of institutions has become isolated over the years as personal relationships and institutions have ceased. I intend to present the institutional changes and social processes that transformed a socially and ethnically heterogeneous neighbourhood into a stigmatized ghetto. In this process, the role of different organizations that structure the life of the urban poor, and the governance structures in which those organizations are embedded are fundamental. Overall, the penalization of poverty and criminalization of ethnicity characterize the mechanisms that maintain invisibility. These are as follows: (1) limiting their right to access certain institutions through the creation of a second set of institutions, particularly in education; (2) operating a public work scheme along ethnic divisions; and (3) surveillance of space used by the local Roma minority government to organize, monitor and regulate this neighbourhood.

**Keywords:** social and spatial segregation, stigmatized ghetto, Roma, urban policy

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INTRODUCTION

Segregated neighbourhoods are places where the families come and/or stay not by their own free will, but under some economic or social pressure; where the given part of the settlement is even physically separated from the rest of the settlement; where the area in question is clearly stigmatized; where there are major differences in the access to the institutions compared to other parts of the settlement (Wacquant 2007, 2012). In the Central and Eastern European context, the spatial exclusion of marginalized Roma groups appears in two major patterns: the ghettoized rural village and the urban district combining the four structural elements of stigma, constraint, spatial enclosure and institutional parallelism (Ladányi–Szelényi 2006, Wacquant 2007, 2015, Ladányi 2015, Vincze–Rat 2013, Váradi–Virág 2015). Scholars argue that it is justified to speak of Roma neighbourhoods as ethnic ghettos in Central-Eastern European countries. Even if they differ in several aspects from the US ‘black ghetto’, the conceptual framework of the ghetto and the mechanism of exclusion determined by ethnicity, inflected by class and intensified by the state (locality) is similar (Wacquant 2015).

The place of our case study, a segregated neighbourhood of a small town situated in the Great Plain, has been the dwelling place of the local Roma and non-Roma poor since the 1940s. The migration processes in the last decades, in connection with the economic decline following the regime change, have radically transformed the ethnic and social compositions of the neighbourhood and family relations within the segregated neighbourhood along with the relation of the neighbourhood and the town. Recently, this neighbourhood has emerged as a stigmatized and criminalized space, an ethnic ghetto the majority society set apart from the town by sharp boundaries. The perception of ethnicity is spatially determined. It means that according to the majority society, everybody who lives in the stigmatized ghetto is Roma; ethnicity is manifested in exclusive categories of Roma or non-Roma. From the perspective of the majority society, this neighbourhood is socially and ethnically homogeneous and stigmatized; meanwhile, this area is home to different social groups, each one with its own social and ethnic composition, means of subsistence and life strategy (Virág 2015).

In my paper I intend to present those institutional changes and social processes that transformed the socially and ethnically heterogeneous neighbourhood connected to the town through different institutions and personal relationships into a stigmatized ghetto with sharp boundaries set apart from the other parts of the town. Recently, the aim of the local government has been, through the penalization of poverty and criminalization of ethnicity (Wacquant 2009), to make poor families living in the segregated neighbourhood invisible, through which the social and ethnic problems and conflicts can be cooped up behind the walls of the ghetto. In this process, the role of different organizations that structure the life of the urban poor, and the

governance structures in which those organizations are embedded are fundamental (Small 2008, Allard–Small 2013). The most important tools for the making and maintenance of invisibility are (1) limiting the right to access and the creation of a second set of institutions, particularly in education (Kertesi–Kézdi 2014, Zolnay 2006, 2010); (2) operating the racialized public works scheme (Vidra 2012, Messing 2013); (3) surveillance of the space used by the local Roma minority government to organize, monitor and regulate this neighbourhood.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The central issue of international scientific discourse on spatial exclusion, or more precisely on ethnic segregation over the past decade has been both the redefinition of the concept of the ‘ghetto’ and the description and analysis of various areas defined as ghetto. Rethinking the place-centred concept of ghetto, scholars point out the examination of social and ethnic heterogeneity (1), the role (or lack) of institutions that structure the life of the urban poor (2), and policy interventions reflecting their differentiated social situation (3) (Small 2008, Small–Allard 2013, Marcuse 2007, Wacquant 2012, 2015).

Criticizing the strong concept of ghetto; that is, that poor black neighbourhoods are relatively homogeneous across the cities, Small proposes to understand the complexity of and differences within the poor black neighbourhood. Despite the fact that the main feature of transformation of ghettos in the 1980s was the process of depopulation, the disappearance of workplaces and institutions which cause poverty concentration and isolation (Wilson 1999), recently, after more than two decades, there are much more significant differences along the poor black neighbourhoods in density of population and institutions, partly due to state intervention and the different economic and social position of the given city (Small 2008, 2014).

Scholars pay attention to research and understand the situations and conditions of disadvantaged social groups in complexity: focusing not only on individuals and their neighbourhood but more importantly ‘on the organizations that structure their lives, the system in which these organizations are embedded, and the institutions that regulate the operation of both’ (Small–Allard 2013: 8). In this approach organizations could belong to different (non-profit, business or government) agencies through which people manage their scarce resources, and which have a role in their well-being or opportunity for mobility. Different organizations (community houses, schools, kindergartens, churches) are interpreted as places where people could meet each other, and these daily interactions could form social ties between different social and ethnic groups, affect perception of ethnicity and redefine it, where differences across ethnic, gender, class and other boundaries can be bridged or reinforced. These organizations operate and structure neighbourhood conditions, mediate the impact of macro-level factors or affect the well-being of individuals, and this way also form the features of the given neighbourhood, i.e. the pattern of spatial and social exclusion (Small–Allard 2013).

Moving beyond the place-centred definition of ghetto, Wacquant conceptualized spatial and social exclusion as a dynamic process whose ideal-typical end-points represent the most varied forms of segregated spaces, changing over time, located on a continuum between socially heterogeneous ethnic neighbourhoods with blurred borders and the *ghetto*. The central issues of international professional discourse on spatial exclusion, or more precisely on ethnic segregation over the past decade have been both the redefinition of

the concept of the urban 'ghetto' defined by the concentrated dwelling place of poor groups belonging to various ethnic minorities, and the description and analysis of various areas defined as ghetto. The most widely accepted definition is associated with Wacquant. According to his definition, while the concentration of poverty and ethnic segregation is a typical feature of ghettos, an area will only qualify as a ghetto if four specific criteria are fulfilled: (1) the area in question is distinctly separated from the rest of the settlement, and lends itself to easy delineation (2) the majority society describes the area and the families living here in negative terms (stigma) (3) the families did not move to the area by their own free will but under some (economic, administrative, symbolic) pressure and (4) they use an institutional system parallel to and separate from that of the majority society. The ghetto's spatially separated social and institutional system functions both to enable the highest possible degree of economic exploitation of the excluded group, and to prevent the members of the majority society from coming in contact or mixing daily with the inhabitants of the ghetto, which also means protection from the symbolic dangers that are associated with ghetto dwellers in the eyes of the majority (Wacquant 2007, 2012).

Scholars argue that it is justified to speak of Roma neighbourhood as ethnic ghettos in Central-Eastern European countries. Even if they differ in several aspects from the US 'black ghetto', the conceptual framework of the ghetto and the mechanism of exclusion determined by ethnicity inflected by class and intensified by the state (locality) is similar (Ladányi–Szelényi 2006, Wacquant 2012). The majority of Roma in the Central-Eastern European countries, as in Hungary too, live in very poor housing conditions, facing poverty, exclusion and discrimination in education, labour market and also in housing and development policy (Berescu et al. 2013). However, according to a recent survey almost every second Roma lives in a neighbourhood where the dominant ethnicity is Roma, but the living conditions and social relations vary along the forms and extension of spatial and social exclusion in the given settlement. However, there is a wide diversity of Roma segregated neighbourhoods, which reflects the Roma's heterogeneous, stratified, geographically and linguistically diversified social position (Gatti et al. 2016: 154).

Researching the forms of spatial exclusion and their changes is closely connected in Hungarian sociology with the investigation of the spatial position of Roma people in a given settlement as an extreme and spectacular form of exclusion, and with the problems of eliminating Roma colonies and slums. Although the ethnic and social composition of 'Roma colonies' is often heterogeneous, their stigmatised status and their external perception usually qualifies them as homogeneous spaces. The comparison of the results of three waves of a survey research conducted in 1971, 1993, and 2003 (Kemény–Janky 2004) with one conducted in 2010, reflects significant improvement of the housing conditions of the Roma, a radical reduction of the number of colonies, in spite of the fact that the extent of their segregation further increased (Teller 2011). Meanwhile, the forms of spatial exclusion have changed: besides rural Roma colonies and ghetto villages (Havas 1999, Ladányi–Szelényi 2006, Virág 2006), low-status, dilapidating urban neighbourhoods (Ladányi 1989) had appeared by the 1980s as a result of urban development projects not completed despite having been planned. However, following the millennium it was mostly the urban rehabilitation programs that induced gentrification processes (Nagy–Timár 2007, Csanádi et al. 2007). These programs can be interpreted as local governmental attempts to

segregate, which is usually supported by the majority society (Kemény–Janky 2004, Ladányi 2012).

In Hungary, every fifth Roma lives in a segregated neighbourhood, and out of them every fifth lives in a small town (Ladányi 2012: 105). Small towns represent a special form in the Hungarian settlement structure not only regarding their size, but also their economic and administrative position. Although they officially have ‘city status’ and some administrative public service functions, in fact they are not urbanized but rather economically underdeveloped centres of their peripheral rural areas. Research projects on spatial and social exclusion in Hungary have so far focused on ghetto villages of rural peripheries (Havas 1999, Ladányi–Szelényi 2006, Virág 2006, Durst 2008), only some research investigates urban districts (Ladányi 2008), and there is a lack of empirical evidence on the forms and mechanisms of social and spatial exclusion of Roma in the peripheral small town context (Váradi–Virág 2015).

The article is based on the findings of a qualitative research project on Roma marginalization in twenty localities of four regions of Hungary (Váradi–Virág 2014)<sup>2</sup>. The selection of the settlements followed the national distribution of the Roma population according to regions and settlement types. In the first phase of our fieldwork we conducted semi-structured interviews with local Roma and non-Roma stakeholders, analysed documents of local development programmes and also gathered quantitative data to map the distinct conditions in the domains of education, employment and work, housing and infrastructure, and representation and participation of Roma in local policy-making and politics. In the second phase of the research we made in-depth family interviews in three selected localities, the town of our case study among them, to identify and describe the dimensions and mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion as processes affected by ethnic relations. In the selected small towns the social and spatial segregation of Roma is a common phenomenon, but its patterns vary along the necessity, frequency and features of everyday interactions between Roma and non-Roma or different Roma groups, the exclusionary or inclusionary local politics and practices of non-Roma, which also determine the ways how Roma are allowed to use local institutions and public spaces. The scale of a small town offers us deeper insight in the processes and structures of the changing patterns of the spatial and social segregation of Roma on the continuum between ghetto and ethnic neighbourhood. The case study of this paper represents the patterns of a stigmatized ghetto.

## THE PLACE

The segregated neighbourhood is situated on the edge of a small town on the inner periphery of the Great Plain. According to different local estimations, 1800–2000 people live in this neighbourhood, but their proportion of the total population is less than 10 per cent. The position of the neighbourhood within the town and in connection with that the social and spatial situation of the local dwellers has been changing over time and determines the changing pattern of spatial and social exclusion. In my paper I present those social and institutional changes, which transformed the socially and ethnically heterogeneous neighbourhood that

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<sup>2</sup> The article is based on the comparative research project *Faces and Causes of Marginalization of the Roma in Local Settings* coordinated by CEU CPS between 2012–2014 with the contribution of Katalin Fehér, Szilvia Rézműves, Gyöngyi Schwarz, Dezső Szegedi, Annamária Uzzoli, Monika Mária Váradi, Zsuzsa Vidra, and Tünde Virág. <https://cps.ceu.edu/research/roma-marginalization>

existed in the 1970s and 1980s into the recently formed stigmatized ghetto.

It has been the dwelling place of the local Roma and non-Roma poor since the 1940s. Interviewees recalled how Roma and non-Roma children grew up in a similar environment even in the 1980s, were socializing free of conflicts, and emphasized that they attended mixed classes in the local schools in the 1970s–1980s, while Roma and non-Roma people worked together in large factories operating in the town in those decades. At the same time, due to the social and spatial mobility possibilities, a powerful selective migration process got underway from the 1970s: the majority of the non-Roma families purchased a house elsewhere in the town, and a large number of young Roma residents found jobs in the capital. Due to these selective migration processes, this part of the town tended to become a Roma neighbourhood. After the regime change and again by the turn of the millennium, many of those Roma families who had previously moved to the capital city were forced by different economic and social factors (primarily housing and survival problems and the extended family's support in raising their children) to return to the neighbourhood. There they faced the situation that due to the transformation of the local economy, the former job opportunities providing work for unqualified people had disappeared. These processes have radically transformed the ethnic and social compositions of the neighbourhood, family relations within the segregated neighbourhood, along with the relation between the neighbourhood and the town. Recently, this neighbourhood has emerged as a stigmatized and criminalized space, an ethnic ghetto and a 'no-go area' for the regular townspeople.

The segregated neighbourhood, 'Gypsy-Town' as the townspeople call it, is set apart from the town by sharp boundaries. The perception of ethnicity is spatially determined. According to the majority society, everybody who lives in the stigmatized part of the town is Roma; ethnicity appears in exclusive categories of Roma or non-Roma, even in the case of intermarriages (with some exceptions, see below). From the perspective of the majority society this neighbourhood is socially and ethnically homogeneous and stigmatized; meanwhile, this area is home to three large social groups, each with its own social and ethnic composition, means of subsistence and life strategy. The life of the poorest Roma families in the former Gypsy colony, and in the unfinished cheap social houses is characterized by uncertainty and helplessness. Their daily life is all about extemporized solutions for day-to-day survival. Low level of education, exclusion from the primary job market, early parenthood, and many children: all these factors are interrelated, keeping families in the poverty trap. Fear and lack of personal security is felt mostly on the former colony and in the neighbouring streets. This group has limited social ties that operate almost exclusively within this segregated area, and are primarily kinship and neighbourhood relations (Messing–Molnár 2011). Other Roma families live on the edge of the neighbourhood, several of them in intermarriages maintaining relations beyond the neighbourhood. They have more varied livelihood sources, but their daily life depends on help they receive from their network of family and friends. It is important to note that the differences between the two former groups are not very sharp; some families easily detach from the latter to drop into the former, whereas there are hardly any examples of moves in the opposite direction. The situation of non-Roma families living in 'decent poverty' in the border area of the neighbourhood is particularly uncertain despite the fact that at least one member of almost all households has a steady income. These households essentially differ from the former group in that they mostly experience living in that neighbourhood as an exigency, and maintain little or no contact with neighbours or

relatives, and attempt to make up for supporting networks mainly by creating relations with institutions and different organizations.

The possibilities of Roma and non-Roma families living in the neighbourhood differ in two important aspects: firstly, although they have the same qualifications, meaning that most of them completed only primary school, and only a few of them have skilled worker's qualifications, according to the narratives the non-Roma men and women have spent the past decades in permanent full-time employment, accessed different social networks connected to the non-Roma inhabitants living in the other part of the town and different institutions. Secondly, the various institutions of the local municipality only appear in a positive light in the non-Roma narratives, helping non-Roma poor families in various situations. It means families living in the segregated neighbourhood, but identified by the majority society as non-Roma, are esteemed and accepted members of the local society and use the same organizations and public places as the majority society.

### MAKING AND MAINTENANCE OF INVISIBILITY OF THE SEGREGATED NEIGHBOURHOOD

Urban policy, formed and determined by the political and economic interests of the town leadership (political and business actors, influential social groups) primarily determine the image of families living in 'Gypsy-Town' (the segregated neighbourhood) through the use of space and institutions, urban development and urban rehabilitation plans, influencing the degree and forms of spatial and social exclusion, the socio-economic transformation of various town quarters. In the last one and a half decades, the development concepts of the town leadership have mostly focused on the renewal of the town centre and the modernisation of public institutions. In addition to carrying out developments, the local government initiated the expansion or downsizing of services and institutional capacities according to the needs of the local elite. In a continuously changing regulatory environment, it aimed to keep under its supervision the rights to access institutions and services; more precisely, to determine which groups of local society would have the right to use them. Beyond limiting the right of access, there has been an increasing demand to create a parallel set of institutions for the socially and/or ethnically stigmatized group.

Recently the aim of local government is the formal and informal regulation of the use of institutions and the penalization of poverty and criminalization of ethnicity (Wacquant 2009) making poor families living in the segregated neighbourhood invisible, in this way the social and ethnic problems and conflicts can be cooped up behind the 'walls' of the ghetto. In the following I identify the most important tools of social and spatial exclusion which has formed and reinforced the more and more visible 'walls' of the Roma neighbourhood: the (1) creation of a second set of institutions in education; (2) racialized public works schemes; (3) the role of the local Roma Minority Self Government to organize, monitor and regulate this neighbourhood.

## Education

In this chapter we intend to present the institutional changes in education that have affected Roma families negatively. There are five elementary schools in the town. The two extremes of the local education system, the school for children with special educational needs, which taught exclusively Roma children, and the school with music specialization that mostly taught children from middle-class families, operated in the same building, and their position, the social and ethnic composition of the children did not change for decades. In the 80s, within the other three elementary schools, there were few differences in terms of the social background of students and the level of education. Albeit in the 1980s the distribution of Roma children among these schools was based on different ways of selection, i.e. the town did (and still does) maintain a special segregated school for children with special educational needs, and parallel Roma classes existed, mixed classes for the deserving Roma children (meaning the parent had a permanent job, and the children had no behavioural problems) were also available. It means there was a portion of local Roma children who ‘deserved’ to use the same educational institutions as non-Roma. Most of the family interviews from the 1980s refer to a non-Roma school mate. *‘I went to school together with, which is not typical today, people like the police commissioner, doctor, notary, colonel, I went to school with these, which the children today cannot say because the Hungarians [non-Roma] are such, that this is not really possible’.* Recently, during our research, talking to the parents of school-aged children, however, mention of the school only brings up stories of grievances; we rarely meet a Roma family in which segregation at school, and other experiences related to their children’s schooling would not be a daily discussion topic. Recently, almost every Roma family living in the stigmatized neighbourhood had to face exclusion from mostly non-Roma attended schools. *‘They are selected out. Hungarians are in one group, but the Roma are the Roma. They were scattered around in groups of 3–4, thrown down here to ensure that the parents would not notice. Because then, they thought, it would not be noticed by the Roma. But it is because the previous headmaster had the Hungarians and Roma in one class. They got along so well one can hardly believe it. There was not a single argument. The new headmaster is a Gypsy-phobe, a racist.’*

The situation and process in education reflect the national tendencies. The Hungarian educational system is a strongly selective one, which does not reduce, but reproduces and reinforces socio-cultural and socio-economic inequalities. The segregative and selective mechanisms of the educational system got an early impulse through the free choice of schools accepted in the 1980s, but the gap between schools has been growing constantly. Educational institutions are extremely sensitive to the background of the students they provide services for, and thus to their spatial position – in spite of the fact that there is no direct connection between educational and spatial segregation, and it is more connected to the rate of commuting students, the share of the Roma population, and the integrational or segregational character of educational policy (Kertesi–Kézdi 2014).

Until 2012 schools were owned by local municipalities; after that, the system became more centralized. The changes in the public education structure of the given small town confirm the general experience that regarding centralization, local municipalities have decreasing influence on local educational policy and church operated institutions play an increasingly powerful role in educational segregation. The number of church

schools expanded radically in the 2011–2012 school year, it was nearly 25% higher than the corresponding figure in the previous year (Váradi 2012). Part of the reason is financial: it is a way for the local government to save funds, while the churches could easily commit themselves to the operation of schools having much more generous funding from the state than the local government.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, churches are not subject to the statutory enrolment districts drawn up by the municipalities requiring schools to take all children from within their district. Church schools could select their own students by turning away any candidate that they did not like with no explanation given, which was a tool in their hands of ensuring an ‘appropriate’ composition of students in the long term.

In this town, the Calvinist church has been operating a primary school since the 1990s, and has accepted both Roma and non-Roma children for many years, partly because the building of this school is in the vicinity of the segregated neighbourhood, and partly because it has had a segregated site school<sup>4</sup>, the so-called ‘Gypsy school’ for Roma children for decades. Although the selection of Roma children was present for decades, and was based on what the majority required from the Roma pupils: *‘I went to a school where very few Gypsy went. Ten used to be a high number. But even those ten had to be white skinned and clean to ensure they did not stick out from the Hungarians.’* The change set in as the new management took office, and refused to enrol Roma children.

Parents who used to study in mixed classes, and had recent relationships with the majority society, tried to provide the best education for their children, i.e. have them study in mixed classes, but that has become increasingly difficult. One woman who grew up in the town said: *‘We used to live among Hungarian [non-Roma] families, I never knew Roma around here.’* She moved to the capital, where she met her husband; then, because of financial difficulties they moved back ten years ago with their three children. They bought a house at the edge of the neighbourhood among non-Roma. *‘When we first moved here, my backdoor neighbour said he was pleasantly surprised to see that none of his chickens disappeared.’* But by the time they had themselves accepted with the people in the street, the population got gradually replaced, and today Roma have become the majority. The two older children went to the closest primary school of good reputation, which was taken over by the Calvinist church a few years before. *‘The whole family used to study there, but then the new headmaster started to select among applicants, and he refused Roma. However, I would have insisted on it, ‘cos this is where my older children go. Initially they claimed they did not achieve 90% [the school does aptitude tests for children], and then they said we were not religious, then that we were surplus. We also attended the pre-school course to ensure that my kid should be taken on.’*

The other tool to ensure ‘appropriate’ composition of students was that the new management of the Calvinist church returned the segregated site school, the ‘Gypsy school’, to the local government. In 2010 the town municipality handed over one of its primary schools along with this ‘Gypsy-school’ to the Catholic Church.

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3 Church school operators receive from the state, on top of the basic statutory support, also a supplementary statutory support that is meant to replace supplementary municipal funding, thus the churches do not need to use their own funds to supplement the schools’ maintenance costs. [http://www.hazaeshaladas.hu/ftp/hesh\\_kozoskassza\\_elemezes\\_kozoktatas\\_public.pdf](http://www.hazaeshaladas.hu/ftp/hesh_kozoskassza_elemezes_kozoktatas_public.pdf)

4 Some town’s schools as administrative units are comprised of units at multiple locations, which are sometimes quite far from each other. I use the word ‘site school’ as a part of a school organization that may consist of more than one school site.

That is, while churches openly targeted elite education and tried to get rid of their disadvantaged Roma pupils, the local municipalities also tried to get rid of its segregated site school. Today, only a handful of Roma children study in the 'main building' of the Catholic school situated in the central part of the town; Roma children attend the 'Gypsy school' situated in the segregated neighbourhood. The Catholic school, as every church-maintained school, has no statutory catchment area and the right to terminate the segregated member school gradually, in an upward system, and become one of the institutions of the local elite. Roma families have an accurate perception of the differences forming among schools: *'Those attending the Petőfi [the 'Gypsy-school' maintained by the Catholic Church] wear a letter "C"<sup>1</sup> on their back ... Almost exclusively Gypsies attend the Kazinczy [state primary school] but the better type of Gypsy. Those who can afford it have their children go to the Kazinczy, those who cannot, remain in the Petőfi. (...) Schools select, not the parents; all we do is submit the application sheet. They have the whole thing set in advance.'*

The 'Gypsy school' situated in the segregated neighbourhood maintained by the Catholic Church soon became empty. Recently, Roma children could only 'choose' the single state-owned primary school – situated quite far from the segregated neighbourhood, Roma pupils would need to walk more than half an hour to get there – which sooner or later became segregated. Due to structural changes initiated by the municipal council and the church (the merging and reorganization of institutions), most Roma children sooner or later get enrolled in a state maintained institution. The appearance of church operated primary schools represents the increasingly obvious presence of a parallel institution system in public education: well-to-do middle class non-Roma children study in church schools, while disadvantaged Roma children living in the segregated neighbourhood are confined to attending the state primary school.

### The role of public employment

At the beginning of the 1990s, Hungary's economy almost completely and rather rapidly collapsed, and more than one-third of jobs disappeared, mainly in mining, heavy industry and agriculture where formerly the under-qualified, including most Roma were employed. From the 1990s, the Hungarian labour market has been characterized by a very low level of employment, combining a low rate of unemployment with a very high rate of inactivity. The latest Roma-specific survey shows that only 21.6% of Roma are employed and 32.4% are registered as unemployed, in contrast with the whole population where these rates are 54.4% and 8.7% (Gatti et al. 2016: 101); moreover, 10% of the Roma population are totally excluded from the labour market and have never had a job (Mód 2011). The most significant cause for low employment rates of Roma is the labour market disadvantage caused by their dramatically low level of education in comparison with the whole population. The number of children plays an important role for women too, and geographic location also explains some of the gap (Kertesi–Kézdi 2011). The statistical data reinforce our field experience: the institutions created to handle unemployment are dysfunctional; we never heard of anyone finding a job through the employment office, and, as it happens, the unfavourable experience of discrimination encourages fewer and fewer Roma to formally apply for jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> 'C' means 'cigány' (Gypsy).

As Roma are excluded from the formal economy, they participate in the informal labour market. In Hungary every fifth Roma is estimated to be involved in the grey (informal) economy (Messing 2013). According to our field experience, most Roma families have only very weak ties to the formal labour market, or have never been part of it, and their informal job opportunities are rather limited and incidental, too. However, the most widespread informal employment opportunity in this town is day labour, and various occasional jobs, which vary according to how long they last, how regular they are, and how much they are embedded in the local society. Roma living in the segregated neighbourhood usually have limited social ties that operate almost exclusively within this segregated area, and are primarily kinship and neighbourhood relations through which they can scarcely find job opportunities.

In the recent years, the government gradually extended the public works programme, and turned it into an exclusive tool of social policy to handle long-term unemployment and poverty. However, there is no transfer route from the subsidized labour market to the primary labour market, and experience suggests that the arrangement gradually weakens the relationships that link the unskilled unemployed to the labour market, even the informal (Messing 2012). The public works programme plays a key role in the livelihood of poor Roma and non-Roma families. The overwhelming majority of poor families hit by long-term unemployment relates to the world of formal labour market practically exclusively through public work. For the majority of the long-term unemployed Roma living in the given segregated neighbourhood public work offers shorter or longer spells of relief, bringing them work and livelihood. Public work constituted an important source of income for poor families; it is a particularly great and rare luck if even a member of a family is offered public work. The wages of a public worker, even if the employment lasts longer, and even if it is more regular, is naturally not enough to provide an opportunity to break out of poverty.

The distribution of public works possibilities are often based on informal and personal relations embedded in local societies, and determined by the boundaries between different social and ethnic groups, and they distinguish between deserving and undeserving poor. That, however, also means that a second hierarchy parallel to the primary labour market has been formed within the system of public employment, offering employment ranging from almost continuous work inside the institution to litter picking in the street for just a month or two, and where the bottom of the hierarchy is steadily occupied by the undeserving poor Roma. The selection criteria used to select applicants for various positions are remarkably similar to those applied in the primary labour market: there is no direct exclusionary discourse, but certain positions require work experience and some kind of qualification.

The structure of public employment in this town is an accurate reflection of the relation of the town management to the Roma. However, independently from the local governmental policy, the current arrangement of public works may be regarded as a classic workfare type policy, with the clear aim of disciplining, and possibly punishing poor people (Messing 2012, Vidra 2012). According to estimations of multiple local officers 70–80% of the public workers are Roma. The leaders of the Roma Minority Self Government (RMSG) play a key role in selecting public workers and organizing the work: they are appointed team leaders authorised to select the members of their team. Meanwhile, the members of the RMSG are themselves unemployed too and

continuously employed in public works schemes. That – on the one hand – gives rise to allegations that the leaders of the RMSG unfairly favour their own families, but at least that enlisting for public work requires being on friendly terms with the leaders of the RMSG. On the other hand, Roma have the impression that the local government organizes separate Roma and non-Roma teams, i.e. that the local government organizes public employment on an ethnic basis. It is a fact that only Roma men and women pick up litter in the streets and sweep public spaces, and the local inhabitants regard the Roma as *the* public workers. At the same time, the local municipality dismisses allegations that it arranges its public works programme based on racial considerations. The overwhelming majority of public workers are Roma, wherefore necessity dictates that some teams should be composed of Roma only, while there are also teams in which Roma and non-Roma work together (Messing–Bereményi 2016).

At the same time not everyone has the experience and load-bearing capacity to qualify for the so-called *élite* teams. That meant a few teams set up by town management years ago, in which public workers worked almost all year on average, and directly did useful work for the town. Some of them, mostly women, doing office work, which was a way of filling standard local government jobs with public workers at reduced cost. The same was done with cleaners and kitchen staff. In addition to building pavements and renovating institutions, there has been a project for ten years: they purchased equipment, and paid 4–5 people to repair the town's asphalt roads. *'The asphalt élite team have no special qualification, only that they have seen concrete at least once in their lives. They start work at 7 o'clock in the morning, they finish the asphalt work by noon, they go home, have lunch, have a shower, come back refreshed, and then throw the asphalt up on a truck, and transport it to the site'* (officer at the local municipality). The special public works programme on agriculture also provides an opportunity to employ several people continuously: they produce early lettuce, radish, potatoes, paprika, which they hand over free of charge to the kitchen of the local crèche. The members of these teams are typically non-Roma, and their employment is almost continuous; in this way, local inhabitants *don't regard them as public workers*, just diligent local people who work for the town.

Selection and discrimination among public workers is present not only in practice, i.e. in terms of visible/invisible, superfluous/important work, but also in the narratives of the staff of the local government coordinating public work. Roma teams working in the street are usually regarded as absentees, being late for work and doing nothing, while workers of the *'élite'* teams are referred to as esteemed experts. In other words, the town management maintains part of the public work for the *'deserving'* poor, regarding them non-Roma, who do useful work for the benefit of the town, who are not regarded as real *'public workers'* for the local inhabitants, and part of it for the *'undeserving'* poor, who are almost exclusively Roma, doing *'nothing'* on public spaces thereby further confirming their undeserving status. Local social and political support for increasingly stricter workfare and the *'work for benefits'* principle remains strong, and public work becomes a tool for the distinction, disciplining and/or reward of the deserving and undeserving poor (Szalai 2009, Ferge 2012).

## The surveillance of space

In our settlement, ensuring public safety, safeguarding the value of investments in the town centre, and maintaining the peace and safety of families living in the town's interior areas are among the most important goals of the town leadership. Making the urban space safe means legal instruments and policing techniques, which enable the spatio-social exclusion of groups stigmatized as undesirable by society under the banner of realizing urban development goals. This implies the criminalization of urban policy and the extension and strengthening of punishment politics (Wacquant 2009). According to Wacquant's reasoning, it is the task of the punishment apparatus to, on the one hand, hold the increasing disruptions arising from extensive social insecurity and growing inequalities in the lower social strata at bay, and on the other hand to ensure the surveillance of precarious social groups. This logic demands the increasingly strict control of public spaces. Through regulating the use of urban spaces, urban policy ensures a liveable urban environment for 'orderly' citizens, and keeping up the value of urban renewal programmes, achieved through control over families living in the 'dangerous' part of town (Mitchell 2010).

Nowadays, this neighbourhood appears as a stigmatized and criminalized space in the narratives of actors working in various educational, social or administrative institutions, linked with notions of alcohol and drug consumption, prostitution, illegal dogfights, etc. Social experts working in town, just like the staff of the local government office, offer a clearly exclusionary, stigmatizing and criminalizing narrative, even when the expert in question is in daily contact with the subjects. *'There are ruling families (...) and we don't mix them, we don't put them in the same brigade. These people blow each other up with hand grenades, kill each other with knives, swords, everything. You must pay attention not to put enemies on the same team, because the result will not be work, but fighting'* (public works organizer at the local government).

A social worker in daily contact with the families mentions drug use as an everyday problem of the families, or clients seeking her out. Although young people are being brought to the hospital for gastric lavage almost every week, they have no tools in their hands to deal with the problem. The police are similarly incapable: by their own account, they don't have the tools to supervise the 'Gypsy-Town', to have control over the processes taking place there. Although they maintain regular patrols in the neighbourhood, and they accurately see substance use, they know *'it is not possible to prevent drugs via administrative means'*. Prostitution is the largest problem beyond the almost everyday conflicts developing into fights and drug use. While the latter two are completely in the open, and they have become an everyday occurrence for the inhabitants of the 'Gypsy-Town', information on prostitution is only second-hand; it is a shameful activity to be kept under wraps. *'We were going to the next town by car, and I saw two mommas standing there. One waved, but it looked like she was ashamed, and I value that greatly. As long as it stays this way, it is good, as long as we don't speak of it the way we do about drugs'*, recounts one of the social workers.

The loss of security is an everyday experience for the majority of families living in the 'Gypsy-Town', but it is linked not only to the criminality appearing in the neighbourhood. The exclusionary, racist threat from majority society is becoming increasingly common in the neighbourhood, which affects better off and poor Roma alike. That is, families living here also feel in danger due to their ethnic belonging. One of the reasons

is the living memory of the 2008–2009 Roma murders in nearby settlements, and another is the continuous presence of the far-right party 'Jobbik' that has garnered a rapid rise in popularity since the early 2000s, and the 'Magyar Gárda' (Hungarian Guard) a pseudo-civil militia organization in the town and the segregated neighbourhood (see more Vidra 2014). *'Life isn't safe anymore, we don't feel safe. We are afraid even if we go out to the toilet. It is because of the shootings. The fear is inside us. There were bikers here not so long ago. When the attacks were taking place, many of us stood guard in the street – there are four or five Gypsy houses here, or ten – we all stood guard. The civil guards were here, the police also – they were okay.'*

*'Jobbik is here in town, there was a period when they broke into houses beat people up. Many were afraid, especially those who lived on the edge of town. And on March 15<sup>th</sup>, the Guard held a march here. I am not afraid of them, but if I saw them, I'd break out in a cold sweat.'*

The town is not merely without means and powerless to solve the problems, but it looks like it is not even interested in dealing with them.<sup>2</sup> This way, it gives ground to the 'simple solutions' of various racist, exclusionary groups on one hand, and by holding the Roma responsible for their own problems, it gives the tasks of organizing, controlling and 'keeping Gypsy-Town in check' into the hands of the leaders of the local Roma Minority Self Government (RMSG), reasoning that they are the only ones with regular contact with the Roma families living in the segregated neighbourhood.

In this small town the local administration reported a good and smooth relationship with the RMSG adding that they tried to involve the membership of the RMSG in all issues that concern the Roma. Meanwhile the representatives of the RMSG complained that they were not given the opportunity of participating in the work of the town's committee that prepares decisions, and it may also occur that the local government changes their list of Roma recommended for public works without informing them. Even if the participation of the RMSG in preparing decisions is strongly limited, town administration put the leader of the local Roma Minority Self Government in charge of organizing, controlling, and 'keeping the "Roma neighbourhood" on a leash'. At the same time, it participates in distributing the resources granted to Roma living in the segregated neighbourhood as the local government seeks its opinion before handing out assistance. They assemble the public worker brigades, but they also manage enrolments in training courses related to development applications. The chairman uses that power to reinforce his political position; he is the founding member of the local organization of the pro-government Lungo Drom, that recruits members among Roma public workers even today. At the same time he himself and the members of the RMSG are also unemployed: their employment depends on the local government. It still seems that the role of the RMSG as 'gatekeeper' is necessary also in order for the town administration to avoid coming into personal contact with the colony's inhabitants. That is at least what the story of a young Roma woman seems to prove, who asked for a personal appointment with the mayor, but when she turned up for the meeting, she found, to her utmost surprise, that the chairman of the RMSG was also present. *'When I said that I preferred not sharing my story with him, because just what authorizes him to hear my problem, she pretended to not even having heard me. (...) She [the mayor] said she*

<sup>2</sup> The erroneous nature of urban policies up to now is demonstrated by how, after we had finished our fieldwork, the candidate for Jobbik won the municipal elections, and became mayor. The previous assembly had no Jobbik members; only an independent delegate was rumoured to be supported by them. Since the municipal elections – according to the entries of local blogs and Facebook pages – authorities have stepped up control in the 'Gypsy-Town'.

*needed protection. So I say am I gonna eat you or what? So why the protection?? He [leader of RMSG] stayed, moreover, he spoke for the mayor.'*

The leaders of the RMSG – in addition to public works and the training and employment connected to development projects – also participate, or participated in organizing day and seasonal labour. One of them organizes day labourers for agricultural work: *'(...) I got people for the kind of people who had entrepreneurs' permits, and I was asked by some village people if I could bring them fifty, sixty, sometimes thirty, depending on when and what kind of work they needed done. And they asked me to bring it, and gave a negotiated wage (...) Then I realized, why should I make others rich for small change? They earned pretty good money there. So then I realized that I could also do this. And at one place, I succeeded in getting work for myself as well'* (member of RMSG). During our fieldwork, he himself was working as the foreman of a public works brigade. Another former member of the RMSG has worked at the local brickworks since the 1980s, and received an opportunity to organize work on account of his trustworthiness and contacts. *'Then we had an opportunity. We got work here, here in the brickworks; they said we should do it as an enterprise. There was an entrepreneur they weren't satisfied with. They knew we were working in that, so they handed it over to us'* (member of RMSG). The business went very well for years, *'You could make a living'*, he said modestly. The bricks were mostly used to build 'szocpol' (social housing subsidy) houses; the constructions were organized by another local Roma entrepreneur. *'It is hard to sell today, but then, adobe went very well (...) Today it is hard, hard to sell adobe. It is hard, you know, because there are no constructions like that anymore, szocpols are over'* (member of RMSG). The two entrepreneurs are relatives, and used to be the representatives of the local RMSG for a shorter or longer period; their businesses basically depend on exploiting the opportunities linked to the Gypsy-Town: here they recruit their day labourers, from here they go to work at the brickworks, to make bricks they then sell for 'szocpol' houses built in the Gypsy-Town. That is, the RMSG representatives don't just dispose over the distribution of public works and project opportunities arriving in the neighbourhood, but this is inextricably linked to their own enterprises. These businesses are special in multiple aspects; first, their activities are typically built on exploiting a single, current opportunity to its fullest, and are thus inevitably temporary; second, they are based on the labour market exploitation of families who live in the neighbourhood and who depend on them.

While the RMSG theoretically serves to represent the interests of the local Roma community, its members themselves appear as unemployed, whose employment depends on the local government. The local government maintains a balanced but not equal relationship with the RMSG's representatives; by involving them in the distribution of social transfers and public works opportunities, it delegates them responsibility, as well as conflicts arising from the scarcity of resources. Meanwhile, the local government grants a kind of gatekeeper role to the RMSG members, whose function is to keep the members and problems of the Roma community away from the town and the local government offices. Accepting the gatekeeper role presumes loyalty towards the town leadership on one hand, and on the other hand means the expropriation of institutional relationships pointing outwards to the families living in the 'Gypsy-Town'. We could say that a hierarchical chain of existential and political dependencies has taken shape, where the president and the members of RMSG are loyal towards the town leadership, but are representatives of power towards the Roma living in the segregated neighbourhood. In this case, power means at the same time disposal over the distribution of public resources, access to occasional work

opportunities arising in the neighbourhood, and total control over the articulation of interests and administrative procedures. That is, the RMSG's members can fulfil their gatekeeper role by organizing the surveillance of the neighbourhood in place of the national organizations and institutions, based on the total control of the vulnerable families living in the neighbourhood, keeping them in personal dependency, and subject to their exploitation.

## CONCLUSION

The place of our research situated on the edge of the small town and has been the dwelling place of the local Roma and non-Roma poor for decades. Previously the ethnically and socially heterogeneous neighbourhood connected to the town through different institutions and personal relationship: most of the Roma and non-Roma children attended mixed classes in the local schools in the 1970s–1980s, and Roma and non-Roma people worked together in large factories operating in the town in those decades. Due to the social and spatial mobility possibilities, means non-Roma families bought houses in the other part of the settlement and Roma and non-Roma families moved to the capital city and later, after the regime changed and again, at the turn of millennium more and more Roma families were forced to return there, the neighbourhood became an ethnically and socially homogeneous place. Recently the neighbourhood is set apart from the town by sharp boundaries, and the perception of ethnicity is spatially determined. From the perspective of the majority society this neighbourhood is socially and ethnically homogeneous and stigmatized; meanwhile, this area is home to different social groups, each with its own social and ethnic composition.

The theoretical framework of the paper was linked to Wacquant who conceptualized a ghetto as a concentrated dwelling place of marginalized social groups belonging to various ethnic minorities that has four structural elements: stigma, constraint, spatial enclosure and institutional parallelism (Wacquant 2012). The form and the composition of these elements have been changing over time and in this process the role of different organizations and institutions that structure the life of the urban poor are fundamental (Allard–Small 2013). *In my paper I presented the institutional changes that transformed the socially and ethnically heterogeneous neighbourhood into a stigmatized ghetto.* The most important institutional changes that affected Roma families negatively happened in education. The local government in collaboration with the churches initiated merging and reorganization of educational institutions, consequently most Roma children sooner or later get enrolled in a state maintained institution. The appearance of church operated primary schools represents the increasingly obvious presence of a parallel institution system in public education: well-to-do middle class non-Roma children study in church schools, while disadvantaged Roma children living in the segregated neighbourhood are confined to attending the state primary school. Public work offers more or less stable sources of income to under-qualified, long-term unemployed Roma. The current arrangement of this public employment system is regarded as a workfare type policy with the clear aim to discipline and punish poor people. The institutional parallelism appears in local public work too: the town management maintains part of the public work for the 'deserving' poor, regarding them non-Roma, who do useful work for the benefit of the town, and part of it for the 'undeserving' poor, who are almost exclusively Roma, doing 'nothing' on the visible public spaces thereby further confirming their undeserving status.

However, the penalization of poverty, creation of a second set of institutions in education and maintain racialized public works scheme serves the protection of the members of the majority from contact, and daily encounters with those living in the ghetto, and thus from the symbolic dangers that, in the eyes of the majority, are associated to ghetto dwellers. In this ghettoization process the members of Roma Minority Self Government have an important and undoubted role when collaborating with the town's leader and accept the 'gatekeeper' role. While the members of RMSG have to be loyal towards the town leadership, they are also representatives of power towards the Roma living in the stigmatized neighbourhood. The RMSG's members can fulfil their gatekeeper role by organizing the surveillance of the neighbourhood based on the total control of the vulnerable families, keeping them in personal dependency, and subject to exploitation.

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