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Participatory Research with Romanian Roma Immigrants Living in Polish Settlements: Methodology, Results and Barriers

Abstract

Systemic segregation and economic exclusion of Romanian Roma immigrants in Poland, starting in the 1990s, has deprived this group from the right to work, health care, welfare system and adequate housing. Roma encampments built from recycled materials represent the most radical forms of collective response to the problem of access to housing.

A group consisting of sociologists and activists conducted the first Polish sociological intervention studies with this community living in Polish encampments. The final report has been created in cooperation with Roma people. These studies show problems which this community is facing, making it impossible for the authorities to further ignore the presence of these people in Poland. The result of this research has been used to support social change in this community, and continues to support claims made to local authorities to change their policy.

In this chapter I focus on the analysis of existing forms of cooperation with this community and the challenges faced by people who want to enter into the emancipatory forms of cooperation with Roma immigrants, presenting the possible fields of cooperation and obstacles.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and to critically reflect upon results of participatory cooperation between Romanian Roma immigrants living in Polish settlements and activist-researchers, with special attention given to barriers experienced in the course of the study.

In the chapter, I view engagement with the subject of Romanian Roma's situation in Poland as significant in the context of the debate concentrating

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not so much on ethnicity (as in Roma studies, Gypsy studies), but on the social, economic, and political situation of foreign nationals in Poland.

Most of the Roma of Romanian origin living in Poland do not have the citizenship nor registration of residence, and thus no access to basic rights or the possibility to represent their interests is given. The research being presented in this contribution was the first participatory country-wide study of the social situation of camping-out Roma (living in independently-built encampments). The project was conducted in 2015 to diagnose the situation, and to implement social and political changes in the future. Another aim was to enter into a cooperation with the Roma, so that the joint presentation of research findings could include them in the public debate, since up to that point the national authorities and local governments either pretended not to notice their presence, or acted in such a way as to maintain their lack of voice under the status of “illegal immigrants”. To answer to this rhetoric and the problems related to economic and political exclusion, it was necessary to implement participatory practices. Preparing for the research, as an activist engaged in work with Roma community in Poland since 2012, I purposefully deployed a methodological approach characteristic for militant research, building on the works of Deanna Dadusc (2014), David Croteau, William Hoynes and Charlotte Ryan (2005), among others.

The goal of this contribution is to describe the situation of Roma in the context of Polish migration policy towards poor foreign nationals, and to present the results of the undertaken attempts of participatory, non-paternalistic cooperation between the Roma and the researchers and activists as well as introduce the readers into the barriers experienced in the course of such research.

I will start with description of the research inspiration and process in order to later segue to answer the question of how its realisation became possible, as well as how we used the research results in the form of a report and a documentary film. The second part will focus on conclusions from the research, attempting to analyse the current forms of cooperation with Roma community. I will also discuss challenges faced by researchers and activists oriented on working with Roma community.

Roma as a “problem” in Europe and Poland – justification of participatory practices

After the fall of the Ceausescu dictatorship and the revolution in Romania which took place in 1989, the volume of Roma migration to European countries increased (Kostka, 2015). After the revolution and the systemic transformation, Roma were the first group to lose their jobs (e.g. in agricultural facilities and

on farms, where during the communist dictatorship they were directed to work as a cheap, low-skilled labour force). Always treated as second-class citizens in Romania, they have not gained access to the labour market and the ability to improve their qualifications after the fall of the dictatorship. They were also losing flats. Currently, as a result of processes related to gentrification and programmes based on the principles of neoliberal urban policy of “cleansing cities” from poor people, Roma remain a class with the greatest threat of displacement as a result of successive evictions from the city centre. Debt was not always the reason, but also city investments or a change of the foregoing function of the buildings inhabited by Roma.

Acquisition of precise data specifying the range of their migration is very difficult. During his dictatorship, Ceausescu regularly avoided political discussion on the subject of Roma. At one point he announced that Roma do not exist in Romania, hence there are no problems related to this community. At a later point and during the recent National Population Censuses carried out in Romania, a significant number of Roma did not admit their ethnic origin. This decision is related to a high level of segregation and discrimination of this minority. The available official data, therefore, can be significantly understated in relation to the actual number of Roma inhabiting Romanian cities and villages.

Increase in the emigration of Roma from Romania occurred in relation to the Romanian accession to the EU (2007). To Roma, migration gave hope for the improvement of financial status and respect of their rights. Statistics concerning migration of Roma to EU countries after 2007 – namely after the accession of Romania to the European Union – are not available neither; crossing of the border is visa-free, hence, despite the fact that Romania is not in the Shengen zone, movement of Roma peoples is not a subject of statistical analyses. Some of them chose Poland and here we have the analogical situation. Poland does not keep the record of Romanian Roma living and born on the territory of the country as in Poland Roma of Romanian origin are not recognised as a national minority.

The main reasons for choosing Poland declared by Roma people were socio-material motivations and possibilities related to the basic knowledge of Polish language, their own previous migrations to Poland in childhood (when they would often be deported back), or experiences of previous generations, relatives and friends. Currently, the Roma who live in encampments on the territory of Poland arrived in search of better work and life conditions, mainly from villages located near the cities of Sibiu Vistea de Jos, Fagaras and Brasov, and from Transylvania.

When it comes to the formal-legal status, Romanian Roma are treated as “guests”, legally visiting “tourists from another EU country”, at the same time it is often categorically denied that they have been living on the territory of Poland for years, despite the fact that a large number of them were

born in Poland. Roma immigrants, residing in Poland for over two decades, struggle with poverty and significant limitation of opportunities for social advancement.

Romanian Roma have a rather limited contact with Roma holding Polish citizenship (regardless of cultural differences between the groups – different language dialects, traditions, customs – economic disparities play a significant role). Support operations for members of Roma associations and expressions of outrage in relation to, for example, illegal evictions of encampments are rare. A significant role in the mutual relations with others is played out by the differences resulting from their hierarchy in the social ladder. They are perceived as beggars, living in self-made settlements (encampments), hence there are occurrences of acts of aggression and ascribing specific characteristics to this group - social parasitism, laziness, reluctance to take up work and abuse of the social benefits system. The phenomenon of economic racism, consists in essentialisation (Blaut, 1992) and attribution of certain characteristics to a specific community due to extreme poverty, regardless of nationality.¹

At least from the 1990s up until 2014, not a single governmental institution (including those subsidized with EU funds) cooperated with Romanian Roma, while there were some institutions cooperating with Roma holding Polish citizenship. EU funds allocated for the integration of Roma and enabling the use of a range of programmes, could not, and to a large extent still cannot, be allocated for financing activities related to support for the Roma immigrants of Romanian origin living in Poland. Governmental statistics concerning aid programmes do not include those who are in the worst situation. (They include only the Roma constituting the official minority in Poland, having a regulated legal status or citizenship). From the formal point of view, therefore, this community for many years has been “invisible” (no records in the system, no registration of stay, or an official address of residence), while the only activities undertaken by city councils and national authorities concerned forced displacements and deportations. Descriptions of these types of operations found in the archives of local press are reproduced, among others, by the current author in a text on the impact of substandard housing on the deepening and reinforcing of social inequalities (Czarnota, Iwański, 2017).

What makes the situation worse is that the postponing of public debate on systemic solutions which would encompass inclusive policy aimed for this very poor community has been the norm for years. However, authorities on the national level knew about Romanian Roma migration to Poland already in the 1990s, proof of which are the first deportations organised by the Polish state.

¹ The same concerns, for example, Polish people living and working abroad – “That Pole who begs on the street is not the same Pole as I am”.

No access to education and extremely poor, substandard housing conditions in Romania force successive generations to emigrate. At the same time, illiteracy significantly impairs their independence and ability to receive humane work in the countries to which Roma emigrate. As a result of systemic exclusion and segregation, Romanian Roma, in my view, occupy the lowest position in the social ladder, and secondly, are one of the groups with the worst economic situation in Poland. They constitute one of the most striking examples of the fact that the Polish migration policy is not constructed in a way allowing for acceptance of groups of migrants who do not meet economic criteria related to, for example, having a sufficient economic status, education and relevant skills which would potentially help fuel the Polish labour market. It is evident in the fact that there is already a third generation of Romanian Roma living in Poland as an isolated and virtually invisible minority.

The support of activists allowed the registration of stay for some of them, and, so far in single cases, acquiring access to the labour market and education in 2015.

The need for studies, and most importantly for participatory activities with Roma, is very high because in Poland this community is the most excluded from administering and decision-making over their own life on multiple levels. Participatory research combined with appropriately critical reflection constitute ground for cooperation is needed.

Research methodology

In my research work, constructing knowledge usable only in the debates of a rather hermetic academic circle is not the priority. Similarly to Bertie Russell (2015) or Jeffrey Juris (2007), I treat sociological research in this case as an emancipation tool, at the same time questioning the paramount role of university as, in some cases, limited by hierarchic structures and thus limited in terms of possibilities of using research results in social practice. I believe that the researcher's engagement has a positive impact on the research quality, since an engaged researcher has the ability to obtain more detailed information, acquiring knowledge of the wider context of the topics addressed (Choudry, Kapoor, 2013).

More and more researchers use the paradigm of participatory action research methodology (PAR) (such as those financed by the European Commission in the countries of the Global South²), which is not to say

² Numerous examples can be found on the official website of Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS). Many projects, however, are not subjected to critical evaluation when it comes to the results of their implementation and the range of participation.

that more Roma are included in the process of research creation nor in application of its results. For example, as stated above, communities do not have access to research results and cannot use them in practice. In my study I use militant research as one of the forms of participatory research. At the same time, by using the term of militant research I wish to highlight the fact that I put strong emphasis on the goal of the research and application of its results. In recent years the PAR methodology has become rather common, nonetheless, results are often available only to the academic circle and in reality do not improve the situation of its participants.

Thus I referred to the experience of activists and academics coalitions including *Collectivo Situaciones* (2003), or the *Madrid Observatoria Metropolitana* which describe themselves as:

a militant research group that utilizes investigations and counter-mapping to look into the metropolitan processes of precarious workers, migrants, and militants taking place in Madrid, brought on by crisis, gentrification, speculation and displacement.

Another inspiration were the activities and studies also using the militant research methodology conducted by researchers affiliated with the *Social Housing Now and Desire Foundation*.³ As I mentioned before, a group of activists and academics affiliated with these groups (being part of the local tenants' movement), for several years have been working with the community living near *Pata Rat* on the outskirts of the second largest city in Romania which constitutes a strong academic centre – *Cluj Napoca*.

Constructing the main principles of my research I was also inspired by the activity of Roma academics affiliated with the *Central European University* in Budapest and the international network of researchers, *MigRom*.⁴ *MigRom* is probably the largest research project bringing together researchers working with the subject of Romanian Roma migration to countries of Western Europe. Their foregoing research concerned mainly migration to Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. *MigRo* also puts emphasis on participation of Roma through, among other means, participation in research processes, distribution of research results, and supporting Roma as experts on their own communities. Nevertheless, scientists centred around *MigRom* approach the issue of the migration of Roma of Romanian origin to Poland as too marginal and concluded that there is no possibility of obtaining reliable data.⁵

³ <http://www.desire-ro.eu>

⁴ *MigRom* is the acronym of the research project: *The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagement strategies 2013–2017* (*MigRom*, 2017).

⁵ Despite significantly lower level of migration compared to other countries, I believe that research concerning reasons for migration to Poland and the situation in Poland is very important, while stories of individual families show that migration is embedded in the history of around three generations of Roma, mainly those residing in the *Sibiu* area and smaller villages

The militant research with Romanian Roma community in Poland

The research on the Roma community, coordinated by the current author and realised by the Western Centre for Social and Economic Research (Marcinkowski, 2015), constituted the first sociological research in Poland which was an attempt to analyse the situation of Romanian Roma on a country-wide scale.

The research took several months, commencing in the spring of 2015 in Poznań, followed by visits to encampments in Wrocław and Gdańsk. During the field study, we conducted 62 questionnaire interviews and 18 in-depth interviews concerning mainly the social and economic situation of Roma who came to Poland from Romania. This way, we obtained information on the legal status of 226 people, including 122 children. The Roma talked about their reason for migrating from Romania to Poland. The data collected during the interviews were partially subjected to quantitative analysis, whereas the in-depth interviews to a qualitative one. Additionally, conclusions were also a result of discussion with the Roma. Some of them served functions similar to evaluations. In order to carry out the research we reached Roma encampments located, among others, in Gdańsk, Kraków, Słomniki, Wrocław, Poznań. On the estates studied, at the time a total number of around 500 people lived on them. However, we expect that the Roma studied by us represent a wider group of immigrants whose size we did not manage to determine. Additionally, a film was realised in which Roma talk about work, education, healthcare, reasons behind their arrival, and forms of discrimination they face, as well as their dreams in regards to staying in Poland.

The data was collected on the basis of the snowball method⁶ – residents of subsequent settlements informed us of spaces inhabited by larger groups of immigrants. Of course, it can be debated whether the study is representative. We reached only the most populous encampments. Many individual families live in very dispersed spaces. Interviews were conducted in Polish and Romanian, one in English. Not everyone wanted to participate in the study. Declared reasons for the refusal were concerns regarding potential further use of the results by third parties, forwarding personally identifiable information to border authorities, and fear of deportation or incurring potential consequences related to the illegal

within the region of Transylvania. As already mentioned, I have not found similar research concerning the situation of Roma of Romanian origin.

⁶ Snowball sampling – a method of non-arbitrary selection of sample based on recruiting participants of study through other participants.

construction of settlements, etc. The Roma respondents were more likely to agree to a questionnaire interview rather than a video one. After conducting the questionnaire interviews, respondents selected persons who would participate in video recordings. Those who agreed to be video-recorded were people who spoke fairly fluent Polish and had the support of most of the community (mostly males). In each case, these were the people who had also filled in the questionnaires. We visited each of the encampments several times (the most in Poznań). After editing the footage, the material was subjected to discussion during the meetings with communities in Gdańsk, Wrocław and Poznań. Those people agreed to its final form. The Roma did not want the material to be shared online but only during closed meetings and debates on their situation in Poland. Photographic documentation was also made – at least 10 photographs from each of the encampments. During the realisation of the study, documentation served not only an empirical purpose, but also a formal-legal one. The photographic materials constitute for Roma a valuable evidence in cases of forced displacement.

During the project realisation, the research team was informed of an illegal eviction of one of the Wrocław encampments. Due to that fact, one stage of the study had a strictly interventionist character (action research). As a reaction to the demolishing of the encampment located on Paprotna street in Wrocław, we arrived on site in order to receive an explanation from the local policy-makers and to obtain more information on the evicted Roma. Partner organisations and the Western Centre for Social and Economic Research Foundation, in the meeting with the community made a joint decision on the necessity to further publicise the problem of displacement and take up interventionist operations.

The next day, with the help of Dawid Krawczyk, a journalist from the Wrocław division of *Krytyka Polityczna*, we recorded video interviews with the representatives of national and regional institutions which were the parties involved in the judicial process concerning the eviction of the Roma encampment: The District Building Inspector, a spokeswoman for the Wrocław City Council and the director of the Municipal Centre for Social Aid, the director of Animal Shelter in Wrocław, and the representative of the Nomada Foundation. Thanks to the intervention and the use of the video interviews, the research team found that despite there being an inter-sectoral group for the issues of Roma migrants in Wrocław,⁷ which was appointed at the Province Office, no one of these involved was informed about the eviction. Upon the request of the Wrocław municipal authorities, workers of the shelter were to assist in the demolition to prevent people carrying out the

⁷ Wrocław is the only city in Poland to have such a formal body. The purpose of the group was to improve the situation of Roma and to develop an agreement on the issue of inhabited encampment area belonging to the Wrocław municipality.

procedure from being bitten by dogs. The film documents both statements of the victims, as well as those responsible for the displacement.⁸ The film was recorded five days after the demolition, contributing to the determination of basic information concerning the eviction process. As a consequence of these events, the Roma (with the help of activists from Nomada) later lodged a complaint to the Human Rights Tribunal in Strasbourg stating the breach of four articles of the Human Rights Convention.

Results of the research

Improvement of the life conditions in the community (which gives the temporary protection against eviction without trial), are first steps to citizenship and raising of voices which are connected with the longer-term process of accessing basic rights – access to healthcare, education system and the job market. Those are only first steps in all processes of recovering the impact on life. The main goal was to create possibilities for those who want to attend school or have access to job market and healthcare system. It is really important also to show the reasons of refusal to start a school education which are related to: parents' permission to the absence (parents do not believe that education would change anything); lack of stability of housing conditions (frequent relocations); no possibility to sufficiently prepare for school such as rest, washing of clothes, appropriate conditions for learning and doing homework (no electricity). Whereas some children (and their parents) who want to take up education, cannot do so due to the limited number of places – there is only one school in Poznań which has educational assistants and appropriate preparation for them.

Enhancement of the first steps into citizenship

Prior to the activist operations, the Roma (at least in Poznań) would generally not register their stay and in practice they had no possibility of exercising social and labour rights, nor rights to education and housing. The main factor preventing the registration was the lack of a bank account (together with a sufficient sum of money proving that in future they would not become the social aid beneficiaries), insurance, and knowledge of the procedures. On a local level, even publicising the situation itself and showing it from the Roma perspective enabled the commencement of

⁸ The film entitled: *Wrocław Europejska Stolica Wysiedleń [Wrocław: The European Capital of Evictions]*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvLaXXr0jpY> (accessed: 16.06.2017).

a range of activities in the cooperation with the community by other groups (mainly workshops with children and interventionist help). Of course, the methods of cooperation can be subjected to criticism. Nevertheless, the work required includes that on an interventionist level, as well as that on the political platform (leading to the change of the situation and empowerment of the whole community). The language barrier, illiteracy, or unfamiliarity with the procedures pose obstacles during the registration process as the registration system is not adjusted to the needs of the disadvantaged and migrants of a low economic status who have major difficulties in accessing it. The applicant must meet the criterion of having a bank account with a certain amount of money, or provide a proof of permanent employment (work contract) which are supposed to prove that they will not claim social benefits, otherwise the registration is not possible. Moreover, there is no help offered for foreign nationals or illiterate people in filling out the forms.

The main goal when it comes to women is providing health insurance (they care for children, illiteracy in their case is more frequent than in men, especially the elderly). The Roma who are illiterate cannot take advantage of qualification-enhancement courses (the Roma declared willingness to participate in driving, forklift, and building courses, among others). Additionally Polish language course would have to go hand in hand with providing housing or financial aid. After many years of turning the other way from the problem and claiming that Roma do not want help, hence they do not receive it, continued insistence and pressure prompted MOPR⁹ to delegate two social workers to work with the inhabitants of the encampment. The registered individuals received access to additional benefits, the two social workers took on most of the responsibilities related to interventionist operations (support in access to doctors, filling in of documents, organisation of initiatives related to cleaning the encampment, and registration at the regional Job Centre¹⁰). The problem lies in the lack of interpreter for daily works, no possibility of organising more frequent meetings with the whole community in a way which would enable undertaking operations with the participation of the Roma, raising the Romanian Roma's voice in public discourse in Poland. The study results, compiled in the brochure form, avoided exclusionary and academic jargon and were presented during meetings in several cities. Criteria for the selection of cities were related to the presence of encampments and activity of Roma community. Presentation of the research report was aimed at including Roma in public debate. On each meeting, apart from survey results, the film with recorded interviews with Roma people was presented. The film facilitated the overcoming of language barrier (most of the Roma

⁹ Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Rodzinie (Municipal Centre for Family Assistance).

¹⁰ Polish original name of the institution is Urząd Pracy (UP).

do not speak fluent Polish, especially when plunged into a direct contact or in front of a wider audience). Representatives of Roma community taking part in the meeting also took the floor answering question. At their disposal there was an interpreter of the Romany language.

The presentation of reports in a public space, as well as cooperation with media were significant elements of the process of changing the discourse on Roma. It allowed for revealing the reasons for occupying disused buildings, street-begging, etc. To enable continuity of the public debate, the last of the four presentations took place with the participation of the Ombudsman. During the presentation of the report, the Ombudsman was asked to take a stance on the topic of Roma. After several months from the conclusion of the project, the Ombudsman Office organised a seminar on the situation of Romanian Roma in Poland, inviting activists, representatives of regional governments (Poznań, Wrocław and Gdańsk), and the Roma living in the encampment. As a result of this meeting a study visit was organised. Finally, the representatives of local government in Poznań, the regional Job Centre, Education Department, the Department for Foreigners, the Wielkopolska Province Office and NGOs, activists and the Roma meet every 3 months to jointly agree on further stages of the cooperation process, at the same time striving to maintain the subjectivity and decisions-making possibilities of the Roma. Of course meetings will not change anything (it is often used as a discursive strategy of the state, how to put social resistance within safe frames) but it is only a tool which can be used by community and activist-researchers as a form of pressure and highlighting demands. (It is maybe hardly worth mentioning that we will probably need later to fight for implementation of the agreement). Thanks to these type of activities, it was possible for the city of Poznań to open a debate on the development of systemic changes in regards to formal-legal barriers, but also those deriving from the generational exclusion of Roma. This creates a higher probability that the Roma issue will be included in the migration and social policy of the city, and not merely delegated to NGOs on an ad hoc basis, at least in the capital of the Wielkopolska Province. As a result of interventions on the country-wide level, a debate with the participation of the Polish government's representatives was launched, which directly translates into local operations, and (at least in Poznań) limitation of the possibility of conducting a sudden eviction of the encampment, deportation of its inhabitants or other activities harming the Roma. Activities undertaken by local authorities are still monitored by activists who take part in debates and continue to work on the subject of possible future systemic changes. At the same time, the activists' aim is not to serve the role of independent social workers but to pass on these responsibilities to institutions which theoretically should undertake interventionist operations – e.g. the Municipal Centre for Family/Social Assistance. This has been partially successful due

to jointly developed methods and political pressure. Activists affiliated with the socio-political movement are not restricted by any financing source, nor by any NGO structure, and thus can continue to intervene in case of racist behaviours of officials, or attacks on encampments. Protests are still organised when necessary.

Barriers experienced by the researchers in participatory practice with the Romanian Roma

Socio-cultural difference between members of the community and activist-researchers

The vast majority of barriers in such work are those resulting from differences between members of this community and activists/researchers. These differences derive from experiences, class position, as well as stereotypes of a racist nature. We encounter this also in the case of some other activists, campaigners and employees of non-governmental organisations, who with their operations de facto essentialise and racialise Roma ascribing to them (as a whole group) certain negative characteristics. Wanting to “help” Roma, and to implement aid programmes on the principles which are inadequate to the situation but meet the expectation of the donors is something completely different than starting to cooperate with the minority and learn about differences between community and “donors”. It happens that projects conducted in the encampments by the other individuals or NGOs result in the emergence of frameworks which de facto do not take into account the Roma’s independence, but reflect the rules pre-established by the project-conceivers themselves. The Roma often do not understand the principles and the exact course of such programmes as long as they are not involved in the process of their creation and their daily reality and history is completely different from “ours”. A huge obstacle is also the “language barrier” which has a broader class and historical context of segregation in the education system. All the more so since some of the respondents are illiterate and cannot fluently communicate in Polish (in the case of working on a report they could not read it or introduce changes by themselves). It is not unusual that even those born in Poland who have lived here for years cannot use abstract terms of the Polish language and do not understand the bureaucratic language. It is, therefore, necessary to provide an interpreter during discussions (preferably of Romany language), trainings, or debates with policy-makers. Otherwise, we could witness “exoticisation” of the presence of the Roma (they are there, participating in official meetings, but understanding little).

It could be assumed that launching support for the Roma can also cause inward tendencies within the group (a need to rely on “one’s folk”, because the help from the outside is partial and uncertain) and – importantly – outwards tendencies (e.g. those who know the Polish language better gain more and do not necessarily share this with other inhabitants of the settlements, thus inequalities emerge).

Another barrier is a help intrusion into the cultural pattern of the community. It covers scenarios in which aid can impose different dynamics within the group, for example by introducing shifts in the traditional roles of men and women (e.g. in cases when women receive relatively more support than men), which can in turn lead to the dissolution of the community. Such situations occurred when women received work as interpreters at schools – their husbands felt that their social status, previously being the breadwinner, is now lower.

Institutional barriers in the course of research

Participatory and emancipatory research often demands cooperation or sometimes struggles between activist-researchers and public institutions. Cooperation between the Roma, us and the staff of the Job Centre in Poznań is a good example of such potential barriers. The Roma together with activists postulated the ability to register at the Job Centre, which would enable them to receive health insurance. City officials in Poznań have for years claimed that such registration is impossible from the legal viewpoint. Only following first visits to, and then debates at, the City Council and legal consultations, certain pathways of operations have been developed which enable registration. After several weeks, the Job Centre in Poznań organised separate meetings in order to streamline the Roma registration which significantly accelerated the procedure. Later however, some of the people would miss further dates of scheduled appointments. They would feel frustrated and discouraged by the fact that they cannot even read the job offer, sign a document or understand what the Job Centre employee is saying. Others did not want to accept a three-shift pattern of work for the money on the lowest wage, which arouse disgust (e.g. men are reluctant to leave families alone at night, for security reasons).

Conclusions

Traditional occupations, so heavily ethnicised and exoticised by ethnographers and anthropologists who sometimes postulate enabling Roma to perform them again (these include pottery, pan-making, horseshoe

forging) since they supposedly “do it best and are born for it”, in a matter of fact resulted from a very low socio-economical position of Roma. Quite often, these anthropologists, sociologists or social activists do not pose the question of why Roma did not perform other occupations of a higher social prestige? At the same time, even today they present them as exhibiting the willingness to a vagabond lifestyle, which, as is known, had always been a certain form of adaptation to the oppressive policy and economic situation. The inaccessibility of the community, settling in groups, selecting squatting places in Poland which are not clearly visible and easily accessible, also does not derive from the will for social isolation (a choice), but, first and foremost, is dictated by ensuring basic personal safety.¹¹ Every child born in the Roma settlement has far lesser chances for access to basic rights, including education. The phenomenon of “romaphobia” (although not described as often as anti-Semitism or, currently, islamophobia) has been experienced by Roma for centuries, justifying the racist policy and segregation within the city space (mass displacements, deportations).¹²

Attempting self-criticism of the effectiveness of operation with the Roma in Poznań, it could be said that in this case the principle of “militant research” itself (as participatory studies which also serve as a tool of social change) has not contributed to the improvement of life conditions and the situation of all of the encampments’ inhabitants from the systemic perspective. Developing a form of resistance to racist practices or institutional barriers on such a scale as in the case of workers’ unions or tenants’ groups operating in Poznań is impossible due to the many years of long-lasting systemic segregation and political, economic and social exclusion of Roma. As researchers who are applying participatory methodology we should more focus on the discussion of how can we implement results of our research and for what purposes we are conducting them (only for academia or also for social change?). It is worth to mention that the first step is to understand the privileged position of academia and researchers. It could be said that, initially, the activist-research operations – protection of the settlements against raids of a racist nature, blocking evictions, publicising conflicts, demanding the presence of Roma during talks in the City Council and in media, postulating changes in the registration system – with time have transformed into operations aimed at coordination and monitoring

¹¹ In smaller towns, individual Roma families occupy disused buildings located, for example, near roads leading to villages or smaller towns. These buildings provide better conditions, but it is also related to the avoidance of threat from the residents (most of whom know each other) or radically right-wing groups.

¹² A good example of segregation within the urban space is the fact that many encampments in Romania were created not as a result of Roma choosing to settle in a certain area, but as a result of displacements caused by evictions. Decisions to locate encampments near polluted areas, in the proximity of landfills, are made by authorities.

of official and administrative proceedings (registration at the Job Centre, etc.). Operations on the improvement of Roma's life conditions require many years of work, access to specific resources and systemic changes. Those systemic changes should be defined and worked into the process of cooperation of two different groups (community and activist-researchers).

The borders of existing systemic principles are closed increasingly tight for Roma (and other immigrant groups), and the resentment fuelled by national egoism justifies even the physical acts of aggression. Consequently, the work should take place on the humanitarian and reformist level, as well as on the political one (so far initiated by activists together with the Roma). The practice of building struggle structures is necessary: the organisation of demonstrations, coalitions of different entities and direct operations¹³ which enable Roma, at least partially, to have greater possibilities of impacting their situation through the construction of pressure aimed at social changes.

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¹³ However, even this is problematic because in the case of Roma it is much more difficult to mobilise the society to come out on the streets in support of this community (as opposed to, for example, tenants' issues) due to the fact that in times of crisis migrants are often blamed for "stealing jobs", benefiting from "dirty" untaxed money and preying on society by, for example, begging.

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