

ROMA MARGINALIZATION AND EXCLUSION IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Comparative perspective

The “**Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Communities**” inquiry explored the economic, political, demographic, and social forces at municipal and community level which shape practices and consequences of social exclusion and potential pathways to inclusion. **Phase 2** of this research focused on a representative sample of municipalities (20–30 per country) in Hungary, Romania, and Serbia to explore basic local social services and infrastructure provisions, conditions of political participation of the Roma, and local interventions targeting Roma inclusion. This research phase relied on structured field research collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.

For the full volume resulting from this research please see Szalai, Júlia and Violetta Zentai, eds. (2014) *Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Contexts*. Budapest: Center for Policy Studies, Central European University.

This study presents the comparative findings of the second phase (Phase 2) of the “Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Communities” research project. The major objective of this phase of the research was to identify the conditions and local dynamics that produce and reproduce marginalization (and often exclusion) of Roma within the localities where they live. It was also our aim to understand those processes of inter-ethnic encounters which severely hinder individual and familial attempts to break the cycle of reproduction by forcefully applying on each case the majority’s deeply stigmatized categorizations of the Roma community. Finally, the research also aimed to reveal those rare instances where attempts were made to change the conditions and relations toward opening pathways for Roma inclusion.

Phase 2 had another equally important objective: to elaborate and test a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators in the broad areas of education, work and employment, housing and infrastructure, developmental issues and Roma socio-political participation that can provide a basis and a toolkit for the Roma communities to monitor how trends of ethno-social inequalities shape themselves locally and to identify the means at the disposal of the Roma collectives that, at least in the long run, may help to attain a more equal and more equitable distribution of resources and assets in the administrative settings (municipalities, communes) where they belong. This second objective was met by embedding Roma participation into all phases of this research project, including the preparation of the methodological design, undertaking the fieldwork, analyzing the research results, and drafting the country reports. The reactions and responses of the Roma and non-Roma interviewees and local leaders provided important lessons. These experiences showed the potentials but also the historically and structurally conditioned unevenness of shared knowledge within the Roma communities, and raised important issues about ethnic identification and recognition and the need for a “vocabulary” to express and communicate the striving of Roma for acceptance and integration both within their own ethno-cultural collective and also in inter-ethnic exchanges.

In light of these main objectives, all elements, routines and tools applied in Phase 2 were designed to serve the dual goals of revealing new information and analysis as well as establishing new procedures for future inquiries so that members of the Roma community can harness them without high-level training in social science research. The discussion below is constructed in consideration of this duality. This comparative report presents the major findings and variations across the three countries of inquiry (Hungary, Romania and Serbia) and offers some conclusions for policy-makers. It discusses the conditions and challenges associated with regular monitoring if done by those who, at the same time, are the very subjects of the relations and conditions that are to be critically supervised. By revisiting issues of recognition and representation, it also explores some key aspects of participation, “voice” and adaptability. A detailed discussion about the pros and cons of collecting personalized ethnic data, the introduction of the idea of relying on institutional estimates of ethnic profiles instead (again, with the advantages and the drawbacks of such routines), the difficulties that arise from internal divisions and conflicts in deprived Roma communities, the potentials offered by collaborative multiethnic research teams that are able to speak the language of both the majority and the minority, and the advancement of the Phase 2 toolkit to regularly monitor Roma deprivation and exclusion are all issues of key importance that require a “cross-reading” and further careful processing of our research findings and fieldwork experiences.

As will be demonstrated in the last segment of this report on Roma representation and political participation, the success of putting Roma needs on the local political agenda and claiming their due recognition in redistribution and development planning is preconditioned by a number of

important factors. Trust and cooperation within the community are the primary prerequisites towards agreeing on major goals and priorities which, in turn, require deep and accurate knowledge. In this context, the capacity of political representation is painfully restricted at present by the lack of data and a haphazard interpretation of associations and responsibilities. This lesson has some further important implications suggesting that data collection and monitoring of the facts and processes affecting the daily life of Roma requires a “language” and an agreed-upon set of tools and measures that cannot be elaborated without Roma, but that cannot be left to their sole responsibility either. A trustful, inter-ethnic understanding and mutual commitment to professional investment in equality and inclusion (or, at a minimum, to avoid marginalization and separation) are the preconditions for establishing meaningful cooperation and for guaranteeing proficiency and public usefulness in this domain.

1. Issues of visibility and identification

Phase 2 aimed to extend knowledge about the causes and manifestations of ethno-social marginalization and exclusion by bringing into the fore the *collective* components and aspects of marginalization and exclusion in their interaction with the individual and familial attributes of poverty, deprivation and discrimination. To do so, our Phase 2 inquiry focused on the settlements that had been chosen for the 2011 large-scale regional UNDP Survey on the situation of Roma¹ so that direct connections could be established between the measured attributes of the households and the community-level indicators brought up by the qualitative research. At the same time, we had two equally important requirements to meet. First, our focus on the collective aspects of marginalization/exclusion necessitated selecting communities in which Roma lived in well identifiable territorial arrangements and with a certain degree of separation from the local majority. By this requirement we implied that marginalization and exclusion of entire ethnic communities arise from collectively experienced separation and, further, ethnic separation may be preserved even if the given Roma groups have succeeded to escape from poverty. Although ethnic separation and exclusion might affect entire settlements (as in the case of the so-called “Roma villages” in the poorest corners of our countries), it is even more likely that such segregated parts form identifiable “units” comprised of poor, mostly Roma, households and that these units are recognized by the locals as distinct formations within the settlement—be it a town or a larger village. It is important to note that visibility is not a precondition: our research identified cases where the physical borders of a previously demarcated Roma/poor unit have indeed disappeared (e.g. as corollaries of certain urban renewal programs, Roma were compelled by the authorities to move out to a designated territory), but the notion of the old unit—now perhaps inhabited by impoverished non-Roma—outlived its physical presence and was still listed by local people as a living entity.

Second, we assumed that the depth and sharpness of separation/marginalization/exclusion may vary depending on the degree of access to resources and opportunities of a larger surrounding. Therefore, we aimed to map the potentials for commuting for education, work and also for accessing services within the scope of a larger unit that can be considered an organically

1 “The Situation of Roma in 12 EU Member States.” This large survey covered the new EU member countries of Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe. All three countries participated in the research.

developed “small region”² with center(s) offering better and more widespread services that are assumed to cater to the populations of a whole cluster of territories in their vicinity. The need to shed light on these collective potentials and the often severe limitations in exploiting these services led us to incorporate a range of settlements that exemplify how far Roma can capitalize on the differing sources and assets of larger surroundings.

Our attempts to meet the above aspects through a proper selection of settlements revealed certain difficulties and led to some important lessons.

First, it turned out that the UNDP samples omitted certain “white spots” in all the three countries, i.e. smaller regions that were known by local experts and the wider public to be densely populated by poor Roma communities but, in fact, turned out to have a modest proportion of Roma according to the census data (the major source of the UNDP sampling procedure). The controversy points to important dynamics. Past research in these countries identified the respective settlements as populated by one or more Roma groups that had lived there years or decades before in far larger numbers, but the ethnic profile of these localities has markedly changed in recent times. The discrepancy between the past and present indicators pointed to two phenomena that have to be considered when the collective aspects of marginalization are examined. First, the willingness or reluctance to declare one’s Roma identity is unevenly distributed. The inhabitants of settlements who endure sharp exclusion and collectively experience poverty usually face unceasing stigmatization. As such, members of such communities eventually internalize their devaluation by agreeing to a “Roma” labeling with all its—usually negative—implications and they declare their ethnic identity on the grounds of such internalization.

At the other extreme, Roma communities that have a history of traditions of inter-ethnic cohabitation (and work) in a given locality often identify their Roma ethnicity with pride and important local meanings. However, between these two extremes the identification of “Roma units” as collectively shared entities may face the dilemma of contrasting individual and collective needs. While the needs for recognition and effective representation would require a collective acceptance of Roma identity, individuals and families might find it more promising to follow certain paths of assimilation that may seem easier if one avoids ethnic identification. Therefore, the identification of “Roma units” within settlements and in larger territories is a delicate issue: such endeavors should be built on collective deliberation and the simultaneous observation of individual and collective interests. In the absence of these—as exemplified by certain units that the country research identified as having “blurred” ethnic and social boundaries—the communities themselves turn out to be weak social constructs with low levels of cohesion.

This fact should be considered as the second important manifestation of the above controversy. While settlements with a high proportion of Roma seem to be easily identifiable units when viewed from the outside, the internal structure may in fact be of deep division into distinct segments. The *socio-tours* that our research team applied as a procedure to tap into the local distinctions and divisions revealed this to be a common feature in a great number of localities.

2 In this report we use the term “small region” as distinct of the concept of “micro-region”—a customary term in planning and developmental programs. We have two reasons for the distinction. First, the clusters of towns and villages in a “small region” often consist of settlements that, according to their administrative categorization, belong to different micro-regions. Second, when we examine our “small regions” we intend to grasp interconnectedness and a certain degree of cooperation among settlements as manifested in people’s movements and, often, in their career orientations and their longer-term plans on developing new lifestyles; however, with its focus on the redistribution of resources, administrative categorization might follow different principles and comprises towns and villages across our “small regions”.

In most cases, these divisions emerged along the departing histories of “old” and “newly arrived” inhabitants, or shaped themselves by the still important and meaningful differentiations between traditional crafts, skills and patterns of inter-ethnic cooperation. Yet in other cases, socioeconomic differences—especially the differing opportunities for work—divided the Roma community further, and inhabitants of the different segments were keen to emphasize such distinctions.

These experiences have led us to reconsider what we should identify as a “Roma community”. The point of departure is how people describe their regular contacts (be these supportive or conflictual), how they draw the frame of reference within which they define their positions, and what they have in mind when asked about their group-belonging. Solidarity and mutual support are often parts of the relations within the ethnic community, but in other cases, it is disorganization and frequent clashes that characterize daily life. At any rate, it is important to note that the content of togetherness matters a lot. It seems that a low degree of solidarity within a Roma collective often becomes a serious obstacle when trying to raise recognition and increase the voice of Roma within the framework of administratively defined localities (municipalities, communes, etc.). Our research attempted to overcome this problem by acknowledging it. Phase 2 research identified as many communities as Roma themselves depicted and described with regard to the chosen clusters. While this might seem a simplistic solution when our aim was to collect new knowledge and information, it actually pointed to important differences between two large groups of local associations: the units held together by the shared experiences of stigmatization and exclusion while lacking the potentials of self-representation, on the one hand, and the local formations acting as self-reflective communities with shared identity and a degree of agreement about the common goals and the ways to represent them, on the other hand.

Our attempts to examine Roma marginalization and exclusion in the context of the larger territorial units of “small regions” provided some further important lessons. First, it turned out that the concept itself has different implications in the three countries. In Hungary, the term is in administrative use: yearly budget allocations and the distribution of EU-funds as well as certain governmental resources are channeled towards designated small regions which are officially recognized as the units of developmental planning. This categorization is especially important in localities and local clusters that are identified as “disadvantaged” or “cumulatively disadvantaged”. In Romania, the distribution of similar funds follows distinctions by larger regions, thus our “small regions” might consist of settlements that are never reached by financial support and others that enjoy distinctive attention on the part of decision-makers. Given that Serbia is not yet a member of the European Union, funding follows primarily project-driven goals in geographic clusters that often overlook even loose ties among the constituent settlements and thus cannot be interpreted as “small regions”.

These differences in the administrative structures influenced how settlements and their Roma and non-Roma inhabitants negotiated their relations with the neighboring towns and villages in the three countries. While in most cases very few signs of regional togetherness and cohesion could be identified, the reasons for this differed according to the views and hopes regarding future local development. This was true even in Hungary where lay members of the local communities hardly ever considered their belonging to a larger unit; nevertheless, they expressed general agreement that issues of such belonging have to be taken up by the elected local politicians who were entrusted to convincingly speak the language of small regions when matters of funds and budgets were the subject of discussion.

The limited use of the concept of regional cohesion and togetherness manifested itself in additional ways. Upon close inspection, neighboring villages with largely the same characteristics of well-being, quality of infrastructure, socioeconomic composition, and proportion of Roma show sharp differences in their relations to their wider surroundings. Some have lively connections with the nearby urban centers as well as with some of the surrounding villages while others show signs of stagnation and extreme separation. In this sense, it proved difficult to establish certain general characteristics of the different “small regions”. Instead, our fieldwork revealed significant differentiations of which the causes and mechanisms require further research.

Such differences proved especially important with regards to issues of development. As it seemed, the distribution of developmental funds and opportunities reflected more the “lobbying potential” of the mayor than the needs of the collective. Even in instances of extreme poverty, some villages were capable of attracting attention and funding while others were ignored. The result was that the various attempts at regional resource distribution often unwillingly contributed to a self-perpetuating increase in inequalities which could hardly be halted by the one-time injections of project-based funds.

In sum, the identification of Roma communities—especially those forming segments within settlements otherwise dominated by the majority—proved more delicate and more complicated than one would assume at first sight. The actual risk of easy identification might be an unreflective reiteration of the often prejudiced categorization of the non-Roma surrounding. In order to avoid such an undesirable outcome, it is important to approach the structuring of local societies through outreach to and feedback from both Roma and non-Roma members of the community in question. As our socio-tours revealed, such two-way approaches bring to the surface half-hidden conflicts and also demonstrate the divisions in matters of identity-formation within the Roma collective.

When looking at the relationships among the locally identified Roma segments within the more spacious surrounding of the immediate “small region”, our research revealed occurrences of setting up administrative units in such a way that lumped together settlements that in reality lacked any cohesion. This happened frequently in areas where poor villages that have become seriously deprived even from their earlier contacts in the de-industrialization process, were squeezed into one “developmental unit”. It is no surprise that such artificially constructed “units” are weak and lack the necessary capabilities of efficient interest representation and negotiating power and thus, instead of closing up, they contribute to further marginalization and exclusion. However, poverty and deprivation now appear as characteristics of the unit as an entity; this way visibility of their manifestations within the constituting settlements is greatly reduced and this leads, in turn, to a further reduction of their potentials for powerful representation.

Such experiences have two implications. On the one hand, they show that regionalization is not an innocent and purely technical process: if it lacks sufficient economic, social and political backing embedded in living contacts, as well as cooperation and solidarity among the constituting units, then it easily might become a contributor of deepening deprivation now functioning “in its own right”. On the other hand, revising the current administrative structures and articulating needed changes and corrections calls for making civil contributions and controls a regular and routinized part on all levels and in all domains of the distributional process. However, as our research shows, civil society involvement is rarely a part of the process in policy-making, planning and implementation even in “small regions” where a sense of mutual belonging is an element of

the region's self-identification and where cohesion in the constituting communities provides grounds for powerful social and political self-representation. In this context it is important to emphasize that the lack of mechanisms and arrangements of Roma presence and representation on the level of the regionalized units easily deprives the community from even those, rather weak, channels of articulating needs and lobbying that are in place on the local level. This way, paradoxically, Roma might lose the potentials to influence distribution and development even in those contexts where successful self-representation pays in access to increased funds and grants for use at the regional level. These experiences raise important questions about how one should think about issues of regional and local development and how the reconstruction of organic relationships between neighboring settlements could be fostered in order to liberate Roma from their ever intensified deprivation and tightening territorial captivity.

2. On residential segregation

The vast literature on the causes of deep and lasting Roma poverty and exclusion identifies residential segregation as one of the major sources of collective deprivation and as an important factor in the failure of individual attempts at breaking out. In its general conceptualization, segregation is seen as a primary form of discrimination and as an outcome of enforced separation originating from the sharp inequalities in the prevailing power relations between Roma and the non-Roma majority. The phenomenon is identified in three major contexts that usually work in an interactive way. It is segregation in residential relations, education and the labor market that are generally argued to construct and maintain the framework of inequalities and that themselves work as major vehicles in reproducing the prevailing disadvantages and deprivations.

At the same time, it is heuristically known that segregation is not a uniform phenomenon. In certain cases, it becomes obvious at first sight that there are drastic differences in housing and the state of the infrastructure of a village, a district, or a town, or in the conditions of two neighboring schools in the community. Other times segregation is more difficult to discern when, for example, parallel classes are organized in an otherwise "integrated" multiethnic school or in the ways that public works schemes are administered along ethnic lines. Yet in other cases, the walls between Roma and non-Roma are not recognizable in their physical reality, however, they still powerfully organize the ways of cohabitation and the division of labor—due to their strong presence in people's remembrance and the patterns of inter-ethnic encounters and local mentality.

Furthermore, the forms as well as the degree of segregation differ according to the institutional frameworks. Spatially, the phenomenon manifests itself in different guises whether the point of reference is local communities or larger units of loosely tied settlements within an administratively or economically defined territorial unit. Likewise, important differences can be identified by the forms of work and their institutional contexts in the formal and informal labor markets. The differences with regards to the framing of segregation are interrelated: collective exclusion in the emerging "Roma villages" hinders individual attempts at accessing work; at the same time, Roma enclosure into certain occupations that, at best, find their market in the locality, often becomes a serious obstacle to breaking out from the local residential ghetto.

The above considerations inspired us to delve deeper into the causes and manifestations of segregation from a range of simultaneously applied perspectives. While acknowledging the outstanding importance of residence, schooling and employment in framing the phenomenon, we were interested in additional aspects. First, by looking at the patterns of Roma residence within the larger units of “small regions” we examined whether the different collectives living in different geographical constituents of such units face similar degrees of integration or exclusion. Second, given the above discussed sensitivity of collective identification and also the supposedly differing acceptance of the “borders” between Roma and non-Roma within a given settlement, we attempted to measure the directions and the intensity of such differentiations by allowing for multiple (sometimes even contrasting) identifications of local ethnic separations. Third, by assuming that the socioeconomic structuring of the local Roma communities may take different degrees and forms of segregation, we aimed to reveal the sometimes opaque local hierarchies and their implications for Roma-Roma relations within the local societies.

Studying segregation through these different perspectives required a multiplicity of methods. While available official data on the level of the “small regions” helped to identify the internal inequalities among the constituent settlements, and while associating them to the ratios of Roma populations helped to identify spatial segregation in its territorial aspects, the ban on collecting ethnic data of individuals (which is in effect in all the three countries) hindered any closer analysis by household formations, socioeconomic conditions, educational level, and employment that would have helped to identify the social and cultural characteristics of those most affected by the considered territorial aspects of segregation. These aspects had to be revealed by qualitative methods. It was mainly our socio-tours, which followed a detailed design, and interviews in multiple sessions with key informants in the Roma communities and their non-Roma counterparts, that provided the necessary information. These methods proved efficient in giving some “living” content to the currents of segregation across settlements. Their mobilization also helped to shed light on an under-studied aspect of the phenomenon: the internal structuring of the Roma communities inducing different degrees of forceful separation within the borders of their localities.

Let us summarize the results along these different perspectives and then draw some conclusions for desegregationist policy-making.

3. Inequalities and segregating trends across the settlements within a “small region”

By looking at the ethnic composition of the settlements that make up a “small region”, our research put a question mark to the rather frequent equation between the spreading of poverty and the proportion of Roma within a given territorial unit. While the association usually proves valid in the larger contexts of administrative regions, it is important to refine the picture when smaller and supposedly more coherent units are considered. As the data show for all three countries, Roma are generally concentrated in areas where the economic indicators signal widespread poverty: in these areas the measures of economic development as well as the rates of employment and unemployment are below the national average, production is confined to traditional monocultures with a heavy concentration in agriculture, and the social indicators of

educational attainment, housing, infrastructure and mobility point to severe conditions. As the census data demonstrate, large numbers of Roma live in these regions, and their proportion has increased in all the three countries between the last two censuses.³

However, these easily identifiable and straightforward associations are no longer in place when the constituent settlements of a given “small region” are considered. First, the proportions of Roma greatly vary within these units. While the selected “small regions” are considered densely populated by Roma, the high average indices might reflect remarkable internal unevenness: the concentration of Roma in one or two villages, in contrast to very low proportions in other settlements. Such configurations were observed in all the three countries, although the reasons behind them were different: long-term and highly unequal development accompanied by sharply differing opportunities of employment and great inequalities in the standards of living in Hungary; the long-term effects of varying distances from the local centers and, in particular, deeply unequal access to transportation in certain parts of Romania; the lasting impacts of unequal industrial investment and the varying levels of developments of the physical and human infrastructure in Serbia. The highly uneven concentration of Roma in certain settlements within the “small regions” pointed toward a further implication: movement across the settlements, and/or efforts for evening out socioeconomic conditions through deliberate investments with an eye on future collective growth and development hardly ever appeared on the horizon of local policy-makers. Despite the spread of regional thinking and the built-in incentives of the European funds and grants that inspire an approach to developmental issues based on larger territorial units and with longer time frames, the cohesion that regionality presupposes rarely becomes the foundation or even a seriously considered aspect of regional-level policies. By the time the funds arrive at the place(s) of utilization, plans for cooperation and cohesion fade away and at best are considered as a mere framework for equitable distribution: the unit that policy-makers and the public conceive is still “our” own town, village, district or street—and rarely anything beyond. Besides reinforcing separation and inequality and thereby strengthening the tendencies of segregation within the “small region”, such mental restrictions in people’s approach to regionality undermine solidarity across the borders of the settlements. This is especially harmful in those cases when the concentration of Roma in one single settlement reaches a level that qualifies the given village as a “Roma-only” territorial unit. In such cases—which surfaced in all three countries—the village soon becomes a ghetto that ceases to have contact with the outer world. In such extreme occurrences of segregation, inhabitants of the “Roma-only” localities become de facto imprisoned: children get a very poor education and, on the basis of lacking knowledge, skills, the demanded behavioral routines and an education-centered orientation, they are not accepted at the schools of the neighboring towns and villages to continue their studies; a long history of unemployment and exclusion from employment have undermined the skills of adaptation on the labor market and inactivity becomes a self-sustaining fate of the adult Roma population; being cut off from access to transportation hinders any attempts at seeking work within the larger vicinity; and the widely known stigma surrounding the settlement as “dangerous” and “full of criminals” accentuates discrimination that, in turn, gives rise to efforts and attempts of further separation.

However, the emergence of “Roma-only” localities as an outcome of massive fleeing is not the only manifestation of the segregationist trends that characterize many of the “small regions”—

3 It has to be noted that the increase is partly a result of the efficient campaigns targeting Roma self-identification. Due to successful efforts, the measured proportions and indices were brought closer to what people know as characterizing the given territory and what appears as an aggregation of Roma informal identifications.

especially the poorer and more disadvantaged ones. As it turns out, a recent increase in the differences in access to transportation has increasingly become an important factor of exclusion. Here one observes clashing interests with structural implications: narrowly-defined economic considerations have led to the closing down of public transport in areas where cost-benefit indicators have shown little return. These are the very areas where marketization and privatization have led to the closure of the one-time socialist factories and where the rapid impoverishment of entire large areas has become a source of deterrence for new investments and regenerative policies and actions. For some time, access to relatively cheap transportation was practically the only hope for the affected communities. However, by drawing transportation under the regulation of the market and by decentralizing its management, public expenditures on routes and services connecting such areas have come to be viewed as “superfluous”. Preserving such critical services has proven to be a matter of powerful representation and lobbying, and considerations regarding different constellations of local needs have practically had no influence on the outcomes. The result has been that the potentials to travel and commute have been drastically restricted for the inhabitants of those villages facing the most severe unemployment and poverty.

Cutting off access to transportation has quickly become a singular source of exclusion that has been further intensified by another aspect of marketization: the steady rise of the rates and prices that poor people are unable to meet. It is hardly a surprise that it is villages with a high proportion of Roma that are hit the hardest and that bear the brunt of the upwards spiraling of collective deprivation and exclusion. It is easy to foresee the future: given that all who can—Roma and non-Roma alike—make concerted efforts to leave such settlements with the prospect for continuous decay, those who stay will soon find themselves as inhabitants of utterly excluded, newly emerging “Roma-only” villages with no hope for returning to even the conditions and the level of living of the near-past. It has to be noted in this context that improvement of transportation within and across the localities is hardly ever identified as a developmental goal. True, efforts in this direction are usually beyond the financial capacities of the region and/or the municipalities. Nevertheless, it is a painful insufficiency of “regional-level thinking” and a limited willingness for a cost-sharing based on solidarity that are equally important hindrances of countervailing and curative actions. The outcome is usually a hypocrite solution: justified by their central role in providing for large numbers of people beyond their borders, investments in transportation concentrate on the center of a “small region” and within it, serve primarily the local middle class.

The above-described forms of segregation impact Roma as inhabitants of given localities that have become segregated mainly because of their impoverished state and, relatedly, because of their lack of powerful representation. However, the true terrains of segregation through outright discrimination and the violation of citizens’ rights are the settlements themselves. Experience as well as a vast literature have shown that residential segregation within the confines of a town or a village usually leads to the emergence of clearly visible borders that separate the inhabitants along sharp differences in the conditions of housing and infrastructure. In the majority of the cases, such segregated segments evolve on the periphery or in the outskirts of the settlement or emerge as deeply impoverished slums occupying adjoining streets and squares in the middle of towns. While our research confirmed the prevalence of such formations, it revealed striking structural differences across similar manifestations, thereby pointing to great variation in the causes and mechanisms of ethnic separation and, further, raising the importance of distinguishing a particular form that not only involves detachment but actually leads to the emergence of ethnic ghettos.

4. The many causes and faces of segregation

By looking at the local manifestations of segregation through a comparative lens, our research revealed significant differences in the factors and forces that produce and reproduce the phenomenon. While the major type in all three countries is separation along ethnic lines, the actual social meanings are different. In Hungary, Roma are squeezed into one or two distinct territorial units that embody social class relations: it is primarily the depth and length of poverty that “justifies” spatial separation which, in turn, appears as a self-sustaining collective trait in the eyes of the majority. If more than one segregated unit is involved, they can usually be distinguished by further refinements as “more” or “less” impoverished as seen by the majority in terms of appearance (the state of the houses, the streets, and public spaces), the spreading of unemployment and the estimated ratio of families living on welfare assistance. In certain cases, such differentiations (and simultaneous attempts at segregation) are accentuated by recognizing ethnic origin. If Romungro, Vlach and Beash Roma are present among the inhabitants in parallel, members of the different groups tend to live in separate segments and usually avoid inter-marriage or even close neighboring.

At the same time, these different groups have developed common forms of representation. Our research identified several villages where the groups which otherwise kept a physical distance from one another, arrived at a viable compromise in finding joint candidates for local minority elections and agreed on the mechanisms for controlling the work of the elected body. Due to the strength of the socioeconomic differentiation and also to the lack of deep segmentation by language or religion (important sources of division in the two other countries, as discussed below), spatial segregation within the localities rarely resulted in the emergence of “Roma-only” segments within the confines of a given locality. Instead, non-Roma living in similar conditions and also suffering long-term unemployment and poverty tend to reside inter-mixed with Roma. Such mixing frequently results in the dissolution of ethnic distinctions by “gypsy-izing” the non-Roma poor while underscoring the importance of the ethnic borders of the segment that separate it from the spaces inhabited by the majority. Further, a relatively new divide works as an important structuring factor in regions that rapidly change their profile. Certain impoverished parts of the country where the collapse of socialist production has left behind an economic vacuum have attracted waves of Roma migration in search of cheap living and housing. In such areas the “newcomers” quickly became part of the local society though both the “old” Roma inhabitants and the local majority still consider them to be “aliens.” Typically, the “old” and the “new” groups tend to maintain their distance from one another, which is expressed by living in different segments—though both away from the majority. It is important to note that such a structuring of the local Roma community often generates serious conflicts between the two groups that can hardly be settled by relying exclusively on the groups’ own resources. At the same time, attempts to even out their conditions or stimulate inter-group cooperation are rarely incorporated into the projects targeting desegregation and as a rule, similar endeavors remain outside the scope of developmental efforts.

In the Romanian case, Roma segregation seems to follow old historical lines. Due to the rather late inclusion of Roma in socialist production, old divisions often dating back to the times of slavery seem to come through with greater strength than in Hungary. The traditional cleavages by crafts and occupations are still forceful factors of separation and inter-group conflict. Furthermore, religion, the use of language, the differing forms of family life and the distinct patterns

of patron-client relations that bind members of the different groups to the majority society are also important components of internal structuring. All of these factors and forces weaken solidarity and cohesion and put Roma into situations in which they remain defenseless in facing oppression and direct and personal discrimination on the part of the local majority. The ceasing of regular employment and the decline of even the weakest forms of labor market participation through day-labor and casual work have accentuated the internal breaks and conflicts and pushed masses of Roma into hopeless poverty.

On top of all this, those suffering the most critical conditions face eviction and unlawful expropriation of their properties—without any restitution. Such widespread local practices of the majority to “get rid” of Roma by designating new lands for living often in hygienically dangerous, dilapidated areas have produced a new group of the most disadvantaged people whose entire life has become “illegal” by having no traces of their actual belonging in formal documentation. What is more, these harsh acts against basic citizens’ rights hit entire Roma families and create insurmountable obstacles with regards to school enrollment or access to welfare assistance when mere subsistence is at stake. Furthermore, Roma with somewhat safer recognition and local acknowledgement try keep away from those who might compromise their status by their “illegality.” Like elsewhere where occupational distinctions or different religious affiliations are known as sources of Roma-Roma separation, the divides within the local Roma community work to the advantage of the better-off non-Roma and the middle class of the locality. Segregating Roma into the far-off and run-down corners of the settlement becomes an easy process concluding in ever deeper impoverishment amidst the conditions of the current economic crisis. This process is intensified by a rather new development: increased migration. Following the patterns of many non-Roma, Roma have started to emigrate in large numbers to the Western parts of the European Union (France, Italy and Germany in particular) where they hope to find a better livelihood and more humane conditions. The chains of emigration follow old networks and rely on the niche of old acquaintances. Since rich and helpful contacts and their supportive potentials are concentrated in the hands of the better-off families, their emigration implies that the village suddenly loses its most capable and most mobile members. Although the successive emigration of the entire family is always part of the plan, in reality, women and children are rarely able to follow the men, at least not in the short term which would ease the need for extra accommodation. The result is that the segregated Roma communities risk losing even the tiny protection that they have enjoyed thus far. The deepening of familial poverty, together with heightened child drop-out rates and the emergence of dubious forms of income generation, such as drug-dealing and prostitution, are the most frequent outcomes. This is an important lesson: without the necessary resources and protective shields, the impact of emigration turns upside down, and instead of serving to improve conditions, it gives rise to further disintegration and the gradual erosion of familial and communal ties. In sum, the manifold lines of cleavages and conflicts within the Roma community raise matters of ethnic cohesion and solidarity to paramount needs: without helping the (re)construction of ties and cooperation within the local communities, it remains a matter of wishful thinking to claim desegregation, recognition and equity.

Roma segregation is shaped by different patterns in Serbia. While the country is characterized by massive inequalities in economic development across the large regional units, the clusters of the “small regions” within them demonstrate rather similar conditions. The major differences appear along the different histories of modernization: the poorer regions are still dominated by agricultural production—though the local potentials show a steady decline amidst the opening up of the international flow of capital, investment and trade. It is hardly a surprise that Roma are con-

centrated in these least developed and least modernized parts of the country. At the same time, their presence in the constituent settlements shows variation according to the level of urbanization and the intensity of participation in the modernizing terrains of agricultural production: however, their access is in steady decline. The rapid segmentation of the labor market seems to work as the prime factor of segregation that induces intense internal migration of Roma toward the localities that offer relatively better livelihood and provide access to cheap housing in the informal market—though these settlements increasingly tend to reduce or cut off the services and provisions they offer due to non-recognition of changes in demand and also as a result of declining funds for maintenance.

At the same time, internal migration towards the most impoverished parts of the country is not a “Roma-only” phenomenon: great masses of the one-time socialist working class are also affected. As a consequence, the least developed settlements are the ones characterized by multi-ethnic cohabitation. The inter-ethnic relations arising within these segments are fuelled by the degree of general poverty: the forces of segregation are the weakest in units where Roma and non-Roma share similar conditions of disadvantage and deprivation. It follows that a general trend proves to be sharpest in Serbia: the intensity of segregation grows by the degree of urbanization and economic development. This is demonstrated by the apparent inequalities within the “small regions”: Roma find somewhat better living in the centers, while suffer increased discrimination and face unceasing attempts of the local majority at their ghetto-like segregation; at the same time, their living conditions are deeply impoverished in the adjoining villages, while the local relationships between them and the non-Roma inhabitants imply a sense of solidarity based on shared experiences of destitution and marginalization.

Ways out of these traps include moving out of the ghetto and, if possible, emigrating. However, the current economic crisis has put an end to these two forms of mobilization: the resources required for moving have been fading away, and unlike in Romania, the potentials for migration have steadily declined. In sum, it seems that impoverishment in a poor country is the most important factor behind the prevailing sharp ethnic inequalities. In light of the processes that it has generated, differences in language use, religion, and culture seem to have only secondary importance in inducing further internal stratification.

By looking at the above presented variations of residential segregation within and across countries, one can conclude that attributing the phenomenon simply to widespread discrimination on the part of the majorities would be an oversimplification. While different forms of discrimination against Roma are always present in the background, the prejudiced and humiliating attitudes themselves would not be enough to make segregation a *structural feature* of how localities and communities are organized. As noted, discriminatory tendencies in face-to-face relations need to be backed by power to become the vehicles of collective separation and ultimate segregation along ethnic lines. True, ethnic distinctions resulting in inequalities of the prevailing local power relations are usually part of the story: as a rule, the means and the potentials of control over access to services and provisions, as well as over redistribution and development, tend to be consolidated in the hands of the non-Roma majority. The fragmentary involvement of a few Roma representatives in the local administration does little to change such imbalances. Furthermore, one can assume that, in principle, it should not be a matter of ethnic belonging when it comes to deriving policies for a general betterment of living and Roma inclusion. Hence, even considering the local power relations proves inadequate in finding exhaustive explanations for the practices of Roma segregation that apparently work as an iron rule across localities and countries.

In light of these considerations, it seems necessary to put the issue of local residential segregation into a larger context and examine those relationships and processes in society-at-large that, at present, leave little room for countervailing policies and actions within the meso-level communities of the “small regions” and the immediate settlements. Such an overview is all the more important because of the conclusions one can draw as to the potential intermediate actions in support of desegregation which presuppose certain large-scale changes and measures for backing the arising local initiatives.

5. Considerations for policy-making toward desegregation

With regard to the large-scale changes, three crucial factors have to be mentioned. The first is the rapid regional/territorial polarization of impoverishment that has characterized the process of post-socialist transformation in all of our three countries (and across the whole post-socialist region). Such polarization partly resulted from marketization: backed by neo-liberal incentives and measures, the flows of capital and investment targeted the best developed areas while abandoning more underdeveloped regions. Parallel to this process, the distribution of work and of the ever-shrinking employment opportunities has become highly unequal and has manifested itself across entire regions suffering from high unemployment, widespread inactivity and massive poverty. Since these outcomes were rarely countervailed by anti-poverty measures and policies to maintain a certain degree of livelihood on universal grounds, the formation of segregated pockets of poverty was an unavoidable outcome. In this context, the concentration of Roma appears as the problem of the poorest among the poor: ethnic segregation can be viewed as a consequence rather than a cause.

The second important factor behind ethnic segregation can be identified in the changing patterns of self-defense against the losses of transformation that the shaken one-time middle class has worked out and has developed to widely-applied attitudinal and behavioral routines. Since the processes of economic transformation implied an increase in insecurity well beyond those layers of society that were directly hit by unemployment, attempts at reconstructing one’s social standing and earlier level of living have generated sharp competition and induced tendencies for “private accumulation at all costs” on the part of the vast social strata permanently fearing impoverishment and a downward turn in position and livelihood. The transformation of the systems of social security and a wide range of governmental measures in social policy aimed to maintain tranquility and prevent social unrest by quickly breaking down the earlier prevailing universal schemes of distribution and by introducing reforms clearly favoring the middle class. Furthermore, such policies tacitly accepted attempts of the non-poor and nearly-poor to re-establish the clear divides between the majority and the truly poor minority by privatizing housing, infrastructure provisions and certain public services as well as by permitting enforced separation in the local residential and institutional relations. This way segregation as a source of status maintenance and self-esteem became a shared interest of large social groups that enjoyed state support in all attempts to distinguish themselves through squeezing out Roma and the poor from the earlier shared spaces. Examples of status-driven struggles for separation can be found in all domains of everyday life. The prime manifestation is the widespread “white flight” in education that has concluded in the emergence of a great number of ghettoized Roma schools and

classes in all three countries; likewise, the separation of Roma workers in employment and public work programs has often been driven by a wish to keep apart different status groups behind the veil of professional and technical considerations. Similar traces of forceful separation have been generated by the sharply unequal distribution of developmental and urban renewal funds to upgrade local infrastructure in middle-class-dominated segments while allowing for prolonged spontaneous degeneration in quarters inhabited by Roma and the truly poor.

The third significant all-societal factor of Roma residential segregation is intersectionality that has gained a “convenient playground” amidst the processes of decentralization. Since decentralization has been an important driver of reshuffling public administration and reforming education, while it also framed the transformation of the local labor markets, the interplay among these developments has taken place largely within smaller regional units and, simultaneously, it has become more or less invisible from a macro-level perspective. The decentralized framing of the intersecting inequalities has led to the personification of poverty and to the spreading of ideologies of “non-deservingness” by which the reasons for extreme forms of poverty among Roma became identified with behavioral and cultural traits. On the ground of such shifts in reasoning, Roma marginalization has appeared as a “just” reaction and has invoked local actions to be applied for the entire community. In this context, residential segregation seemed both necessary and useful. It is “necessary” because of the cleavages in culture and habits, and it is “useful” because in its enclosure, the Roma community can maintain its “collective traits” and practice its collective routines—and all of this can happen in the name of autonomy and collective “rights”.

These briefly introduced large-scale factors behind Roma segregation carry some important implications. While the outlining of a complex program for targeting the phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to underline that, given its macro-social embedding, little can be done to effectively promote desegregation exclusively at the local level of policy-making, even if we broaden the meaning of “local” to include a range of settlements and their clustering into “small regions”. As the above implies, a key matter for halting segregation is a deep change in the way in which the middle class relates to Roma. This, in turn, requires stabilization and a vast improvement in the currently insecure and downward-pointing positions of large groups of families and households. However paradoxical it may sound, in this sense, the clue to turning the tide of local segregation calls for reforms in education, employment, and welfare to support these groups of the middle class in order to reduce their interest in distinguishing themselves through segregation against those occupying the lowest positions in the social hierarchy.

Further macro-level prerequisites towards local desegregation involve a thorough rethinking of universalism that considers equality and equity in meeting basic rights a foundation of redistribution and policy-making in welfare. Against this background, lessons of decentralization point toward the need of redrawing the boundaries between the central and local constituents of education, employment and social policy. While re-centralization may bring about new risks of authoritarian tendencies and a top-down management of public affairs, the reformulation of state responsibilities toward the entirety of the citizenry seems to be a prime concern for developing local policies of inclusion. Such a reformulation seems to be needed in all three countries, regardless of the actual division between the central and local organs of public administration. As our research revealed, even if education, labor and redistribution are administered in a top-down manner—as in Serbia and, to a lesser degree, in Romania—local currents and interests find ways to translate the central regulations into divisions and institutional arrangements according

to the needs of those with influence and power. It is not difficult to see that it is the weakness of universal rights and norms that makes such transformations easy regardless of the actual technical routines of governance.

While the above may imply that local attempts at desegregation have to face strong limitations without being backed and supported by macro-level laws and regulations, the results of our research do, in fact, suggest some scope for action.

First, our findings point to the need to understand residential segregation in broad spatial terms. As indicated above, segregation affects Roma to varying degrees even within a reasonably coherent “small region”. It follows that policies for desegregation should embrace whole clusters of settlements by considering the tendencies and potentials of Roma movement within their confines and beyond. Designing policies and actions solely within the rather static bureaucratic boundaries of administrative units may even deepen the territorial inequalities and further marginalize Roma in the most vulnerable conditions.

Second, facing the rich arsenal of factors and causes inducing forms of segregation that appear on the surface as similar, calls for an adjustment of desegregation policies to reflect local specificities. Recognition of the differences should be expressed in the diversity of actions. Hence, policies addressing the inequalities of socioeconomic conditions and their spiraling toward separation should mobilize measures to redistribute local assets and welfare to reducing inequalities in livelihood. Such policies will certainly differ from those in which the key issue is to establish (revitalize) local production through investment and state-driven actions for job-creation. Yet in other cases, recognition of Roma skills and crafts might lead to attempts at desegregation by invigorating local markets and forms of Roma-non-Roma cooperation.

Third, as our findings indicate, conflicts between different Roma groups related to traditions, language and religion (as in Hungary and Romania) or generated by political divisions (as in Serbia) prove to become high-risk sources of segregation that, in turn, easily block any attempts of collective action and self-protection. At the same time, low levels of cohesion, weak self-representation and failures in attaining recognition for the entire Roma community intensify the defenselessness and put the collective at the mercy of the deeply prejudiced majority. In light of this, it seems that reconstructing trust, cooperation and cohesion within the ethnic community should be a primary step to enable all other desegregation actions.

Fourth, by considering intersectionality as an important component of deepening residential segregation and surrounding it with an endless reproduction of low levels of education and marginality in labor force participation, we should emphasize the necessity of local (“small-regional”) programs and actions aiming to break up the interplay of factors pointing toward the same directions of separation and exclusion. In practical terms this means that policies of desegregation should be rooted in a design that synchronizes actions across areas of housing/infrastructure, education and employment. Such policies require a good deal of flexibility in order to cut through bureaucratic boundaries between these three areas. However, it is important to underline that attaining flexibility is not simply a matter of how local administration is organized. Flexibility is rather a practical adjustment to the conceptualization of poverty, exclusion and ethnic segregation that are recognized to be caused by intersecting forces and processes in various domains, and that therefore should be mitigated by compound measures and actions. Such an understanding and converting its ramifications into local-level policies expands the circle of potential actors as well. The elaboration of powerful measures and actions implies a bottom-up

involvement of civil participants and the representation of all important social groups within the locality that might contribute toward such an innovative approach. While civil participation in local development is a precondition for successful interventions, it is of profound structural need with regards to planning and attaining desegregation.

Finally, our inquiry into the causes and faces of segregation revealed the importance of churches and Roma NGOs in mitigating the problem. As it turns out, certain municipalities in certain segments of our three countries acknowledged the role of civil and church actors in this regard. However, the recognition of non-governmental efforts often implies a tendency of shifting the burdens and responsibilities toward them, this way tacitly “liberating” the municipality from its tasks and duties with regard to the poor, and moreover, with regard to the segregated Roma communities. These developments call for some caution as well as some control in order to stop the advancement of “decentralization” in instances where it results in the further obfuscation of the “Roma issue”. While the involvement of the churches and NGOs is necessary for expanding civil participation and making these entities the regular actors of agency, protection and service provision, their engagement should be predicated on clear divisions and accurate circumspection of the respective tasks and duties in a way that does not allow for transgressing the boundaries that are customarily drawn between the state and non-state agencies in administering the “normal” routines in the case of the non-Roma majority and also with regards to macro-level governance. Through multi-sided deliberations about tasks and responsibilities, while avidly working to improve the conditions of living of the Roma community, the civil sector can also become a spontaneously evolving agent to help raise Roma recognition, whereby the chances for elevating the “Roma issue” to the level of local politics might substantially increase. We return to some further implications of these developments below when discussing matters of Roma participation in public affairs and politics.

6. Education and employment: some new insights

According to a rarely experienced, broad consensus among scholars, practitioners, policy-makers and Roma representatives, education and employment are the two major domains where the immediate sources of producing and reproducing the collective marginalization and exclusion of Roma can be identified. It is argued that low levels of education passed from one generation to the next hinder proper inclusion by making entrance to the labor market near to impossible: amidst the conditions of an increasing demand for high levels of knowledge and skills, low-educated Roma cannot keep pace with the heated competition for available positions, while their exclusion from the organized world of labor undermines any attempt for mobility and integration. Further, Roma exclusion from employment deprives members of the community from the very basis of social participation, subverts individual and collective recognition, breaks down any attempts at organized representation through the customary forms of workplace-based trade unions and professional associations, and serves as the major source of perpetuating high levels of poverty.

While these associations are widely acknowledged, there is less consensus concerning the factors, forces and processes that maintain them. Structural, institutional, cultural and behavioral frameworks have been in place to provide explanations but rarely have these attempts been applied

in a synchronized way, and even fewer efforts have been made to describe their intersectionality. By taking into consideration the richness and also the controversies of the knowledge about the exclusionary trends in education and employment, we designed the fieldwork in schools and in (or around) workplaces by implicitly relying on already available knowledge and concentrating on the least studied and/or most debated aspects to reveal the mechanisms of intersectionality. As for education, these attempts led us to look at schools as institutions with their own interests and routines, and to focus on the interplay between the above introduced, highly varying forms of residential and territorial segregation and the restrictive mechanisms of institutional segregation. Being aware of the recent trends of decentralization in education in all the three countries, it was also our aim to reveal the locally evolving, varied forms of “professionalizing” segregation in schooling by creating highly ethnicized categories of disadvantage that then translate into “disqualifying” Roma students as poor performers and as incapable participants. In addition to placing the disadvantaged situation of Roma children and youth into the broader context of ongoing changes in education as part of our countries’ post-socialist adaptation, we also intended to contribute to the widespread debate surrounding school segregation that is often seen in black-and-white terms either as a direct product of the residential conditions or as an “independent” terrain of discrimination driven by majority prejudices and incentives.

With regard to employment, we intended to look beyond the well-known correlations between low levels of education and training among Roma on the one hand, and their reduced employability amidst the drastically changed conditions of post-socialist economies on the other hand. Through a closer observation of the workplaces and the recently launched public work schemes we aimed to reveal how Roma employment fits or fails to fit the apparently “technocratic” considerations of employers (be they public or private) and how these considerations have been assessed by Roma themselves. Finally, conceptualizing our research in the spatial framework of “small regions” allowed us to look at some rarely studied associations between education and employment. This way the study revealed how local economic interests directly influence the contents and orientations of streaming and tracking in secondary education and how the conflicts of de-industrialization and the challenges of market adaptation shape vocational training in various, hidden and overt, ways so that the training programs they provide often better meet the trainers’ needs for safe employment than the trainees’ interests with regard to their future employability. Furthermore, the concurrent studying of the respective actors of education and employment brought up important differences with regard to the “languages of ethnic distinction” by pointing to a widespread disinterest in the “Roma question” among employers, while emotionally driven attempts to “blame the victim” in a great number of schools and educational units of vocational training.

Let us start with the overview of the main comparative findings in education.

Ethnic/racial inequalities, the restriction of Roma educational opportunities, and school segregation as a violation of human rights were voiced as “hot topics” in the pre-accession negotiations in Hungary and Romania, and in a similar way are thoroughly monitored by Brussels as indicators of Serbia’s true commitment towards “Europeanization”. In parallel to Brussels’ call for attaining meaningful changes toward Roma inclusion, education has also become the rallying point of civil activism: a great number of Roma and committed non-Roma NGOs have provided strong advocacy and/or innovative new services to help reduce Roma disadvantages through intensified assistance in the forms of after-school provisions, training programs, the involvement of parents on a community basis, and—if needed—by bringing cases of Roma exclusion to court.

Apparently, the unceasing efforts over the past twenty years aimed at keeping Roma educational disadvantages and marginalization on the political agenda have had an impact: the harshest forms of segregation—first of all, the earlier widespread practices of placing Roma children into special schools for the mentally ill—have become unacceptable, and the respective governments had to introduce a set of measures to prevent against such routines if for no other reasons than to save their international reputation; further, local educational administrations, school principals and teachers have started to re-conceptualize ethnic disadvantages and to engage in applying new curricula and new teaching methods for improving Roma students' performance; moreover, Roma educational failures have been framed in the public discourse in a way that distinctively differs from how causes of Roma poverty or welfare dependency are presented by emphasizing the deeper economic, social and institutional associations undergirding the problem.

Our fieldwork revealed certain important traces of these developments. The recent closure of a great number of special schools was recorded in all three countries. Representatives of the local administration and the school principals we interviewed listed a range of actions they are taking to reduce Roma segregation by redefining the catchment areas of the local primary schools; by introducing inter-cultural lessons as part of the curriculum; by employing teaching assistants to provide personalized teaching and to act as “mediators” between the schools and Roma families; and by seeking cooperation with the local Roma NGOs to establish after-school programs for Roma children.

However, our research demonstrates that these positive developments have proven ineffective at reducing or halting segregation: just as a chameleon changes color, Roma segregation seems to disappear in one form but immediately reappear in another. The case of the above-mentioned widespread closure of local special schools is a clear example of this point. Demonstrating the delayed arrival of the notions of inclusive education from the Anglo-Saxon world, this process was accompanied by the introduction of a new category of children with “special educational needs” (SEN) that erased the sharp distinction between the physical disabilities and learning difficulties due to social and familial conditions and thereby opened the door for the inclusion of Roma children in “normal” surroundings. However, being an SEN student rapidly became a euphemism for being distinguished as “inept” and thus deserving special treatment through separation. It follows that Roma find themselves yet again segregated, though the manifestations of this phenomenon significantly differ across the three countries.

In Hungary, “old” special school attendees (and their younger siblings entering school today) quickly became redefined en masse. However, many schools cannot cope with the increased needs for personalized curricula and instruction, and by recognizing the necessity of “special treatment”, they organize “correctional-classes” for the SEN children –the majority of whom are Roma. This way intra-school Roma segregation replaces the earlier regime of inter-school segregation. Not surprisingly, the consequences are more or less the same: SEN children rarely have the chance to become “ordinary” students in “ordinary” classes and, even if they do, given the low pace and poor quality of their education, they soon end up among those whose low performance qualifies for class repetition, or they give up and drop out of school.

In Romania, a similar process of “reclassifying” Roma children as SEN students has been accompanied by extending the network of Roma teaching assistants to help Roma children and their families. However, the new network has quickly become a source of segregation: teachers usually do not regard the teaching assistants as equals and try to “ghettoize” them within the school and “gypsy-ize” them in the neighborhood. The constraints of the new provisions are signaled by a

significant increase in the proportion of dropouts from primary education (after years of steady increase, the ratio grew to 17.5 percent by early 2014⁴) and a steep rise of the number of the children of Roma internal migrants who are excluded from regular education because they lack proper documentation (something that the “special schools” tended not to care about).

Serbia provides yet another case. Although the new law on education (2009) urges inclusive measures and calls for the closing down of special schools, the pace of actual change is very slow. Such schools still operate across the country with no less than a third of their student body being of Roma origin. Reclassifying these children as SEN students is more an exception than a rule. However, even those formally registered in “ordinary” primary schools remain segregated in “special-teaching” classes or study groups. Furthermore, the requested health certificates to demonstrate the “coping capacities” of the child and the family exclude many Roma children from entering the mainstream system: having no or limited access to healthcare and lacking the knowledge of how to collect the necessary documentation serve as deterrents and barriers to entry. Moreover, the flows of in-country migration as well as international emigration produce a pool of Roma children in limbo who easily become “forgotten” by the educational authorities or fall through the cracks of the school system. In sum, reforming education has brought about worrisome results thus far: one-third of Roma children of compulsory-education age do not attend school, and among those who do, dropout rates are still persistently high (around 13 percent according to UNICEF), teachers complain that the upper classes of primary schools are full of hardly cooperating and often revolting overage Roma boys and girls, while expert estimates signal a decrease of the already low ratio of Roma who continue schooling on the secondary level.⁵

The above three variants of the responses that schools have given to governmental efforts to substitute the ill-famed special schools with more flexible and more inclusive services renders an important lesson: if institutional reforms affect only one aspect of education, they may have the unintended result of introducing even deeper segregation and sharper alienation of Roma in mainstream education.

The second lesson concerns the schools: it seems that educational institutions operate under the heavy pressure of majority “needs” for maintaining strict ethnic borders. In this sense, the structural forces creating hierarchies and segmentation in education along the principles of status and merit become powerfully accentuated by the individual attempts of families for drawing, maintaining and framing—in an institutionalized way—the borders that separate them from those at the bottom: Roma and the truly poor. Amidst these conditions, the decentralized system is practically incapable of fulfilling the desired task of inclusive education. Moreover, schools find themselves facing vast resistance from non-Roma parents who respond by fleeing, thereby further intensifying segregation. Of course, none of this implies that attempts towards inclusive education are in vain. However, the experiences of the past decade call for a wider embedding of the educational reforms into more comprehensive policies and measures targeting Roma segregation across and within schools as an organic part of ameliorating the troubled inter-ethnic relationships in society-at-large. Welfare measures for reducing poverty and steps taken to attain equal citizenship rights for Roma may be key elements of such a large-scale effort. Without them, local initiatives may rapidly wane or result in an unintended aggrandizement of the problem—as demonstrated by the failures of the above introduced three examples.

4 See the statistics published by the UNICEF Country Office, Romania.

5 Roma Education Fund: Advancing Education of Roma in Serbia. Roma Education Fund, 2007.

Of course, qualifying children as “mentally inept” or in need of “special education” because of learning difficulties, behavioral problems, disadvantages in terms of poverty, or simply because of their presupposed “otherness” due to Roma origin are not the only forms of educational segregation. Our methodology for data-collection in all educational units (primary, secondary and vocational schools) within the “small region” allowed us to examine the various forms of forceful (or sometimes spontaneous) ethnic separation. It also provided useful tools to reveal the cumulative effects of interplay between the diverse manifestations and it helped us to follow the paths and the dynamics of segregation across and within settlements, as well as across and within schools. The rich data collection partly confirms certain rather well-known associations, but also broadens the picture by uncovering deep-seated interests behind the segregating trends in vocational training and by exposing the relatively new phenomenon of “Roma flight” as a personal strategy for assimilation similar to patterns of “white flight”. Moreover, our data provide important additions about how residential and educational segregation accentuate each other’s impact and how their multiplied forces push Roma children and families toward exclusion. But they also show that school segregation is a phenomenon “in its own right”: the sharpest forms appear in schools that, at first sight, seem to be integrated on multicultural principles, but that actually work along strictly defined ethnic borderlines between parallel classes and by applying practices of allegedly “blind” student placement according to giftedness and performance.

In this vein, our data demonstrate the major types of Roma educational segregation as identified by a range of recent studies that also underscore the difference in their formations according to the various types of settlements. In smaller villages, which often have a single primary school, the concentration of Roma is a near-automatic consequence of residential segregation; however, the process is made worse by “white flight” as well as of the exodus of better-off and/or upward-striving Roma families. As discussed earlier, many of these villages are over-populated by destitute Roma families. However, when better-off Roma and non-Roma flee in order to provide their children with a better education it practically beheads the local society of children and youth who are caught in the severely abandoned, ghetto-like, “Roma-only” school as the only option left behind. The road does not lead anywhere from here: being aware of their hopeless situation, children usually do not even make a try to approach a secondary school or to apply to a fashionable, mainstream vocational school with a reputation of providing good access to employment afterwards.

The urban forms of ethnic segregation are no less drastic and harmful—though they are often less visible. As a rule, early streaming (in primary education, but with an eye to the successful continuation on the secondary level) leads to the establishment of “meritocratic” classes apart from the “general” ones—where Roma students find themselves in great numbers. The latter provide less knowledge and children are usually taught by teachers who consider it a punishment and a loss in reputation to work with poor and Roma children “who never will succeed in life”. In other cases, Roma students are separated in physical terms as well: if the school functions on different sites, it will be them who are placed in buildings often lacking even basic infrastructure and facilities. This is all in addition to the still prevailing practice of many local educational authorities and schools defining (and redefining) school districts in ways that keep Roma away from the good schools and “collects” them in designated educational units that quickly become the urban counterparts of the “Roma-only” schools of the villages. The consequences are well-known: dropout rates and the proportions of pupils in home-schooling with very limited educational content are three to four times higher among Roma children than even among their disadvantaged peers from the majority. The hardly correctible result is also known: the proportion of children who attempt to continue on at a secondary school is around 50 percent (in all the three countries);

moreover, as the principals of these institutions keep noting, the majority leaves behind schooling by the end of the first grade.

The picture is not better at the vocational schools. Roma applicants rarely join the “elegant” and popular institutions which provide students with modern skills; rather, they are oriented toward a few designated units and classes that offer old qualifications with no hope for ever using them anywhere. However, Roma teenagers are painfully “needed” in these latter types of vocational training: without them the institutions would be closed down despite their usefulness to provide employment for the one-time workers and foremen of heavy industry and mining who had succeeded to “invent” teaching in such schools as a way of escaping unemployment and who are successfully lobbying year after year for the preservation of these outdated institutions. The needs of Roma youth apparently do not matter. It is then no surprise that only one-third of Roma complete their studies in these vocational schools. The majority leave school behind and give up all aspirations of obtaining a certificate that demonstrates employability in certain domains of the economy.

As our interviews with the directors of a number of vocational schools and with local Roma leaders revealed, although reforming vocational training and bringing it up to the requirements of a modern market economy has long been on the agenda of the respective governments, it appears as more rhetoric than reality. Viewed from the local perspective, the permanent reshuffling induces widespread insecurity and the ultimate collapse of the one-time system of apprenticeship (as recorded at all our sites)—this way even those young people who stay on, finally leave the training without the minimally required professional experience and thus find themselves among those who start adulthood by being put immediately on the list of unemployed. In sum, vocational training in its current form is an extended form of the educational segregation of Roma which directly leads to marginalization and exclusion.

The gap between the “proper” secondary schools and the institutions of vocational training has been further deepened by local-level developments funded largely by European investments. As our data show, such grants have been used primarily to refurbish schools and equip them with modern IT-technologies. However, vocational schools that are often administered solely or jointly by different industrial boards have been left out partly due to the fact that they are tacitly acknowledged as dead-end units of secondary-level education, and partly because they fall through the cracks of improper coordination between the different bureaucracies. It follows that any attempts at their modernization and integration into the school system have been left to “civil initiatives” providing temporary training programs (without adjoining educational and cultural services) that quickly die out after the expiration of the grants and that are too narrow and too limited in scope to provide an alternative path for labor market entrance. At the same time, the burgeoning of such short-term training courses creates the impression of “reforming” the system by engaging increasingly in cooperation between the state and civil society, which then makes it reasonable to drop vocational training from the crowded basket of competing needs for EU- and governmental investments. As a result, there is an ever-growing distance between vocational and mainstream schools in secondary education, and Roma are the primary losers of the structural constraints that do not allow for modernization or better adjustment of these schools to the challenges of the market.

The troubled state of vocational training and its ever more pronounced functioning as a path of exclusion for Roma youth (with rather similar causes and manifestations in our three countries) leads us to the issue of work and employment as the second area where “self-evident” arguments

are frequently applied to explain ethnic (and ethnicized) marginalization as the “natural” and “unalterable” condition in the long and painful process of the post-socialist transformation.

Phase 2 research in this domain recognized that, unlike with regards to education, detailed knowledge about Roma employment and, moreover, the forms of work that Roma are engaged in, is painfully missing. Although macro-level analyses about unemployment (and its associations with gender, age, level of education, and regional economic indicators) provide important information that acknowledges Roma disadvantages in employment, data are scarce about local variations, and even less is known in comparative terms about statistical, institutional and face-to-face discrimination. By referring to the sensitive character of data on ethnic identity, the labor surveys regularly managed by the national statistical offices in our countries refuse to take stock of the apparently increasing ethnic inequalities in access to employment. However, two distinct problems seem to be mixed up here: while sensitivity is rightly observed concerning individual-level ethnic data, there is great need for data on the institutional level, i.e. on the ethnic profile of employment in different branches of the economy and at different firms. This knowledge would be all the more important for better targeting: Roma advocacy groups urge this in order to better focus on local and regional development programs and project funding that together assist Roma to (re)enter the field of organized labor, which potentially constitutes the most important path for turning around the otherwise unstoppable trend of exclusion. However, the lack of precise knowledge and data dampens their voice. Cries of the majority that Roma are “incapable” to work effectively prove loudest in the debate.

Given the above-stated challenges, we designed the fieldwork on employment and labor by experimenting with a new methodology that was inspired to a large extent by the vast experience of institutional data collection in education. In a similar manner, we agreed to approach the “principal figures” at each firm as responsible managers of the local employment policy to directly request sensitive data on the ethnic composition of the staff, the typical occupations they offer and the positions filled by employees of different ethnic backgrounds. In doing so we not only aimed to get the necessary data but also to monitor their views, attitudes, explanations and plans concerning the local employment/non-employment of Roma.⁶ These short interviews were complemented by similarly structured meetings with local Roma representatives whom we asked to characterize each firm in our sample and also to provide a detailed map of the overall employment and labor situation in their Roma community.

Even with the time constraints of the fieldwork, this applied methodology proved to be disproportionately burdening and time- and energy-consuming (and this experience suggests it be made simpler for the purposes of regular monitoring in the future). Nevertheless, the research results revealed useful findings that justified the designed tools and methods. One of the most important realizations was the employers’ willingness to enter a discourse about Roma—despite the fact that “publicly” most of them demonstrated unawareness and disinterest in the subject. To be sure, many among the smaller private entrepreneurs refused our request for an interview (the rate of refusal was exceptionally high in certain parts of Romania)—but this is usually the case due to their exceedingly long and busy working hours and their intense daily managerial engagement. In other words, refusal was less attributable to the topic than to the lack of time for “wasteful” academic encounters. However, the majority were ready to provide the exact number

6 The sample of the workplaces was drawn from the registry: public and private employers employing at least five persons were approached.

of Roma among their employees—which in itself indicates the relevance of the ethnic dimension when discussing work and employability. At the same time, our local Roma informants often could refer only to general impressions but were without any knowledge about the internal workings of the individual firms. Such discrepancies in factual information between those who, at least in principle, should be partners in negotiating conflicting interests signals that, unlike with regards to education, Roma exclusion from the world of organized labor has not yet entered the public consciousness, let alone the proper political formulation of the problem and a generally understood vocabulary for its public discussion. Instead, the fieldwork revealed virulent prejudices and stubborn refusals of the idea of institutional responsibilities in segregating tendencies in employment and a decline in readiness to make a trial by temporarily employing one or two Roma.

However, this last characterization has to be qualified. Despite the dominance of negative attitudes, our interviewees also experienced the opposite. At some firms, employers spoke about their long tradition of contracting Roma (these traditions often dated back to practices and networks during socialist times that somehow “survived” the changes in ownership or even in profile). Other entrepreneurs and managers provided elaborated arguments in favor of deliberate color-blindness and expressed their commitment to protect all their workers against discrimination and racism. In sum, the picture proved to be fragmented and controversial, but it contained the seeds of making Roma exclusion from work a political issue in which a significant portion of the “feared” and “blamed” employers can offer solidarity and cooperation.

The actual data on Roma employment indicate severe segmentation of the local labor markets and sharp exclusion from access to work. While the employers explain the dramatic conditions that Roma face by referring to their low levels of education and their lack of skills and experience in the routines of production and cooperation (due to decades of being unemployed), the details of their accounts and those of the Roma representatives reveal a more complex situation. As it turns out, the severe limitation hindering Roma to commute within a larger territorial unit is perhaps an even more important factor than their gaps in knowledge and skills: this is especially clear when we consider that a wide range of recently launched municipal and civil programs for adult education and retraining have targeted Roma in all the three countries, although such efforts have not resulted in any meaningful impact on their employment. Upon closer inspection, it turned out that most of them are too poor to spend money travelling to seek work outside the village or the small town where they live and, as such, they remain trapped in the immediate locality and their newly acquired knowledge ultimately proves to be useless.

However, some of the entrepreneurs in the larger vicinity find a solution to tackle the obstacle of spatial movement by organizing informal transportation for Roma to their places of work. Their knowledge and skills suddenly appear useful if no contract, no social security contribution, and no spending on hygiene and protection are offered. In these instances the Roma workers in their defenseless and often desperate situation have no option other than to accept the humiliating conditions for the sake of earning some meager livelihood. Our data confirm that Roma work long hours and very hard: they constantly seek the opportunity to be accepted—if for no more than a few days of engagement—while the tacit consensus about their poor “capabilities” pushes them deeper and deeper into informality whereby all their efforts remain invisible to the wider public. This way the widespread violation of basic human rights (e.g., the right to free movement, the right to live and work in healthy conditions, the right to organize and being organized, etc.) enjoys broad approval and is justified by the rarely questioned general conviction that “Roma do not like to work, instead, they constantly seek support from public funds that ‘we’ pay for.”

This broad consensus backs the public work programs that have been launched throughout the three countries. Although the regulations vary from country to country, the principles are the same and manifest a particular understanding of the notion of “workfare” that has been imported from the West. While the initial models regard incentives for work through “activating programs” as a way of getting the long-term unemployed back to employability by upholding their basic human rights and do not question their need for support through provisions in welfare, the post-socialist adaptation seems to rely on different principles. The respective programs concentrate on “economizing” and on disciplining the long-term unemployed (Roma in the first place) at the cost of questioning their basic human rights (e.g. personal freedom of mobility or choice) and mandating forced participation in dictated forms of work in direct exchange for their rights for support and welfare. However, the latter association is applied in different degrees in the three countries. While unconditional acceptance of the work on offer has been made a precondition to access welfare benefits in Hungary, and while public work is widely considered a way of reentering the formal labor market via employment in Romania, the respective arrangements are seen as alternatives for contracting day-labor in agriculture and construction in Serbia and, as such, they are applied with remarkable restriction for providing alternative pathways for the unemployed.

Our data show that, despite their diverse goals, the locally launched and administered public work programs provide clear examples of exclusion, even “ghettoization”, in all three countries. The pathways of Roma (and Roma women in particular) participating in such schemes never led to “true” employment, instead they resulted in even more “disciplined” and “grateful” queuing up for assistance and/or repeated entrance to the municipal office and even more willingness to accept *any* form of work in the informal domain. As examples of certain villages and smaller communes in Romania and Serbia show, the mayors and the local elite play a leading role in turning placement on a public work scheme into a means of personal reward and punishment. Given the limited funds and the restrictions on the number of employees, their right to distribute the opportunities becomes a source of harsh ruling—much the same way the old vassalage system functioned some two-hundred years ago. Amidst their excessive defenselessness and the risk of losing their sources of basic subsistence, Roma (and non-Roma in similar situations) not only accept these conditions, but even *compete* with each other. Their turning against each other brings about an additional advantage for the local majorities: it is easy to blame Roma (and the non-Roma in excessively ethnicized contexts) as troublemakers and thus avoid facing the unpleasant truth of the majority’s interests and responsibilities for the current state of affairs.

In short, although it is hard to establish an ordering among the different formations of segregation and unlawful exclusion, one is inclined to say that the world of labor occupies a top position: public control over the above circumstances and relations seems entirely missing in this domain, and the primary rules of the game are molded by attempts at direct exploitation of and unlimited discrimination against masses of Roma people.

Nevertheless, our fieldwork revealed some encouraging news as well. It was a recurrent experience across countries and “small regions” that Roma have better chances for employment if they live in the vicinity of a local branch of a multinational firm. As it seems, together with the moving in of such firms, the culture of color-blindness in matters where ethnicity should not play a role also was imported. At these firms, Roma had better chances for becoming regular, full-time employees with similar rights and duties to their non-Roma peers than at domestic private companies. Furthermore, public firms and institutions have also demonstrated somewhat more openness in comparison to their private counterparts. True, Roma are given the least esteemed,

hardest and dirtiest jobs and/or are “hidden” in backdoor kitchens or cleaning units. But at least they occupy registered and tax-paying formal jobs and as such, they have the prospect to receive a “regular” pension one day, and they can draw on sick-leave should they become ill.

Such differences call for a closer investigation of the departing “employment cultures” and also for a detailed exploration of the structures of interacting economic, technological, political, and social interests that are at play within the various types of firms and institutions. It can be expected that the Phase 3 part of the “Faces and Causes of Roma Marginalization in Local Communities” research will deepen our understanding and it will provide contributions for establishing a vocabulary by which attempts at making Roma (non)-employment an *issue of politics* will become a realistic goal (at least at regional/local levels).

7. Roma representation and political participation

By looking at the internal relationships and mutual perceptions of Roma and non-Roma through interviewing the leaders of the minority and majority communities, our Phase 2 research provided a unique opportunity to gain insights into the formation of local power relations that condition Roma participation and representation. First, such an approach allowed for identifying the factors that induce variations in exploiting the existing institutional structures and for asking about the dynamics that help or hinder getting particular Roma needs on the agenda of local politics and policy-making. It followed that we could explore some important departures in representing minority needs by the different domains indicating relatively high Roma influence regarding matters of welfare while serious shortcomings in representation and efforts at raising public awareness and political will with regards to expanding Roma employment and revising the customary patterns of redistribution that affect infrastructure and access to services.

Second, our cross-country comparisons provided some important new results about the impact that the remarkably differing institutional arrangements of our three countries have on day-to-day politics and policy-making at the local level. In this context we could ask: how far do the structures of formally democratic elections, as opposed to top-down appointments, influence the performance of the institutions that were set up to represent Roma needs? Further, are there meaningful differences in the composition of the representative bodies if they come into being via elections as opposed to being professional assignments, and how is the legitimacy of the arising institutions affected? Third, our fieldwork in the communities helped us to reveal how political representation is seen by those who are represented: how strongly do members of the Roma community feel that their leaders keep their cause on the local policy-agenda and what are the channels and forms of feedback and control in this regard? Finally, a critical overarching question has come to the fore: despite all the debilitating implications of deep poverty and segregation, can one identify signs of a gradually empowering struggle for recognition that gives new meaning to Roma identity and belonging by turning around the symbolism of the prevailing ethnic enclosures and giving them new understandings as sources of ethnic pride and cohesion?

In contextualizing our findings, it is important to note that Roma visibility and the institutional capacities of representing the specific needs that follow from the minority status that Roma occupy have increased in all our three countries during the past two decades. This statement remains true despite the fact that, if compared to other minorities, Roma representation still

proves to be rather weak. Nevertheless, intense pressure from the European Union for breaking up exclusion and segregation through seeding new institutions that embody Roma needs, the launching of a complex program for Roma inclusion through the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion and, most recently, the compelling governmental task in all EU Member States to elaborate national strategies to improve the conditions of Roma through a chain of clearly outlined tasks, adjoining policies and designated institutions have brought about some important developments. In the first place, these efforts have induced changes in political thinking and discourse: instead of the earlier conceptualizations that framed the specific needs of Roma either in terms of poverty or as a cultural issue, there has been a shift in all three countries towards articulating the specific Roma needs in the context of minority status and by acknowledging minority rights within the legal and political systems. Second, it followed from the complex nature of the new initiatives that Roma poverty, marginalization and exclusion appeared for the first time as a product of intersecting forces and processes that, in turn, invoke coordinated policies and a standing framework for their implementation. Such an approach has helped to understand the deep cleavages in education, employment and access to a wide range of services and provisions in their embedding into the prevailing local inter-ethnic relations. This new understanding has weakened those interests and has driven back those forces trying to consider these issues as ethnic specificities with no relevance beyond the boundaries of the local Roma communities. However, despite promising developments, at least rhetorically, attempts to translate the broadened perspective of the macro-level approach into the daily working of local Roma political participation have remained sporadic and any institutional formations that have been called forth have proven largely powerless.

The surprisingly similar developments across countries invite an important question: how much do the laws and the established institutional structures influence Roma political participation as against the prevailing local inter-ethnic relations and the informally shaped rules and traditions of representation? This question is all the more important because the legal arrangements and the designation of public responsibilities have undergone important changes during the past two decades and the subsequent modifications have pointed toward some crystallization of the concept of minority rights and its positioning within the larger political structures in all three countries.

It is worth summarizing country by country the key points of change and their institutional implications.

In Hungary where the right for self-organizing is a strong pillar of the minority law, important modifications in the regulation of minority elections have brought the issue of political representation under the sole authority of the minority community. On paper, this step would have implied clearer formations of minority institutions at the level of the local communities. However, the actual trend has been the opposite: local Roma minority governments have been shrinking in size and importance. This outcome partially results from the ambiguities surrounding the declaration of Roma identity which, in turn, has become a precondition for participating in the minority elections. Given the weak entitlements of the local minority governments while their multifaceted dependence from the municipalities, the majority of Roma look at the new institution as lip-service to minority rights if not a new form of subordination to the ruling of the local majority. Widespread disinterest in the system manifests itself in decreasing turn-outs at the minority elections which then further reduce the potency of the institution for representing local Roma needs.

In the Romanian case, the politicization of the “Roma issue” took departure from a professional development: working with families in the field, Roma mediators, first in education and then in health care, started to frame the problems of the Roma minority by pointing to the intersecting impact of poverty and the lack of rights protection, and claimed complex policies to be backed by broad cooperation within the government. The pressures coming prior to the country’s EU accession from the European Union as well as from some powerful domestic NGOs lifted this new approach to the political level. In response, a system of representation combining elections and top-down pathways of appointment has been established. In this new broadened framework, the “Roma issue” has increasingly become a matter of expertise and professional performance while the electoral aspect and the striving for representation have faded away. The latter development has been influenced by party politics as well: by tacitly acknowledging their weakness, more and more local Roma politicians have left behind the Roma parties with the hope of expanding their influence within the color-blind majority political context. Ironically, while their decisions were wise and rational considering it is important to infuse the Roma cause into macro-level politics, their departure clearly weakened the political weight of the minority institutions.

Much in accordance with the top-down organization of public affairs and political participation, Roma representation is built on a hierarchy of assignments in Serbia. Appointed Roma coordinators (who might be non-Roma) are seen as responsible agents with a dual role. On the one hand, they are expected to articulate the needs, claims and complaints of the Roma community that they represent; on the other hand, it is their clear mission to “discipline” the community and to teach its members to observe the majority norms of “decency” and “right behavior”. Although variations across the settlements are substantial, there seems to be a gradual shift toward the latter roles: in the hope of increasing influence in local government and the higher-level municipalities, Roma coordinators increasingly emphasize their “educative” role while expectations toward them as representatives of the minority community are declining.

Given the important differences in conceptualizing and organizing minority politics and Roma representation as part of its framework, one would expect significant departures in the acceptance of Roma by the majority as political partners and as a community with claims on recognition and rights to a fair share of redistribution. One would assume that a system based on minority elections might carry stronger legitimacy and thus render more compelling claims than a bureaucratic arrangement of hierarchically defined tasks where representation is replaced by professionalism and adaptation to the prevailing structure of governance. However, an important finding of our research is that neither legitimacy nor the actual political weight of representation is in close association with the arrangements that Roma political participation follows. We found examples of strong influence on local politics and policy-making in all three countries as well as similar positions of denied acknowledgement and practical neglect in all three cases. Such a loose association between the legal-political structures and the contents and potency of local Roma representation called for further analysis. It inspired us to look beyond the curtain of formal arrangements and attempt to reveal the drivers and obstacles that bring about these differences through shaping the local inter-ethnic relations.

By assessing the differences in the political formations that host representation and participation, it was the issue of trust that seemed to matter most. A decline in trust has been an important trend over the past decade in all three countries. Although public opinion surveys and the political debates signaled a similar trend at the macro-social level, Roma have had a few specific reasons for expressing distrust in the political institutions and those set up for their representation.

First, the failure of efforts to alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment, and eliminate segregation and exclusion suggested a negative conclusion: irrespective of whether Roma have certain forms of representation or not, politicians engaging in minority politics have proven either weak or outright mischievous with regards to the daily needs of their people. Roma tend to be left behind, and if they as a collective help certain representatives into power, these figures quickly and easily “forget” them in their efforts to attract the approval of the majority. With these recurrent experiences of “forgetfulness”, rank-and-file members of the Roma community see it as a waste of time and energy to engage in politics. Instead, they tend to emphasize the practical advantages of individual struggles and accommodation and state that they do not see any need for mediating agents in these endeavors.

Second, the involvement of local Roma representatives in distributing welfare funds and access to public work has led to substantial losses of trust in the eyes of those for whom they are supposed to speak. Amidst shrinking resources and tightening regulations towards making “deservingness” the most important (if not the sole) principle in providing assistance, Roma participating in the formation of the highly selective local lists of acceptance and refusal—and willfully contributing to the investigation on “deservingness”—seem to be the unconditional supporters of the prevailing inequalities and injustices. Again, it is easy to draw the conclusion that Roma delegates (or those acting on behalf of Roma) easily distance themselves from the community and even agree to act against it. Such a conclusion finds its strong expression in distrust and a questioning of the usefulness of the frameworks for participation.

The third source of distrust is the experience of large Roma groups concerning general elections. In the run up to elections the Roma cause often finds sudden interest among opportunistic candidates looking to procure votes — often via unfounded or false promises to the Roma community. But after elections that interest usually disappears just as fast as it initially materialized and the promises go unfulfilled—this way demonstrating serious instrumentalization and a good deal of cynicism among those who feel at ease to play the Roma card. It was a recurrent thread of the narratives on local Roma participation that fooling the people for the sake of increasing the number of votes by promising meaningful changes in the local conditions and then letting such promises to become “forgotten” as if never existed was one of the most painful and degrading collective experiences the minority community had to face. The conclusion Roma have taken away from this is that politics is a dirty business and politicians do not deserve trust. If one wants to avoid humiliation and instrumentalization then it is best to withdraw into individuality and engage in setting and fulfilling personal goals.

While the reasons for distrust have been accumulating in recent years, our fieldwork also revealed cases demonstrating trust, cohesion and relatively powerful political participation that concluded in Roma recognition and well-shaped inter-ethnic political cooperation. These promising exceptions to the rule revealed some specific stories. In most cases, mutual acceptance between the Roma and non-Roma parts of the community dated back to socialist times. The new structures of representation smoothly followed the old patterns of erstwhile cooperation in mining, agriculture and construction: one-time foremen, who once efficiently organized fellow Roma for the changing tasks of production and successfully represented them in disputes with the management, now became acknowledged leaders enjoying widespread trust on the part of the minority community. In certain cases, the old memories of collegiality were passed from father to son, which seemed a natural development to entrust the latter with the roles and duties that their fathers fulfilled with highly appreciated efficacy. This way leadership—informal leadership

in particular—turned into an intergenerational inheritance that, as long as the remnants of old cooperation kept such positions alive, all actors found a most satisfactory solution for selection.

In other cases—again, independently from the actual institutional arrangements—it was the outstanding qualities of charismatic local Roma leaders that resulted in achievements. Accounts from the locals revealed long histories of inter-ethnic negotiations preceding the peculiar accomplishments. Most frequently, the issues at stake were related to education. Attempts at desegregation were underscored by the innovative after-school services provided by a local NGO that not only Roma but also non-Roma families found attractive to enroll their children. The experiences of improved inter-ethnic relations and cooperation in the civil domain encouraged some local schools to gradually launch programs aimed at integration. As a next step, local leaders succeeded in drawing larger-scale conclusions and argue with the attained results to increase the involvement of local Roma in additional domains. Besides (re)gaining trust, the charismatic leaders contributed to invigorating Roma participation by pointing out its potentials for a breakthrough. As the examples show, such achievements were easier to attain in villages than in towns, though the more structured urban settings provided better opportunities for turning exceptional examples into lasting foundations of inter-ethnic cooperation.

Variation in regulating the forms of Roma representation became relativized from an important sociological standpoint, namely when looking at their impact on Roma mobility. As a rule, Roma willing to fill the positions on offer have been recruited from the relatively better educated and better-off parts of the Roma community who find their own cases replicable and have sufficient energy to turn those into models of combating poverty and exclusion. They are usually dedicated to representing Roma identity as a source of pride and acknowledgement and apply for the position of collective representation with a sense of mission, i.e. to turn around the degenerating public views of the minority. All of these characteristics are met with diligence and commitment which are the two most important drivers behind upward mobility not only in political but also in social terms. These inspirations are often welcomed by the local majority, although their reading of them is often different: there is a widespread belief that upward striving Roma are ready to pay the price for full-fledged acceptance by following the path of assimilation. In other words, it is assumed that Roma gradually have to give up their ethnic identity and become indistinguishable members of the majority community. As experience shows, Roma are willing to take such an offer, although they try to maintain a balance between their belonging to the two communities. However, given the sharp departures, sooner or later they face a challenging choice. More often than not, they opt for a continuation on the path of assimilation. However, this difficult choice brings about serious sacrifices. On the one hand, the Roma community sees a sort of a betrayal in their choice and responds with distrust and allegations of unethical behavior of the originally entrusted leader. On the other hand, assimilation is rarely acknowledged as a performance on the side of the majority: while appreciated as a personality achievement, it is never thought to deserve unconditional acceptance as a strong enough foundation of genuine inclusion.

In sum, we can state that all three arrangements that have evolved over the course of democratization during the past decades have offered certain new potentials for Roma representation, even if they remain under the unchallenged primacy of majority rule. At the same time, variations in the strength and achievements across localities revealed the importance of previous existing models and connections and their interplay which shapes today's majority-minority relations. A serious drawback of the weak impact of the prevailing regulations and institutional formations is the exceptionally high influence of personal will and aspiration that is accompanied by fragile and easily distractible trust and a straightforward questioning of the utility of political involve-

ment and participation. As a result, weak institutions tend to become weaker and lose legitimacy, thus the new patterns and routines of political participation can be easily undermined either by competing inner forces or by the majority. As a consequence, Roma political participation appears useless and futile for ordinary Roma and this notion is reinforced by a declining recognition of Roma claims on the part of the majority. It is easy to see that such a process of emptying the notions of politics deprives Roma from the shields of self-protection and meaningful representation.

As a further consequence, civil actors and churches tend to take over certain political roles on behalf of the disappointed and distrustful Roma communities. While such developments seem to be strongest in Romania, similar cases have also been recorded in Hungary and Serbia. This is a double-edged phenomenon. On the one hand, through the active role that influential religious congregations and NGOs might play in the community, the cause of Roma is kept on the public agenda; on the other hand, this form of representation increasingly becomes impregnated with the particular aims and visions of these substitute actors who thereby unwillingly legitimize the uselessness of political participation and representation of Roma. Furthermore, in most of these cases, such substitutes reinforce dependency and the prevalent patron-client relations which create serious obstacles to any new formations based on partnership and collective deliberations.

In light of the above-described weak representation and widespread disinterest in political participation, it is not surprising that the patterns of local redistribution demonstrated little change toward Roma inclusion. True, our research took place during the tense conditions brought about by the global economic crisis that have directly and indirectly affected the markets of the post-socialist region for the past 5-6 years. In response to the crisis, austerity measures have been broadly applied in the public domain which have seriously curtailed the resources of local governments and the institutions under their management. Amidst these circumstances, competition for the remaining resources has been heated; local actors that previously cooperated found themselves rivals while their inclination to exclude the weakest has become more pronounced as a way of establishing viable new compromises. Predictably, the weak or non-existent institutions of Roma representation were among the first to be sacrificed: the ceaseless postponement of taking Roma needs on board and allocating resources for their fulfillment seemed increasingly rational without assuming a racist tone. Roma leaders caught up in the dilemma of dual loyalty could hardly oppose such decisions because, given the weak contents of minority representation, they were rarely authorized to stand up for certain goals and to advocate for a fair share on the part of their community. As a consequence, the pressing housing, infrastructure and educational needs of Roma were taken off the local agenda, while needs (at least for public work) were relegated to the market, together with a reduction in public responsibility for their fulfillment.

However, despite the unfavorable conditions, while undertaking our fieldwork we came across a number of ongoing development projects. In Hungary and Romania EU structural funds were helping to improve local infrastructure and, to a lesser degree, local education. Typically, infrastructure projects targeted primarily urban areas and concentrated on the inner parts of the settlements. Nevertheless, Roma needs were not completely neglected. Although on a smaller scale than for the majority population, investments for paving roads or extending water pipes and sewerage reached the Roma-inhabited outer circles of the towns as well as some of the neighboring villages. As a rule, the extension of such projects to the Roma segments rarely stemmed from political negotiations between the representatives of the majority and the minority; rather, these investments usually resulted from the dedicated work of certain NGOs. However, such new

initiatives led by NGOs were often launched for Roma but without involving Roma: the details were worked out above the heads of local Roma who were left out of both the planning and implementation phases of the projects. The latter can be understood as a dual loss: on the one hand, it demonstrated Roma incapability for interest-representation, on the other hand, Roma were deprived from the arising employment opportunities that they might have gained through participation. This way the development projects reinforced the practical wisdom of considering Roma participation unnecessary and unimportant. The story of many of such projects suggested the ironic conclusion that greater efficiency and better social justice can result from Roma projects that are organized and implemented without Roma.

The picture is somewhat different with regards to development projects targeting education. First, new projects can build on a long history of experimentation with different attempts at promoting inclusion. The most important steps in this direction involved widespread institutional efforts to bring about desegregation through the closure of special education units. As it turned out, this way schools went through profound changes: suddenly teachers and staff had to face the needs of individual students who beforehand were faceless parts of a stigmatized segment functioning apart from the world of mainstream schooling. The success of eliminating—or at least substantially reducing in influence and power—the institutions of stigma and degradation piqued the attention of influential professional circles toward integration as a viable alternative to the prevailing segregationist arrangements. It was this change in the discourse and thinking on the part of dedicated teachers, community workers, welfare assistants and social workers that opened the door for a few new experiments going farther than claiming integration only in the formal sense and targeting inclusion as a new way of inter-ethnic partnership based on mutual recognition and acceptance. Amidst this awakening interest, the innovative attempts and projects launched by dedicated domestic and international NGOs suddenly enjoyed expanding publicity backed by important political currents mainly at the European level. Due to invigorated international interest and the voice of domestic professional circles, inclusion in education has increasingly become viewed as a basic tenet of citizens' rights and, accordingly, has been taken on as an issue of high importance by human rights activists. Although such progress stumbled amidst the revival of anti-Gypsy sentiments and slow-down has been justified by a lack of resources in our three countries, the lessons of the former period of experimentation have not been forgotten. Examples of good practice in education are often recognized as providing patterns for improving Roma inclusion. The phases of this learning process have been consistent in our three countries—a characteristic that calls attention to the internationalization of the Roma debate as the single most important factor assuring its preservation on the agenda of domestic politics and policy-making.

As if it was on another continent, our research faced ignorance and neglect when issues of inclusion through labor were brought up with employers and managers or the representatives of trade unions and chambers. Although local leaders unanimously listed the poor access of Roma to employment as the core factor ensuring persistent poverty and exclusion, we rarely encountered any local initiatives aimed at enhancing employment opportunities and making efforts towards Roma inclusion. At best, it was public work programs of limited duration that were on offer. However, these programs work against inclusion by their very conception. Their primary aim is to assist clients in their income generating activities and, as such, they are seen in terms of welfare distribution but rigidly away from “true” production. Thus it is “by default” that they do not lead to sustainable employment. Furthermore, public work programs are implemented under the tight control of economic and political institutions ruled by the majority, whereby they rein-

force old patron-client relations instead of negotiated conditions with the participation of equal partners. As experience of the spreading public work programs shows, these induce exclusion instead of inclusion; moreover, they keep their clients caught in a narrow domain where the rules of performance and reward do not apply. In this way, the political message is clearly segregationist: instead of rights and entitlements, Roma have to accept the subordination by contributing to its strengthened institutionalization via placing them into work in designated areas away from the mainstream employees.

The picture is no less controversial concerning infrastructure development. Although the segments where Roma live usually lack basic water supply, access to gas, sewerage and often even to electricity and illumination, it is rarely the case that development funding would serve to even out the availability of such provisions and services by concentrating on such remote territories. Roma representatives often find it futile to advocate for such things: experience has taught them to come up with more modest ideas to help Roma settle utility bills and to avoid offering modern but more costly provisions that, given their fragile financial conditions, Roma households simply cannot afford. Driven by practical considerations, this way Roma representatives tacitly accept the prevailing sharp inequalities and justify local policies that reinforce different norms according to the prevailing status hierarchies.

And even the meager infrastructure conditions are not secure. The local histories revealed a recurrent pattern: due to urban development goals, Roma living in centrally positioned parts of the settlement were often forcefully relocated to the outskirts. This usually happened without compensation or assistance, while the legalization of their new territory, their individual ownership rights and some loosely defined “upgrading” were offered to them. However, the promises were quickly forgotten and Roma found themselves deprived of basic provisions and services and without documentation to make any claims. While access to infrastructure funds typically followed the hierarchy among the settlements within a cluster, ironically inequalities in distributing the available resources turned out to be greater within the towns than between them and the surrounding villages. While Roma representatives lacked sufficient power and influence to change these patterns, some of them had good enough connections in the municipality and a supportive community that entrusted them to launch a smaller-scale, one-time local project. However, even such successful endeavors had their problematic side: the beneficiaries of the projects usually remained restricted to the upper circles of the local Roma community and the distribution of funds followed the lines of personal acquaintances.

Apart from support based on small-favor exchanges, we did not encounter examples of Roma involvement in negotiating development policies in the broad context of local society. As if a tacit rule was in place, while specific minority interests are acknowledged constituents of policy-making in education and, to a certain extent in employment as well, minority interests are seen as non-existent in the large-scale redistribution affecting the entirety of the population. In accordance with such a general understanding, Roma representatives and our local Roma informants refrained from claiming influence and control over development policies and measures in housing and local infrastructure, and considered it a great achievement if some subordinate and temporary project affecting the conditions of Roma households could get a green light and funding as a “concession” of the municipality in control.

The above overview indicates that even if certain forms of Roma representation are acknowledged as constituents of municipal governance with restricted influence on matters that are

seen as “Roma-specific” issues, Roma participation in the formation of local development plans and interventions is very limited. Decisions on redistribution and the initiation of new endeavors are dominated by negotiations and compromises among the most powerful and vocal groups within local society and Roma representatives have a gravely restricted scope of maneuvering within the set framework. These findings reinforce from a new angle that the actual arrangements of Roma representation are largely insignificant. Irrespective of whether they are elected or appointed for their positions, the personal capacities of local Roma representatives for initiating change and claiming local measures for inclusion remain weak against the more powerful constituents representing the highly differentiated community through the well-established and refined structures of local governance. In other words, the shaping of local politics and policies largely reflects the power structure of the local community, and the unheard voice of Roma signals the powerlessness of the minority community within this framework. At the same time, Roma representation and participation are not in vain: our fieldwork identified clear signs of a change in thinking about Roma and in viewing them as parts of the local society. True, thematization of the “Roma cause” is often impregnated with prejudices and false perceptions of “otherness”. Still, Roma needs are slowly taken on board and they have become acknowledged constituents in policy-making. As we saw above, the clearest signs of a gradual shift can be seen in education and educational policies in which ideas on integration and inclusion have become part of the standard vocabulary and vivid public debate. In areas directly related to the economy and employment progress has been slower and more controversial. This suggests that the potency of representation cannot be made independent of the community: given their low levels of education and lack of modern skills to be utilized in a profoundly changed market, any claims for expanding Roma employment remain unrealistic and thus suffer refusal on the part of employers, their representative bodies and local leaders in the community. In this regard, attempts to expand Roma influence and to make Roma employment a political issue have concluded by contributing to segmentation and exclusion. As a response to such claims, segregated schemes of public work have been spreading with the dubious implication of providing temporary employment in exchange for assisting the daily livelihood of Roma. This way Roma employment and welfare have become ghettoized in certain far-off corners of the labor market and sharply segmented social policies—across all three countries.

All of these outcomes can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, they signal slow and gradual change: by replacing silence and the abnegation of the specific needs of Roma as non-existent, the emerging forms of representation have brought about the thematization of minority needs and policies for their advancement. On the other hand, the slow pace of recognition and the built-in controversies of representation underscore the severe and lasting inequalities that seriously limit Roma participation and, moreover, its influence on shaping the conditions of inter-ethnic cohabitation. These inequalities in power often hinder the efforts of the Roma communities and their representatives to get Roma needs on the public agenda and to foster changes in the principles and practices of redistribution. As a troubling symptom of such failures, even if heard and acknowledged, Roma claims often become ghettoized and handled in a separatist way, away from managing the needs and claims of the mainstream. This way Roma representation easily becomes misused as a justification for segregation and second-order administration. Roma themselves are unable to convert their participation into a source of influence and power. However, the evolving public discourse that is shaped by their intense participation can help in politicizing the risks and hindrances that they face and can invigorate a genuine dialogue as an important precondition of any meaningful change.

8. Conclusions

By analyzing the rich data about the circumstances and institutional and social relations on how Roma living in marginalized conditions engage in daily struggles for subsistence, study, or work in different “small regions” and constituent localities in Hungary, Romania, and Serbia, our research offers some important methodological conclusions on the qualities and usability of the collected data and offers a range of implications for local-level policies to reduce marginalization and exclusion on ethnic grounds.

Let us first consider some lessons of the applied means of data collection, the reliability of the data and their applicability for monitoring local trends by regularly repeated small-scale surveys providing comparable results.

Given its nature, our research had limited relevance with regard to collecting data on individual ethnic identification. It is frequently argued that without such data which would allow for measuring inequalities, segregation and exclusion in an exact way, all attempts at desegregation and inclusion remain poorly backed by the necessary evidence. Our experience suggests otherwise. Without questioning the importance of widespread individual Roma identification from the perspectives of attaining recognition and claiming new shares of power in minority affairs and local politics, our endeavor demonstrates the potency of institutional-level estimates for learning about the state of inter-ethnic exchange and also for identifying the tensions and conflicts that are part of the daily inter-ethnic encounters. Such data collection provides new knowledge: the often departing views on the ethnic conditions carry important lessons from a policy perspective. It has to be emphasized that the two ways of approaching ethnic relations serve different purposes and one cannot substitute the other. While the frame of reference in individual data collection is the ethnic community, the institutional approach informs us about the inter-ethnic dimensions of power and redistribution. Given our interest in the latter aspects of inter-ethnic cohabitation and dynamics, our Phase 2 research targeted the institutional conditions and relations as seen from the dual perspectives of the providers and the recipients. If assumed as indications of actions with the involved values and interests, such estimates and the inter-ethnic concordance or disparity in their magnitudes and contents can be taken as important foundations for following up the ongoing currents of inter-ethnic relations and encounters as well as the points of departure for claiming change.

The data collection in our Phase 2 research was based on certain additional presumptions. We were aware that the ban on collecting data for individual ethnic identification limits the possibilities of arriving at exact statistical information about numbers and proportions regarding Roma presence in institutions, their share in redistribution, or their concentration in certain parts of the settlements. However, as experience shows, such knowledge exists nevertheless: after stating that they do not have data on the ethnic background of their students, school principals were ready to make estimates and even to explain their “informal methodology” to calculate their figure; likewise, mayors do not “know” the exact number of Roma in the population, but they are ready to describe in detail the neighborhoods where Roma live; again, after expressing their color-blind orientation, local entrepreneurs are ready to respond to questions about the number and actual position of Roma workers employed at their firms. The duality of lacking factual information and personally making powerful estimates about the presence of Roma in a given institution led us to specify the terrain where such knowledge is valid: and this is *the actual relating of our non-Roma informants to who Roma are*. In other words, the collected numbers and

ratios are tracing how they perceive Roma in their institutional context—and we can be sure that they act accordingly. In this sense, even if the collected data might be uncertain and inaccurate regarding the exact magnitudes and proportions of Roma, they accurately map the awareness of the institutional actors who organize and manage various aspects of the local ethnic relations.

At the same time, a novel aspect of our methodology was asking our local Roma informants about the very same numbers and proportions. In this way we aimed to reveal their views about the ruling approach in a given domain and the foundations of potential disagreement. As it turned out, in certain cases, one could find an impressive degree of correspondence that signals ongoing dialogues and evolving agreements. In these cases, estimates given by the two sides can be read and interpreted as firm data reinforced by a high degree of consensus. Usually, consensus is born in a policy context: even if Roma and non-Roma disagree on the implications, their agreement on the facts as the common points of departure indicates an ongoing exchange of ideas on the basis of mutual engagement. However, the sharply departing estimates demonstrate the lack of shared knowledge—if not the deficiency of contacts and involvement. Quite often this was the case with regard to employment: our local Roma informants seldom had sufficient knowledge about the firms where their neighbors worked, or even a general picture about the level of employment in the Roma community. This way our data on employment remained without the potency of dual confirmation, and could be read as an indication of the over-power of the employers' orientations that usually tended to deny any ethnic distinction in the economic domain. Nevertheless, the gap in knowledge called attention to the lack of public discourse about how Roma employment can be expanded in certain inclusive ways. In this sense, it was not the data themselves but the built-in imbalances that our two-way approach could reveal. The list could be continued by looking at housing or infrastructure or, for that matter, by the often sharply departing majority vs. minority views and estimates on the role of ethnicity in welfare distribution.

The applied two lenses allowed for simultaneously interpreting the collected data in two ways. On the one hand, it is majority estimates that guide those in different responsible positions in tackling the ethnic issue. On the other hand, by a critical interpretation of these estimates we gain a sensitive measure to assess the validity of the collected data. In brief, our data collection renders powerful information on two aspects of ethnic relations, though it certainly does not substitute for any statistical surveying. Given our qualitative approach, the strength of our method is to provide means to evaluate the performance of local institutions and the policies targeting improvement and development. The shortcomings follow from the source of strength: the collected data cannot be considered as painting a value- and policy-free reality.

The potentials and the limitations of monitoring the collected data by regular repetition of the surveys follow from the peculiarities of their character and content. In fact, monitoring aims to reveal certain shifts in how those in charge of one or another institution perceive the ethnic aspects of the institutional working and how they reflect by adjusting or changing their actions and behavior. In this sense, a closing of the gap between the majority and minority estimates signals some conversion and might point toward an enhancing consensus on a discursive level. At the same time, monitoring itself has important political implications. Since it is undertaken by those who are simultaneously the actors and the subjects of the inquiries, monitoring can develop into a domain of Roma political participation. While this is certainly beneficial in attaining recognition and aspiring for a degree of partnership, it could result in politically biased data and thus open the door to allegations of value-loaded content. This is not to say that the monitoring exercise would be in vain; instead of directly taking any singular source, replicated data collections

and the trends that these paint provide important backing by using them for informing local policy-making about certain recurrently underscored associations and for measuring the outcomes of the applied tools and interventions. In this context, it seems important to repeatedly point to the imbalances across the various policies and actions. Our research demonstrated that regular monitoring can be implemented in a straightforward way in education where risks and injustices to the detriment of Roma are part of large-scale discourses and policy experimentations. Measuring local indicators of segregation and exclusion and monitoring their trends have strong relevance on the macro-social level and the enhancing of an arsenal of previously collected data for comparative purposes. Such data have a good deal of self-explanatory strength that local Roma actors can powerfully use in policy-debates.

Employment matters are different, however. In the absence of similar large-scale data and discourse and amidst the often applied technocratic reasoning, local Roma communities and actors have been left without the backing of macro-level facts, figures and interpretations. In this domain, monitoring is faced with vexing challenges. More often than not, Roma disadvantages and exclusion appear in the fabric of low education and the lack of skills that seem to provide strong counter-indications to local policies framing these in the context of minority rights and the deficiencies of the prevailing inter-ethnic relations. It follows that in the domain of employment practically no reliable estimates on ethnic departures can be drawn at the institutional level and the rare attempts at framing economic participation of Roma in the local context remain at best restricted to experimental and short-lived projects. The discrepancy between the two domains implies an important conclusion. A certain level of general agreement about the relevance of data collection and monitoring framed in ethnic terms is a precondition for any further steps. The different actors might disagree on the ways in which ethnicity should be approached and might dispute the methodological tools, but without agreement on the *relevance of ethnic framing*, all attempts at measuring are destined to fail and be in vain. In this sense, the acceptance of monitoring and the topical construction of such endeavors are deeply embedded in the politics of ethnic recognition. However important the questions and reservations concerning the accuracy of data and their interpretations are, such considerations come after agreeing on the foundations of such endeavors, that is, after agreeing on the relevance of enquiring about the ethnic dimension in a given domain.

Additionally, our Phase 2 research identified a number of important lessons for longer-term comparative research and policy-making.

First, by reading the data across the three countries it would be difficult to define which country's Roma are the poorest, where they are least protected, and where they are most excluded from the economic well-being and the protection of rights that other people—the majority—enjoy. Marginalization and exclusion result in similar conditions and produce and maintain similar patterns of inequalities, defenselessness and deprivation. At the same time, the three countries represent a well-known hierarchy in economic performance and a range of important development indicators: Hungary is still ahead of Romania, and Serbia is markedly poorer and less developed than either. Furthermore, Hungary and Romania have a history of membership in the European Union which should have inspired marked changes by now (despite their three year difference that counts less and less, as time passes), while Serbia still seems to have a long way to go. The remarkable similarities in the destitute conditions of the majority of Roma and the prevalence of unlawful discrimination against them indicate that neo-liberal beliefs in an “automatic” disappearance of poverty and, especially, in a self-generating diffusing of westernized values and patterns regarding how different groups of society relate to each other are interest-driven fantasies

and dangerous illusions. Neither economic growth, nor true signs of the diffusion of important new values and patterns of living among the middle and upper classes have filtered down in the social hierarchy in a spontaneous way. Poverty and ethnicized exclusion are products of the prevailing structures of power that keep the vast majority of Roma in the lowest echelons of local societies—if not utterly excluded even from those. These positions do not change with the betterment of the general conditions, unless the struggles of the Roma community succeed in politicizing exclusion and segregation. Such rare cases of success show that Roma struggles for attaining due recognition of minority rights and the incorporation of these rights into the local political structures are prime preconditions of change that the local majorities are reluctant to render without experiencing some strength behind the claim.

Second, despite the striking similarities across the three countries as well as within their “small regions”, our research revealed rather significant departures in the extent and depth of Roma marginalization and exclusion. Importantly, though, majority openness and commitment to inclusion were also witnessed in certain places and institutions. The sources of these variations are manifold. A longer history of Roma–non-Roma cohabitation and work seems to be of paramount importance: the once elaborated patterns still may be in place and these infuse the forms and contents of today’s inter-ethnic encounters in meaningful ways. However, in other settlements or within other institutions it can be a single charismatic local leader who successfully manages to turn the wheel and instigate measures toward desegregation with the broad approval of the entire community. Still, in other cases it is geography that matters: despite living in residential segregation in a village or a small town, if local Roma are fortunate to enjoy the proximity of a larger city where they may find employment and acceptable schooling for their children, then they might have a chance to break out from poverty and to turn their relative geographical advantage into a source of social mobility. The positive examples and the contrasting ones of hopelessly ghettoized conditions with hopelessly perpetuated destitution from early childhood onwards underscore the importance of a closer inquiry into the variations of inter-ethnic relations: this will be the primary task of the next phase (Phase 3) of our research.

Third, although “segregation” is perhaps the word that the political discourse of Roma advocacy most frequently associates with Roma, Phase 2 research shed light on important “white spots” in our knowledge about how the phenomenon emerges and how it remains in place even if actions are taken to erase—or at least mitigate—it. Furthermore, the study revealed that phenomena which we designate with the same words vary according to the deep-seated causes as well as in their strength and consequences. This is not to say that any of its manifestations would be acceptable. Rather, the different degrees in risking ghettoization and/or cutting off Roma from even some mundane encounters with members of the non-Roma majority point toward the need for a thorough overview of the local contexts in order to identify and address the root causes of the vicious circle, that is, to explore how in the given settings one form of segregation generates (or accentuates) others. For such a new approach, *intersectionality* is the concept that our study identified as the key driver.

As we discussed above at length, there are two domains where segregation most likely propels harsh separation and exclusion in other domains: residential segregation in urban conditions and in remote “Roma-only” villages on the one hand, and the exclusion of Roma from formal employment or segmented local/regional labor markets, on the other. At the same time, most efforts (and funding) focus on reducing segregation across and within schools. While such endeavors are important, experience and research unequivocally show that the results have a tendency to quickly fade away without embedding the applied measures on educational inclusion into

a larger-scale and complex program that targets Roma residential marginalization and assists Roma in getting access to formal employment. As our findings indicate, mobility in its physical sense should be a key to such programs: without (re)gaining their right and ability to commute, Roma continue to be caught in their ghettoized conditions, and the hopes for halting the daily reproduction of segregation and multi-sided exclusion remain narrowly limited.

Finally, let us conclude this report with a few words about Roma representation and political participation in their localities. We were aware when designing this study that Roma presence and voice in striving for recognition and battling discrimination and exclusion are of paramount importance. In brief, without Roma participating on equal grounds, the most dedicated civil initiatives and advocacy, as well as the best designed projects for local development, will remain isolated actions reaching, at best, the tip of the iceberg. At the same time, a lasting and meaningful mobilization of Roma has certain preconditions. These include a proper understanding of the causes and components of their situation, deliberation within the community about resources (first of all, in networks and cultural capital), the formal or informal delegation of competent leaders and representatives and, above all, concerted efforts to free the concept of “being Roma” from its stigmatizing content and allow the ethnic community to elaborate its own notion of collective self-identification. However, experience shows that Roma, who have been discriminated against during decades—if not centuries—of history, have deeply internalized the ideologies and stigma of the majority whereby they are relegated to having low self-esteem, frequent self-hatred and very limited convictions about a better future. Furthermore, extreme poverty does not render Roma the time or capacities needed to engage in local politics which might then lead to societal changes. By taking into account these severe contradictions we chose a middle approach: we asked our local Roma informants about the general spirit in their community and about instances of political action in the broadest sense of the term. However, their responses revealed at best their own relations with the different parties and the frequent experiences of deceit and betrayal by key figures within the majority. At the same time, they did not consider the informal gatherings where a group discussed the poor state of the local school, the capacities of the community to contribute to the paving of the roads in their residential segment, or collective action to get their due share of public work to be within the realm of “politics”. In their view, such informal ways of forming opinions and attempting some way to represent their needs does not count as participating in public matters but as one-time, ad hoc reactions in order to avoid worse outcomes.

The differences in conceptualizing “politics” indicate that in order to approach the topic, a new methodology combining participant observation, interviewing and a systematic thematization of public issues that comprise local-level politics is needed to deepen our understanding about the informality and volatility—as well as the sometimes unexpected successes—of Roma political participation. New knowledge about the embedding of local politics into the daily life of the minority community and the inter-ethnic relations in the locality will help inform us about those aspects and issues in which new initiatives are launched with at least the tacit support of the local majority. It will also indicate where local initiatives tend to die out without larger-scale collaboration. Such an approach, which considers politics in its everyday embeddedness and considers the actual forms of expression to be of secondary importance, might provide empowering knowledge to the local Roma community for deliberating and designing actions for awareness-raising. It also might assist to expand the local involvement of members of the community with agency in the struggle to enhance recognition on collective grounds. Finally, such a broadened perspective on Roma political participation brings into our sight the importance of a language that evolves from the dialogues between the minority and the majority and

that potentially serves to substitute the compromised language of stigma and subordination with a new vocabulary and new notions of mutuality and recognition. At this point, actions and their cognitive receptions mold into one: a long history of informal political participation comes to an end by turning into formalized politics in the framework of new local institutions that are based on equity and equality and that serve Roma inclusion with active support from both the minority and the majority.