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**Roma within Obstructing and Transformative Spaces:  
Migration Processes and Social Distance in Ethnically  
Mixed Localities in Romania**

Intersections.EEJSP  
4(3): 57-80.  
DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v4i3.396  
<http://intersections.tk.mta.hu>

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### **Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

The aim of our article is to inquire into the interconnectedness of local social context, mobility processes and social transformations. We argue that migratory patterns of the local Roma population in ethnically mixed communities are shaped by the degree and modes of maintenance of social distance between the Roma and local majority. While social distance can shape the ways migrant networks develop, it also influences the way remittances are invested at home. The analysis focuses on the comparison of two rural communities from Transylvania where we carried out community studies and a household survey which also included attitude questions related to ethnic groups. Our study reveal that the most visible aspect of the local separation is the housing segregation. While this is present in both cases, in one of the villages Roma use their upward mobility to challenge social segregation and to reduce physical distance (i.e. moving inside the village). Here in spite of physical closeness social distance between the majority and Roma remains high. In the other locality the importance of social ties increase during migration and social distance is reduced, while the ethnic groups maintain their relative residential separation.

*Keywords:* mobility, home communities, social distance, social transformation; Romania.

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<sup>1</sup>The research leading to the present publication originated in MigRom – ‘The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies’, a project funded by the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme under the call ‘Dealing with diversity and cohesion: the case of the Roma in the European Union’ (GA319901).

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## 1. Introduction

The recent migration of Romanian Roma within the EU has attracted heightened public and scholarly attention. However, the social context of the migration process is remarkably understudied in the communities of origin. As an experiment, one can look up the two thematic journal issues from the past year (they include 16 studies altogether) and observe that none of these has a focus on home community of the migrants, or the effect of migration on the sending country.<sup>2</sup> Without exploring the reasons for this lacuna, one can easily realize that the interpretation of the mobility processes of the Roma will remain biased or partial without a deeper look into the social processes and transformations of the home societies. In this study, we attempt to offer a glimpse into this area, with a focus on the sending localities. More than that, the dominant interpretation of the mobility of the Roma is the subject of interest following the Europe-wide effects of neoliberal governmentality, the racialization of poverty, and the dehumanization of the migrant Roma (see: Yıldız and De Genova, 2017; van Baar, 2017). Somewhat complementarily, we argue that focusing on the empirical realities ‘on the ground’ provides valuable insight into the diverse factors behind these processes, and explains how these processes play out.

The aim of our article is therefore to inquire into the interconnectedness of the local social context, mobility processes, and the social transformation of localities with a significant Roma population involved in international mobility. To address this issue, we focus on the concept of social distance, which has recently been neglected in the migration literature. Even though there is a large body of research dedicated to examine how racial/ethnic differences are maintained due to social distance among immigrants in destination countries and neighborhoods (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Portes, 1984), few studies discuss the effects of migration with a focus on segmented home communities, and even less on ethnically mixed communities in the light of social distance. Integrating these considerations into the discussion about the migration of Roma is crucial because the effects of migration are significantly dependent on the local social, economic, institutional and political context in the home localities. Making good use of the outcomes of migration might be difficult for returnees, even in the case of favorable general, structural conditions, while Roma migrants may face additional hindrances, or even prohibiting circumstances that are closely related to the existing social distance between local groups.

We argue that the mobility patterns of local Roma and the ways migrant networks develop are shaped by the degree and maintenance of social distance between the Roma and the local majority in ethnically mixed communities. Moreover, this also influences the way remittances are invested at home. The dynamic relationship between these processes influences the direction and extent of local social transformations.

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<sup>2</sup>These are: *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, vol. 32 - n°1 (2016): The Migrations of Romanian Roma in Europe: Politics of Inclusion, Strategies of Distinction and (De)construction of Identity Boundaries, edited by Mihaela Nedelcu and Ruxandra-Oana Ciobanu; and *Social Identities. Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* (2017): Un/Free mobility: Roma migrants in the European Union, issue introduced by Can Yıldız and Nicholas De Genova.

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Our empirical material comes from the results of the **MIGROM** project, during which we employed mixed methods for data collection, carried out quantitative surveys, an analysis of secondary sources, and ethnographic community studies.<sup>3</sup> The structure of this study is the following: first, we discuss the recent return to the local focus on migration studies. We then briefly present the two field sites and the process of data gathering. A methodological overview of how social distance in sociology and anthropology is interpreted follows, while we unpack the data obtained during fieldwork. We conclude the study by considering the potentially diverging paths for local development and the implications of these for local policies.

## *2. Return to 'the local'*

Migration studies have increasingly focused on the local level during recent years. Moreover, there is also a return to the local within policy discourses and development initiatives. Thomas Faist observed in his concluding commentary to a migration-themed issue of the journal *Population, Space and Place* that:

In short, it is above all on the local level that the diversification of migrants' nationality, ethnicity, language, gender, age, human capital, and legal status has become visible and needs to be studied. The debates on development cooperation have also been characterized by a return to the local. As international organizations such as the World Bank have made prominent note of since the early 2000s, cross-border migrants are crucial agents of development whose practices extend across the borders of states above all on a local level. These processes have been accompanied by the growing importance of civil society actors – migrant and diaspora associations included among them – and the local state (Faist, 2008). In a nutshell, the public and academic debates about mobility and development have experienced a scale shift over the past decades – the local is increasingly coming to the fore with respect to policy, social processes, and as a site of study (Faist 2016, p. 396).

Our approach is in line with this tendency, since we focus our analysis on two ethnically mixed local communities. The local focus, however, as Faist also suggested, does not mean that interpretations should remain locally confined. On the contrary, the field site is a laboratory of broader social processes that play out at the local level and therefore can be empirically grasped by researchers. Our cases also exemplify, as we show below, that – in the absence of targeted interventions by the state – the importance of socially grounded attitudes continues to influence group interaction, together with local non-formal institutions, local state authorities, and non-state structures (such as churches). Understanding the role of these is crucial in interpreting

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<sup>3</sup> During the process of fieldwork, local research assistants (most of them of Roma origin) joined our research team, helping both with data collection and the interpretation of findings. We are grateful to these research assistants and research participants in all localities. All remaining shortcomings remain the responsibility of the authors. We would also like to express our gratitude toward Judit Durst and Veronika Nagy for being such sharp-eyed and patient editors. The comments of the two anonymous reviewers also helped us to improve our article.

the social transformations not only in the local context but also for the whole process of Roma mobility within the EU.

While a focus on the local has been present in anthropological and sociological studies on Roma migration from Romania (Pantea, 2013b; Troc, 2012; Vlase and Voicu, 2014) as well as in policy suggestions (Pantea, 2013a), more attention has been paid to the pre-conditions and effects of migration *within the Roma* segments of the local population than to the broader local community and to the relationships between different local population segments (for notable exceptions, see: Anghel, 2016; Cingolani, 2012). In an earlier publication, we presented findings on Roma migration in relation to the general migratory patterns of the Romanians to address this limitation. We paid special attention to the effects of local social divisions and highlighted the particularities of each of the five localities we studied (Toma, Tesăr and Fosztó, 2017). In this paper, we continue to elaborate one particular aspect of our comparative analysis, focusing on the social distance between different segments of the local population in two localities (i.e. between the Roma and the local majority) and the effect of social distance on the local social transformations accompanying migration. In this way, we hope to provide a basis for a future theoretical synthesis in which findings about locally anchored studies will be a central feature.<sup>4</sup>

Local empirical studies about the migration of the Roma from Central and Eastern Europe are also needed to make sense of the broader context.

A few years ago, facing issues related to migration, the European Commission published its Communication on Maximizing the Development Impact of Migration.<sup>5</sup> This document recognized that migration is both an opportunity and a challenge for development, and also warned that poorly managed migration may undermine progress towards sustainable development. In the context of European mobility, migrants from Romania have often received critical attention in different contexts both in destination countries and in Romania. Even though in recent years the EU and member states have appeared to struggle more with the pressure to manage the external ‘refugee- and humanitarian crisis’ and the internal migration of the Roma from Romania and Eastern-Europe seems to have declined in importance as a political priority, the issue still fuels public debate. Roma are often used as scapegoats: in 2017 in France the eviction of Roma camps was continuous;<sup>6</sup> in 2016, Romanian Roma in the UK gained visibility in the context of pro-Brexit arguments;<sup>7</sup> while Scandinavian authorities are looking for strategies to ameliorate the presence of

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<sup>4</sup> Attempts to deal theoretically with Roma migration within the EU have taken different paths so far. They tend to insist on macro-level processes and discourses (eg. securitization, racialization) and the effect of these within the Europeanization of the Roma issue (Yıldız and De Genova, 2017; van Baar, 2017). Even though these are valuable contributions, more systematic connections with empirical local studies are needed to substantiate the related arguments.

<sup>5</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Maximizing the Development Impact of Migration. The EU contribution for the UN High-level Dialogue and next steps towards broadening the development-migration nexus, European Commission, COM(2013)292, Brussels, 21.5.2013. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-maximising-the-development-impact-of-migration\\_en\\_11.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-maximising-the-development-impact-of-migration_en_11.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.errc.org/press-releases/equality-law-fails-roma-evictions-increase-in-france>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/656553/Roma-gypsy-palaces-quit-EU-benefits-Brexit>

Romanian and Bulgarian Roma beggars.<sup>8</sup> These phenomena continue to maintain anti-migrant and anti-Roma sentiments throughout the EU (Stewart, 2012), not only in the receiving countries, but in home countries as well. A recent report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2018) shows that persistent anti-Roma feelings and attitudes hinder the social inclusion of the Roma in home countries. Our study will hopefully shed light on these broader trends by highlighting the processes which are underway in the ethnically mixed local communities that have the potential for reintegrating Roma returnees.

### *3. The localities and the methodology*

Our analysis focuses on a comparison of two rural communities from Transylvania, Romania.<sup>9</sup> These villages resemble each other in many regards, especially if we limit our inquiry to dry statistical data. The immediate vicinity of both these localities is lacking in major investment and industry, although they are located not very far from bigger (formal) industrial centers, and there have been fluctuations in employment rates during the last couple of decades. The sites are characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, and by a relatively high migration rate, both internal and international.

However, on entering these villages, the contrasts in the landscape become clear: arriving in Baratca<sup>10</sup> (Braşov County) from the direction of the county seat, the first sight is of the Roma community, located on the hill on the fringe of the village. The location is a segregated residential area, with mostly one-room wooden or cob brick buildings, spotted with newly constructed, relatively bigger houses surrounded by fences, while further, towards the center of the village, we find the colorful houses of better-off Roma who managed to move out from the deprived neighborhood. Local Roma speak almost exclusively Romanian as their native tongue, and were traditionally Orthodox Christians. They have increasingly converted to Pentecostalism in recent decades. The local majority is Hungarian, while there is also a less numerous Romanian population. Most of the Hungarians belong to the Lutheran Church. The village has been repeatedly studied by Hungarian folklorists and ethnographers and acquired symbolic significance as being representative of regional Hungarian customs. These earlier descriptions mainly focus on particular elements of Hungarian ethnic culture and ignore the presence of the Roma who mostly live on the deprived margins of the community.

Due to the village's proximity to Braşov, which is an important industrial center, inhabitants of Baratca (including the Roma) were typically commuters during the socialist era. Some Roma worked in collective farms and as day laborers on small plots owned by majority owners. After 1990, most locals lost their industrial jobs and a

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.euractiv.com/section/social-europe-jobs/news/sweden-sees-explosion-in-beggars-from-eu-countries/>

<sup>9</sup> In the MIGROM project, we selected five localities (three small- and medium-size towns and two villages). While in towns we were able to survey only a sample of the local Roma inhabitants, in the villages we were able to implement a community census in the local Roma communities and also to obtain a majority population sample.

<sup>10</sup> The name of localities has been altered to preserve the anonymity of the research participants.

large part of the younger and more mobile generation of ethnic Hungarians moved to Hungary. Those who stayed behind started small enterprises, moved to nearby towns, and a few families continue to work the land. Local employment opportunities for Roma remain limited.

Ethnic tensions are present in this village. There have been several instances of violent confrontation between the Hungarian and Roma during the last decade. Most notably, in the mid-2000s more than 350 persons were involved in an open conflict on the village streets. As a consequence, authorities try to maintain peace through the visible presence of police forces in the vicinity of the growing and territorially segregated Roma community. Moreover, earlier in the same period several tens of local Roma, described as illegal migrants and beggars, were expelled from one Western country, putting their home locality on the front page of mass-media reports alongside other Romanian localities, an event that further contributed to the stigmatization of the local Roma population.

The other village, Bighal (Sălaj County), is welcoming, with an image of a developing locality. It displays neat and tidy houses and gardens, a marketplace, and the new Pentecostal Church. Looking more carefully, one might realize that on the left there is a bigger and poorer neighborhood – compared to the houses on the main street –, while a little further on the right, at the end of a side street, several poorer families live, while later we can learn that both locations are inhabited mostly by Roma families.

Bighal is situated in the Northwest of Transylvania which was, during the socialist era, a traditionally agricultural region less affected by socialist industrialization. Most Roma are native Romani speakers, also proficient in Hungarian and Romanian. Traditionally, Roma and Hungarians are members of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church, but more recently membership of neo-protestant groups (i.e., Pentecostal and Baptist) has increased among the Roma community. In the past many villagers worked in small factories in the neighboring town, but local agriculture and its supporting branches (an agricultural machine park, livestock farms) remained the most important part of the local economy. Many Roma families also used to work as servants for local peasants, and then were hired by the collective farms. Sometimes they even travelled to other regions in Romania on seasonal work assignments. From the 1990s until recently, Roma worked as day laborers on land owned by the majority families. These economic relations contributed to the maintenance of peaceful ethnic relationships within the village. In the past few years, the importance of agriculture has declined and the number of small- and medium-sized enterprises has increased in various domains of light industry and tourism. Opportunities for Roma, even for temporary work, have diminished. In contrast to the situation in Baratca, in Bighal conflicts between the Roma and the majority population have not been reported.

The main commonality of these sites and the reason we chose to study them is that the process of migration has increased among the Roma in both villages in response to declining local employment opportunities. Migration of the Roma started relatively recently, and in 2014-2015, during the time of our fieldwork, it was still intense. The mobility of the majority population started earlier but declined by the time of the fieldwork. Roma families involved in migration invested part of their remittances in improving their houses in both villages, and started acquiring houses or

plots from peasants in areas outside the segregated Roma neighborhood in Baratca, in this way visibly increasing their presence in the local public sphere. Traditional local patterns of social interaction are challenged by these transformations; for some locals, having Roma in close proximity is a new experience. Even more visibly in Baratca, a whole new neighborhood has been developing since a portion of the main street at the entrance to the village has been renovated by returnees who bought and refurbished a number of neighboring houses.

The size of the two localities is comparable, totaling 3000-3500 inhabitants. Local Roma and non-Roma agree that there are large local Roma communities in both villages. In Bighal, locals estimate that there are approximately 500-700 Roma living in the neighborhood, which approximates well the data obtained from our household census. According to our survey, all respondents here consider the majority population to be Hungarian, while only four majority households are situated in a Roma majority neighborhood. On the other hand, in Baratca the changes in perceptions about the size of the local Roma population is even more dynamic; our local interlocutors agreed that around half of the inhabitants of the village are Roma; almost everybody (92.8 per cent from 181 persons) said that Roma represent the majority in the locality, while only 7.2 per cent claimed that they lived in a neighborhood with a Roma majority. Interviews underline this result, as some Hungarians claim that the ethnic proportions in the village have reached a tipping point and Roma now make up the new majority in the village. These figures reflect local perceptions about changing ethnic proportions and reveal something of the anxiety among members of the local majority in Baratca, while such fears are absent in Bighal.

In contrast to the local perceptions, the under-representation of the Roma in official statistics is striking. The difference between the figures can be explained on the one hand by the territorial stigmatization of the neighborhoods where Roma live (while these are not exclusively inhabited by Roma, according to local perceptions they are homogeneous 'Gypsy quarters'), and on the other hand by the 'reluctance error' (Rughiniş, 2010). Many individuals who locally are perceived as belonging to the Roma community preferred to declare themselves as having Romanian or Hungarian ethnicity to the census taker. According to the 2011 National Census in Baratca, self-identified Roma represent only 3.37 per cent of the total population of the village, while in Bighal the proportion is 6.69 per cent. Our community survey reveal that in Baratca the Roma represent at least 35 per cent of the local population, and in Bighal we estimate the proportion of Roma at around 20 per cent.<sup>11</sup> While the proportion of self-identified Roma is significantly higher than the census figures suggest, the most important factor in the changing ethnic proportions is the *perceived threat in Baratca*. Here, perceived danger is fueled both by the fear of being outnumbered, and the visible process of the village being 'taken over by the Gypsies' who are moving in from the margins.

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<sup>11</sup> In Baratca, there were 1041 self-identified Roma persons, and in Bighal 672 Roma persons in our sample. We cannot estimate the exact sizes of the Roma populations as we did not reach those who were abroad for a longer period of time during the time of surveying, nor those few households who did not want to participate.

Local administration, however, remains under the firm control of Hungarians: during the most recent elections (2014), the majority of councilors came from Hungarian ethnic parties.<sup>12</sup>

We carried out field visits in 2014 and 2015, during which time our methodology was aimed at capturing the local social divisions as much as possible. We paid close attention to local categorizations during qualitative fieldwork (ethnographic observation and interviewing) and recruited local research assistants, both Roma and non-Roma, to help prepare our household survey. With the help of these assistants, we identified Roma households where the former carried out face-to-face interviews and completed questionnaires that recorded the ethnic self-identification of the respondents. Additionally, we prepared a questionnaire regarding attitudes related to Roma and surveyed samples of local non-Roma inhabitants in both localities (see: the details in Table 1). We followed the principle that Roma assistants surveyed Roma households, and members of the local majority administered the attitude questionnaires among the majority.

*Table 1. Structure of sample for the survey*

County	Locality	Total population (rounded figures)	% of Roma population (Census 2011)	MIGROM Roma Household Census	MIGROM Roma sample persons	MIGROM majority sample (households)
Braşov	Baratca	3,000	3.37	240	1,041	181
Sălaj	Bighal	3,500	6.69	180	672	141
			Total households	420		322
			Total persons		1,713	990

We summarize that the improvement in the housing conditions of Roma families which is observable in both villages is not due to the development of the local economy, or an improvement in the local or regional job market, even if periodic improvements can be identified. Instead, these sudden changes in the landscape are mainly due to the recent phenomenon of the migration of the Roma, which in both localities started soon after 2007 (for more detail, see: Toma, Tesăr and Fosztó, 2017). This phenomenon was practically non-existent before that year. From the 420 Roma households we surveyed, none had experience with migration before 2007, while approximately 60 per cent of the households in both villages had one or more household members abroad after 2007 for shorter or longer sojourns in Western European countries. Motivations to migrate are manifold, but we underline the local scarcity of jobs and lack of income. Only a minor percentage of Roma households

<sup>12</sup> There are three registered Hungarian ethnic parties in Romania; the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR), the Hungarian Civic Party, and the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania.

have members with a work contract and salary as main income. In Baratca, only five persons were found to have a form of work contract, while two women were on maternity leave, while in Bighal 25 persons had a work contract and two women were on maternity leave. Most of the Roma here rely mostly on informal work, different forms of social benefits, and more recently, remittances.

However, there are some basic differences between the two localities, mainly in attitudes regarding the Roma among the local majority population. In the next section, we turn to these differences based on findings from the local attitude survey.

#### *4. Social distance as a way of understanding prejudice*

In surveying the attitudes to Roma among the local majority population, our aim is to give a general review of the attitudes shared by a broader circle of respondents and provide statistical support for our observations and interviews. Our questionnaire included a standard set of questions measuring social distance, interaction patterns, and more general questions about trust relations among members of majority and the Roma.

The concept of social distance was introduced to social theory by the German sociologist Georg Simmel. In his essay on 'The Stranger' Simmel observed that 'spatial relations not only are determining conditions of relationships among men, but are also symbolic of those relations' (Simmel, 1971: 143). Simmel also discussed the tensions generated by the permanent presence of an outsider whose non-belonging is conspicuous by his physical nearness. Robert Park, who later became a prominent figure of the Chicago School of Sociology, attended Simmel's lectures while studying in Berlin, and took the idea across the ocean and applied it to ethnic relations in America. His co-worker, Emory Bogardus, operationalized the concept for quantitative surveys by creating a scale (Bogardus, 1925).

The scale consist of a series of questions regarding the acceptance of members of particular groups as potential marriage partners, friends, neighbors, co-workers, or visitors to the country, or whether the respondent thinks that the named individuals/groups should be excluded from the country altogether. This is a one-dimensional cumulative scale that assumes that the respondent would admit members of the selected group to all positions below the highest level of expressed acceptance (Williams, 2007). This scale, which came to be known as the Bogardus Social Distance Scale, was translated into many languages and has been implemented worldwide (Wark and Galliher, 2007). One shortcoming of the Bogardus Social Distance Scale compared to Simmel's perspective is that it captures only the symbolic component of social distance without considering existing contact between group members or their physical proximity. In spite of such criticism, the scale is used worldwide as a standard measurement of prejudice.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Critics have observed that the concept of social distance and, more generally, Simmel's conception of social geometry is much more generous theoretically than Bogardus was able to capture with his scale (Ethington, 1997). Others claim that there are 'some question as to whether it [the scale] measures group status or social intimacy' (Williams, 2007: 4406). For historical reasons the development of the scale should not be divorced from its social context and the particular moment it was created; namely, during

In Romania, social distance towards minority groups is regularly measured with the Bogardus Scale at a national level. Institutions such as the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) and the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania regularly commission surveys on nationally representative samples, and these surveys usually rank Roma as among the groups which are at highest risk of being discriminated against; members of the majority express a preference for a rather high degree of social distance towards them (see: Table 2 for a comparative summary). However, there are no measurements available at the local level.<sup>14</sup> In our questionnaire regarding local attitudes we included such a measurement, keeping most items unchanged, but adapted slightly the Bogardus Scale to include a question regarding locality ('Would you accept Roma in your locality?'). Additionally, we asked respondents to respond with yes/no to a set of statements regarding attitudes to local Roma, and registered the social circles of the respondents in order to elicit their local relationships with Roma and non-Roma.

*Table 2. Use of the Bogardus Scale as applied to the Roma in Romania*

	IPP Survey 2003 (%)	Come Closer 2008 (%)	CNCD survey 2008 (%)	CNCD survey 2010 (%)	Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of Holocaust (Oct 2015)	Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of Holocaust (Oct 2017)
Would accept in the family	7.9	17.9	20	10.6	6.0	6.0
Would accept as friend	11.9	42.0	43	17.2	7.0	10.0
Would accept as neighbor	16.9*	63.2	58	16.1	10.0	100
Would accept as co-worker	10.6	69.6	62	15.5	10.0	9.0
Would accept in the country	31.1	80.6	n.d.	7.3	27.0	26.0
Would not even accept in this country	13.3	15.6	n.d.	7.9	30.0	26.0
I do not know	8.4	n.d.	n.d.	7.8	n.d	n.d
Total	1500	954	1200	1400	1016	1014

\*asked as: 'Would accept in my locality'

*Sources:* IPP Survey (Moraru, Voicu and Tobă, 2003: 79), Come Closer (Fleck and Rughiniș, 2008: 72), CNCD survey 2008 (GALLUP, 2008: 156), CNCD survey 2009 (INSOMAR, 2009: 12-15), and CNCD survey 2010 (Păunescu and Bobîrsc, 2010: 81), Elie Wiesel 2017 Oct. Report pg. 16.

the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and involving ethnic tensions among immigrant groups in Chicago and Southern California where Bogardus worked and used his scale for the first time (see: Wark and Galliher, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> There are examples of such studies being used in other contexts; for example, see: Valentina Savini for Pescara in Italy (Savini, 2017).

Our results indicate striking differences between the two field sites (see: Table 3). While in Bighal almost half of the non-Roma sample declared that they would accept a Rom/Romni as family member, in Baratca only 1.1 per cent chose this response. In Baratca, more than 60 per cent opted for the highest possible social distance; that is, banning Roma from entering the country. No respondent from Bighal chose this option.

*Table 3. Local social distance to Roma (adapted Bogardus Scale)*

	Baratca (%)	Bighal (%)
Would accept in the family	1.1	<b>48.9</b>
Would accept in the household	5.0	8.5
Would accept as neighbor	6.1	17.0
Would accept as co-worker	5.0	9.2
Would accept in the locality	15.5	10.6
Would not even accept in this country	<b>60.8</b>	0
I do not know	6.6	5.7
Total	181	141

We consider this contrast salient and rather atypical in both localities as compared to the national-level results presented above. In order to interpret this contrast, we need to go into more detail regarding the interaction patterns between members of the groups and general attitudes to the other.

It would be mistaken to attempt to understand local attitudes in isolation from broader social-economic and communication processes. In particular, media images can influence (most often for the worse) the generalized perception of the Roma in such villages. Television and the press carry images of migrant Roma and show the negative perceptions or refusal of the destination countries. If these generalized images are reinforced by local events, their effect on increasing social distance can hardly be overestimated. Not long before we started our fieldwork, groups of Roma from Baratca were sent back from the United Kingdom following charges of begging on the streets of London. Additionally, the British police visited the local Roma settlement and organized a seminar to discuss issues contributing to 'Roma migration.' For the members of the local majority, these events were additional proof of the misdeeds of Roma abroad, and reinforced the conviction that keeping a distance is the right attitude.

The following table (Table 4) illustrates the interactions of the local majority with the local Roma population as reported in our survey. Interactions between the groups are rather intense in both cases but the type of relationships and exchanges differ significantly. In Baratca, the relationships and exchanges of the local majority with the Roma are more likely to be involuntary and aimed at the maintenance of distance, while in Bighal local Roma and non-Roma engage in more interaction which is of a voluntary nature.

*Table 4. Interaction patterns with local Roma*

	True	Baratca (%)	Bighal (%)
	Sometimes Roma help me with agricultural work	29.3	49.6
	Sometimes Roma help me with household tasks	8.3	34.0
	I have Roma colleagues at work	18.2	26.2
	Sometimes I visit a Roma acquaintance, friend	7.7	38.3
	I have Roma neighbors	<b>51.9</b>	<b>22.7</b>
	I have Roma relatives	1.7	7.1
	I am a godparent to a Roma child	<b>0</b>	<b>10.6</b>
	Total	181	141

The most conspicuous difference between the two samples is that more than half of respondents in Baratca reported that they have Roma neighbors, while in Bighal the proportion is only about 22 per cent. This is a result of the process of spontaneous residential desegregation, as described in the previous section. Increasing physical closeness, however, does not necessarily bring about stronger ties or more positive attitudes. In terms of the general patterns of economic exchange, the figures demonstrate that there is more cooperation in Bighal than in Baratca. About half of respondents in Bighal employ Roma occasionally as farm-hands, and about one-third of the sample use Roma helpers in household chores. The proportions of economic cooperation reported in Baratca are significantly lower; 29.3 per cent for agricultural labor and 8.3 per cent for domestic help.

It is interesting to note that, even if our measurement of social distance suggests that almost half of the Bighal sample were ready to accept a Roma as a family member, the proportion of those who actually have Roma relatives is only about 7 per cent. This can be interpreted as an example of divergence between declared attitudes of social distance and existing social practices.

One particular form of ritual kinship is rather frequent in Bighal; about every 10<sup>th</sup> Hungarian has a Roma godchild (Toma, forthcoming). There are hardly any kinship ties between Roma and non-Roma in Baratca.

These attitudes are also apparent in the reported friendship choices in the two localities: in Baratca 51.9 per cent of our total sample declared that their close family friends are exclusively from their own ethnic group, and an additional 47.5 per cent that their friends come mostly from their own ethnic group. In Bighal, 14.2 per cent of respondents said that they only have friends from their own group, while the majority of respondents (54.6 per cent) declared that ethnicity does not count in their choice of friends.

Looking at the responses to questions regarding trust relations with particular groups of Roma, the results are significantly different in the two villages (see Table 5). More than 50 per cent of respondents from Bighal believe that the Roma in their region and their locality 'are more trustworthy' than Roma in Romania generally, or those living in the neighboring localities. Only a few respondents from Baratca hold similar views about the Roma in their region or locality. There seems to be more similarity between attitudes regarding the trustfulness of Roma living in the segregated settlement and those who live in more central areas of the village. In Bighal, 80 per cent and Baratca 46 per cent of respondents agree that those who live within the village are more trustworthy. This result indicates that the desegregation process might

be having a positive impact on perceptions of socially mobile Roma families, while territorial stigma persists about those living in the disadvantaged areas. Virtually everybody from the sample in Bighal acknowledged that they know a trustworthy Roma person, while eight in ten respondents in Baratca claimed the same.

*Table 5. Statements about the Roma by the local majority<sup>15</sup>*

True	Baratca (%)	Bighal (%)
Roma are more trustworthy in our region than in Romania in general	2.2	51.8
Roma are more trustworthy in our locality than in neighboring localities	1.1	52.5
Roma living within the village are more trustworthy than those who live in segregated communities	46.4	80.1
I know a trustworthy Roma person	80.1	95.0
Total	181	141

Some of these results appear to contrast with the measurement of social distance. While replies to questions using the Bogardus scale show a rather high degree of social rejection of the generalized category of ‘the Roma’, local interactions and attitudes to individuals and subgroups are more diverse. The survey data can be also corroborated with the results of earlier qualitative research in Bighal that identified several layers of attitude-related baggage of the local majority population towards the Roma, depending on how they frame their interpretations (Toma, 2014).

Imagining these attitudes on a linear continuum, the broadest set of attitudes is characterized by strong stereotypes and prejudices, a type of discourse that we can easily find in the mass-media and public discourse (*i.e.* ‘*their [the Roma] attitude toward work and generally toward life is very negative. They spend the money that they earn today, yesterday. They don’t think of anything... They learn that dirty lifestyle from each other, they are born in it and that’s what they continue to do.*’ – *middle-aged Hungarian man, institute representative*). At this generalized level, Roma are characterized as a menace to local communities: they are ‘dangerous outsiders.’

The second dimension we can interpret in a narrowed context is the following: Roma are a present reality in the lives of the villages, but there is a clear division between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ These distinctions are also built into the visible differences between different local Roma communities: one (in the ethnically mixed area of the village) is better situated, while the other (territorially more homogeneous) is poorer. This might be the reason why the same informal economic activities are considered differently (by some of the locals): ‘*ahh, it’s a big deal to gather raspberries. You go to the woods, take a nice walk, and get some money out of nothing...*’ (*Hungarian woman, about the compact community*). On the other hand, those Hungarians who

<sup>15</sup>In the survey we asked only one adult person from a household.

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live in the vicinity of or have other types of contact with some Roma families use a more differentiated and complex discourse when speaking about the Roma, sometimes even neglecting totally ethnic dimensions. When these are mentioned, it is underlined that *'our Gypsies are not like the (Romanian, Southern, Traditional, etc.) Gypsies.'*

Finally, the third identified position on the above-mentioned continuum is when the lines of demarcation weaken and even blur. The line between 'us' and 'them' is extended: 'us' broadens to incorporate local others, while 'them' is used to refer to those at a greater distance. This brings to the surface situational identity categories as it largely depends on the actual context, and stereotypes do not apply on an individual level.

However, physical proximity or frequent contact does not obviously blur ethnic boundaries, because the intentionality of behavior in interpersonal relations – which appears in everyday forms of contact – corresponds to that generalizing and more stigmatizing attitude that is applied to the whole group. Removing someone from the 'them' category thus may not mean simply recognizing and acknowledging the difference of the other, but trying to maintain a certain hierarchy, while the Roma – on the other hand – try to capitalize on relationships in order to overcome stereotyping and essentializing generalizations.

These observations are in line with the findings of earlier anthropological studies about ethnically mixed localities in Transylvania that found that local socioeconomic transformation can challenge established ethnic interaction patterns, reinforce stigmatization, and increase collective anxieties (Fosztó, 2003), as well as bring about changes in attitudes and discourses related to the 'other' by emphasizing collective identities at the expense of more personalized interactions (Biró and Bodó, 2003), or can lead to insistence on the positive individual qualities of the Roma person present in the interaction but maintenance of a generalized negative stigma about the ethnic community (Toma, 2006).

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### *5. Discussion: migration and local transformations in the light of social distance*

In this section, we turn to discussing the interplay between local social distance and spatial transformation and its relation to the recent opening up of a wider space for the mobility of local Roma. Migration and mobility bring the promise of upward social mobility, even for the most disadvantaged local segments of communities, but they also potentially create new obstacles to the full realization of these promises by hardening social boundaries and increasing social distance. The localities we study are increasingly experiencing these transformations, although these are not always easy to link directly to the effects of migration.

In spite of the growth in scholarly literature on the impact of migration on communities of origin, it is still difficult to obtain a comprehensive overview and understanding of these effects. In the localities we studied, migration is a relatively new phenomenon which has grown in intensity in a very short period of time. The impact of migration on home communities worldwide has been identified on many levels and in numerous dimensions of social life. It affects the local and national economy, and it can transform the political landscape. Migration can change family structure (Mincer, 1978), but on a broader level and over a longer time it also changes the demographic structure of localities, regions, and even countries. It influences gender and intergenerational relations in households (Schuerkens, 2005; Lutz, 2010; Portes, 2010), it has an impact on the education of the population, and can change the health practices or the access to health of those who remain at home. Moreover, migration can change the everyday habits of home-making and house-building practices. Remittances are fuel for social change and transformation (Faist, 2008) and their effects can be very diverse (Schiller, Basch and Blanc, 1995; Levitt, 1998).

To better understand the effects of migration on a *local level*, financial and social remittances should not be considered as clearly separate categories. Social remittances influence the way financial remittances are spent or invested, while financial remittances can have a major impact on how social remittances are made use of. Both financial and social-remittances are embedded in the local social context and are used through local social networks. Thus, migration and remittances can influence not only the households participating in migration, but also affect the broader community, including non-migrants as well (Taylor and Dyer, 2009). In most cases, the results of 'successful' migration become visible to non-migrants as well, thus it is not only direct beneficiaries who attach value and meaning to it, but non-migrants as well. Non-migrants can value positively or condemn and disapprove (Elrick, 2008) the way that returning migrants present themselves in their locality of origin. These attitudes implicitly affect local social relations with non-migrants, and have the potential to change interactions. There is ample empirical evidence from relatively homogeneous communities worldwide which shows that the impact of migration can be positive or negative, or both synchronously; nevertheless, conclusions are not unequivocal about the factors and processes that lead to these outcomes.

There is less research about ethnically mixed communities where local society is more likely to be hierarchically organized according to the ethnic belonging that is pervasive in every dimension of social life (job markets, education, access to services,

housing, social networks, and so on). Most of the research that does focus on ethnic minorities analyses ethnic minority formation in *receiving* countries, modes of incorporation through policies and informal practices, migrants' job market positions and residential segregation, and, last but not least, intensifying racism and violence (Portes and Böröcz, 1989; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014).

In the previous section we described how there are striking differences between the attitudes of the majority population (Hungarians and Romanians) regarding the Roma in the two localities. In both cases there is a history of residential separation between the Roma and the majority, with Roma houses clustering in the less well-off neighborhoods. However, recently we have observed the rapid improvement of the houses and living conditions of the Roma, and also that Roma families are moving out from the poorer areas. While these improvements would not have been possible without the migration of the Roma during the last decade, the process is more complex. Indeed, one cannot say how these villages would have looked without the effects of migration, but it is safe to say that migration and remittances have substantially contributed to such improvements. Thus, on the local and community level, one of the strongest – if not the strongest – and most visible markers of the impact of migration and the investment of remittances is 'remittance houses' (Lopez, 2010). Building new homes and improving existing ones can be considered a widespread way of spending remittances, independent of the type of migration.

However, the way construction takes place is not independent of the patterns of migration in the two localities of our study: in Baratca, the Roma migrate using their own family and ethnic networks to a limited number of destination countries, while Roma in Bighal had dense relationships and networks with the local non-Roma population, which led to a greater diversity of destinations involving inter-ethnic networks. Everyday contacts and cooperation fostered the opportunity for the Roma to use non-Roma networks to find jobs abroad. In contrast, a high level of social distance and reduced interaction between different ethnic groups in Baratca appears to be leading to the consolidation of ethnic and family networks. The spatial reconfiguration of the villages mirrors these processes: in spite of the heightened social distance in Baratca, the process of residential desegregation is increasing; successful Roma migrants are moving out from the segregated area of the village and are establishing household networks in the inner space of the locality. This can be contrasted in some ways with the process that is taking place in Bighal, where there is much less residential intermingling between the Roma and the local majority, but they maintain a relatively balanced state of interaction during everyday life.

Our findings regarding the situation in Baratca are consistent with recent social psychological studies which demonstrate that contact between the Roma and other ethnic groups does not necessarily reduce social distance in Eastern Europe. This claim seems particularly relevant for understanding the dynamics of social distance in the present context. A study of the correlation between social distance and existing contact between ethnic groups in Romania concludes that 'direct correlations between our results for levels of contact and social distance show that contact is a strong predictor of social distance with respect to both the Romanian and Hungarian ethnic groups. However, levels of contact with Roma do not predict social distance from Roma' (Ives et al., 2016: 10-11). In this survey of a sample of ethnic Hungarian and

Romanian high school students from Romania, social distance appears to remain relatively high, despite contact with Roma. Another study of social distance and contact argues that social contact increases rather than decreases prejudice in the presence of social contexts approving of negative beliefs about the Roma, as demonstrated using samples from Hungary and Slovakia (Kende, Hadarics and Láštiová, 2017).

However, our case study about Bighal also demonstrates that there is an alternative to such negative scenarios in the form of more balanced local development. More detailed study of these cases is still needed, but we can already identify some elements of the contexts. Comparing the Roma households of the two villages, we can observe several basic differences. Traditionally, there was a more intermingled residential pattern in Bighal as more households in Bighal live in ethnically mixed neighborhoods (20 per cent of the households are in mixed neighborhoods, while in Baratca only 2.9 per cent). There are also important differences regarding the use of local languages. In Baratca, the mother tongue of the Roma is Romanian (99.8 per cent) and they rarely speak Hungarian, the language of the local majority. In Bighal the Roma are native speakers of Romani (94.6 per cent), but they speak Hungarian and Romanian as well. They also have a higher level of education on average. Moreover, in Bighal Roma families often chose Hungarian godparents for their newborn children (16.8 per cent of Roma respondents have a Hungarian godparent, meaning that 80 households from the 180 have at least one Hungarian godparent), while in Baratca trans-ethnic godparents are entirely lacking.

In comparison to these findings, the non-Roma households of the two villages are not so evidently different. The most salient difference is that in Bighal the religious diversity among the Roma is higher (3 per cent are Orthodox Christians, 32.1 per cent Protestants, and 64.7 per cent are Neoprotestants). Religious belonging also cross-cuts ethnic divisions, while in Baratca religious boundaries roughly coincide with ethnic ones; Hungarians belong to the Lutheran Church, while Roma are exclusively Orthodox Christians or Pentecostals (14.5 per cent of the Roma are Orthodox Christians and 85.2 per cent Neoprotestants). Additionally, members of the local majority population in Bighal are relatively younger and live in better-equipped households. Members of the majority in Bighal have slightly more experience of migration than those in Baratca, and their intention to migrate is greater. In Bighal, 47.8 per cent of all households were planning to look for a job abroad in the next 12 months (the year following data collection), while in Baratca the proportion was only 22.1 per cent.

Obtaining a broader understanding of how local ethnic relations develop processes of local migration among the local majority populations should be not neglected either. In their seminal study of Csenyéte, a village in Northeastern Hungary, János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi (Ladányi and Szelényi, 2003) demonstrated that ethnic categories and territorial divisions significantly change over longer periods of time. However, changes can sometimes happen rapidly, as the work of Judit Durst revealed (2010). Durst, working in another village in Northeastern Hungary, described how a local government-financed housing program that was set up to offer housing to local Roma and thereby dismantle the segregated neighborhood (*telepfelszámolás*) had unexpected side effects and led almost instantaneously to the

creation of a 'ghetto village'. The project not only contributed to the mobility of the Roma, who managed to move into more central spaces in the village, but also intensified the mobility of non-Roma; the latter took advantage of the financial resources brought into the village by the desegregation project, sold their houses, and moved to the city nearby. In spite of development-related intentions, this process only worsened the exclusion of local Roma by leaving them behind in an isolated, Roma-only village.

Local desegregation can also increase local social tensions and reinforce stigmatization. Working in another village in the same region, Cecília Kovai observed the side effects of a similarly benevolently intended housing intervention:

The programme that aimed to dissolve the Gypsy settlement 'named the Gypsy': the call for participation explicitly addressed the Gypsies. The successful application to carry out the program was prepared by the Gypsy association funded a couple of years earlier. As a result, families who were living on the margins of the village could move into the village but were able to do this only as Gypsies - there was no chance to pretend that their ethnic status did not matter. And future neighbours, with a few exceptions made no efforts to pretend at all: they responded with intense protests. [...] The act of naming therefore brings both new room for manoeuvre within the 'Gypsy issue' and has reinforced offensive and exclusionary stigmatization (Kovai, 2012: 290).

These examples show that top-down, state-driven intervention can have sometimes unexpected side effects. Our own cases document situations where the motor of change was located 'below', as momentum was generated by market forces. Unlike the earlier-described settlement dissolution programs implemented by the local administration and Roma associations in Hungary, the desegregation process in the villages we studied was triggered spontaneously by the local, transformative effects of migration. While there are similarities in the process, the differences are also significant.

## *6. Concluding remarks: diverging paths of development and their implications for local policies*

Sam Beck, an American anthropologist who did long-term fieldwork in the Braşov region in the 1970s and 1980s, was writing about the situation of Roma in socialist Romania. He argued that under the conditions of intensifying, state-driven modernization, policies for settlement and employment-related interaction between the Roma and the majority population increased, but along with this, mistreatment or rejection of the Țigani/Roma also intensified (Beck, 1984: 31). Our findings from roughly the same region but more than three decades later, and under conditions of post-socialist, market-induced modernization, show striking parallels to the changes observed by Beck. Today, migration following European integration is arguably the reason for the most important social changes in the Romanian countryside. The effects of international mobility, return, and the remittances spent or invested trigger

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visible modernization processes ‘from below.’ This induces an increase in the amount of interaction between the Roma and non-Roma that affects and challenges existing patterns of ethnic relations. Changing attitudes feed into and shape possible scenarios for further local development.

However, as our comparative analysis has shown, the effects of migration are not necessarily negative. Compared to what we found in Baratca, the relationship between local Roma and their Hungarian neighbors in Bighal involves much less tension and conflict.

International migration has enabled migrant Roma families to increase their capacity for local social mobility in their home localities. In this sense, the opening up of the European space can be seen as a transformative process for the Roma involved in migration. In the absence of targeted and effective state policies, market forces can bring about local change which challenges old perceptions and generates fear. Still, as we have argued, this is not unavoidable: understanding local ethnic interaction patterns and the dynamics of social distance should be the first step towards creating more empirically informed local policies.

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