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Connecting different life-worlds: Transformation through kinship
(Our experience with poverty alleviation)

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The contributors of this paper are researchers and activists with different disciplinary backgrounds. Zoltán, György and Judit hold PhDs in economics. Judit also has MSc degrees in philosophy and in political sciences. Boglárka is a PhD student in economics and holds MAs in sociology and economics. Barbara holds a PhD in ecology. They are members of the Community-based Research for Sustainability Association (CRS) in addition to their academic positions. They are committed towards the values of sustainability, solidarity, citizen participation and open-minded discourse. They work together with unheard, marginalized groups, to help them to make their voice heard.

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The contributors of this paper take part in a participatory action research (PAR) process with the local Roma community in Szeged, Hungary. Although we do not have our backgrounds in feminist theorizing, we believe, our paper can be relevant for the discussion taking place in the Queer-Feminist STS Forum. Being action researchers we are committed to an approach very similar that of "queering"; an approach which is "never contented by simply depicting the mechanisms of oppression, it also calls for irritation and interruption" (Hofstätter & Thaler 2016).

PAR is a cooperation of trained researchers and the members of the local community in order to generate knowledge that is relevant and useful for the stakeholders (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller 2015). It is an approach that has its roots in the critical theories, therefore it aims to give voice and overcome oppression. Action is a vital element of the PAR process. On the one hand, it is a workability test for the created knowledge; on the other hand, it is the way to bring about social change, to make the research process useful in this sense.

In present paper we would like to put forth a story that draws attention to heteronormativity in the field of poverty alleviation. We would question the basic assumptions and behaviour, which on the one hand make poverty "the problem of the poor"; on the other hand make poverty a discourse taking place among middle class people. We would also like to interrupt and show that there is an opportunity to overcome the lack of personal relations between the underclass and the middle class and to connect these two different life-worlds by kinship. And finally we would like to "queer" the way knowledge is usually put forth, and show that there may be a place for talking about feelings and emotions in a paper.

Our PAR process with the local Roma underclass people was initiated in 2011 as part of an EU FP7 project (Public Engagement with Research and Research Engagement with Science – PERARES). During the past six years, it developed from the initial project-based cooperation, into a more general collaboration aimed at the support and empowerment of the local underclass Roma. It is a cooperation of researchers, citizen activists, civil society organizations, the local Roma self-government and Roma people, most of whom live in the segregates (the so called gipsy yards) of the city[1]. By now the PAR process involves numerous local actors, including both middle class Roma and non-Roma, and underclass Roma families, who are committed to maintain cooperation for social change and local poverty alleviation on the long run. Our activities embrace capacity building (e.g. setting up and running afternoon schools) and anti-oppressive activities (e.g. political activism, empowerment of Roma representatives, community organizing, awareness raising).

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1 You can find detailed information about this process on the website of the Community-based Research for Sustainability Association (www.crsassociation.org) and in Málovics et al. (2012, 2016).

In 2014, a new kind of activity was introduced, the so called patronage programme (later we started to call it patronage network), as an element of the wider PAR process. By this time we had already learnt a lot about the diverseness of the local underclass Roma families and their problems. It had become clear that contributing meaningfully to local poverty alleviation demands much more resources than those of a few small local NGOs; and that bridging social ties between the underclass Roma and middle class non-Roma are basically missing locally.

The patronage network attempted to address these issues. It focuses on personal relationships among underclass Roma and middle-class non-Roma families. Families, who are interested in participation, are introduced to each other with the facilitation of the "core" PAR group. The aim is to set up long term relationships and this way to build bridges between these two life-worlds. The patronage relationship embraces a small amount of material help and various forms of non-material assistance (e.g. education and health issues of children; reducing social poverty; job seeking; joint social programs). The patronage network has affected the lives of approximately 20 underclass families so far. Many of them live in either of the two Roma segregates of the city under extremely poor housing conditions. All the involved Roma families live in severe income poverty.

The expression we use to denote this relationship (patronage) is not necessarily the most appropriate, since it suggests a strong hierarchical relation between patrons and the assisted families. However, we think this is an honest expression, since the asymmetry in these relationships is inevitable. The question is how to reflect on this, and how to mitigate or overcome this.

Purpose of the paper

Poverty alleviation cannot succeed without the detailed understanding of the situation of the people living in poverty. A large deal of our activities also serve this purpose: we attempt to generate knowledge on the situation of the local Roma community, to synthetize this knowledge by building on theoretical insights such as the capability approach of Sen (1999), and to evaluate this knowledge through workability tests. However creating a discourse about poverty that solely deals with the poor, may suggest that poverty is "their problem".

The contributors of this paper take part in the PAR process as researchers (and also as citizen activists) and all of them are participants of the patronage network. These roles led us to the understanding that the people we cooperate with face systemic oppression. In other words poverty in not "their problem": it is our common problem. In order to tackle poverty we must also deal with those who do not live in poverty, those who benefit the status quo – ourselves.

Present paper attempts to serve this purpose. It would like to draw attention to the importance of transformation within the majority. We think that our participation in the patronage network provided us an experience that is gradually leading to an internal transformation. We would like to share bits of this journey (dilemmas, difficulties and joy) with the reader.

So this paper is about the patrons of the patronage network. It does not intend to provide a scientific evaluation about the operation of the patronage programme. It could not serve this purpose anyway, since all the inputs of this paper came from the patrons. What it attempts to do is to depict how the patronage relations, which started as goal-oriented hierarchical relations, gradually changed into something else (perhaps kinship), and how this affected us and built bridges between fellow citizens.

Genre and structure of the paper

This paper does not intend to be a conventional academic paper in its genre. However, during its preparation we applied the fundamental rules of scientific inquiry (after all we are social researchers).[2] The paper would rather like to draw attention to aspects that are so often neglected by academic works. It attempts to talk about feelings, emotions, doubts and joy. All in all, it tries to shed light on the enormous power of kinship: looking at each other as fellow people; transform and being transformed this way.

The paper is written in the form of a conversation, which is narrated by the corresponding author (Zoltan).[3] The main body of the text consists of (mostly, but not in all cases, word for word) quotations[4] from the conversations among the contributors. This is supplemented by connective and interpretive parts written by the corresponding author.

The first part of the conversation depicts the outlines of the situation: who are the families we are in contact with, how did it begin, what did we think about them then and now? The second part refers more to the internal transformation we have been going through: where are our limits and are we able to transgress them, what did we gain and what did we provide? Finally we arrive to some kind of conclusions.

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2 In this sense the paper can be interpreted as an element of the reflection phase in a PAR process (this is a reflection on our roles in the patronage network).

3 We decided not to indicate who said a given paragraph, and we also did not use the names of the Roma people we cooperate with, since the issues in question are very sensitive, and the messages remain understandable without the names.

4 The conversation took place in Hungarian (the quotations were translated later to English). The corresponding author selected and structured relevant parts of the conversation to appear in the text. The quotations from the conversations are based on notes; hence they are not in all cases word for word quotations. Then the text supplemented by the connective and interpretive parts was shown to the participants, who could suggest changes.

"So we started to cooperate"

Some of us had already had some kind of relationship with the families and children by the time the patronage programme was launched, while others contacted the families just because of the launch of the programme. Nevertheless, the motivation to run a programme we thought was worth running, was vital in all cases. So *how did it all begin? Who are the families we cooperate with?*

> I first met them 4 or 5 years ago. We made a photo-voice project in the gipsy yard, and they were the family who offered their house for the discussion of the photos and drawings. The little girl was the one who made the drawing we always recall. They had to draw something they would really like to get, and she drew a bathroom, and coloured the tiles one-by-one. When the patronage programme was launched, Gyuri suggested me to help them. The mother was very sympathetic for me, also the little girl of course (6 years old at that time), and her older brother as well.

> I help a teenager girl and her boyfriend, and of course I also have a relationship with their families (mainly with the mothers). I think we met first in 2012. Then in 2013 we organized a summer camp for children from the gipsy yard at Lake Balaton. Since then I have been in contact with her. Her life is really touching; even within the yard she lived under the most adverse circumstances. But, just because of this (because no one cared about her), she was very independent. She wanted to learn hip-hop dancing and I arranged it for her. Then I looked for a tutor for her.[5] She lives together with her boyfriend who also became interested. He was also there in the summer camp but I lost track of him for a while: he had drug problems and staff. They started to come to our office in the Faculty building regularly, where they meet the tutor. When the patronage programme began, I thought let's call this a patronage relationship.

> I was a volunteer in the Roma afternoon school, where I started to teach two boys how to play the guitar. They live in the larger Roma segregate, which is closer to the city. Once I took them to the cinema and the little sister of one of them also joined us. After the cinema we went to the university library, where the boys could use the computers, but the little girl (8 years old) asked me to show her the library. She said she wanted to learn here someday. A few days later her brother wrote me a message that she was in hospital. I met her father and his partner there (the mother of the girl didn't come to visit her). I thought they were nice, and that there is a chance that I can intervene and it would make sense to put energy into it. So we started to cooperate.

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[5] Helping children in learning is a very important element of most of the patronage relationships. Tutors are either paid or voluntary teachers or university students, or the patrons themselves.

It began with the patronage programme. Gyuri introduced us to each other. They live quite far from the city centre in a house, but not in the gipsy yard. The children actually go to school (6th and 7th class in the elementary school), but they have severe difficulties there. It is quite usual that they have fail marks from one or more subjects at the end of the year, so they have to take comprehensive exams in the summer to allow for entering the next class. Formerly, they attended the Roma afternoon school, and their mother was also active there, but she thought that the children from the gipsy yard (who also attended the afternoon school) had bad influence on her kids, so they stopped going there. The parents usually have jobs, so they are able to satisfy their basic needs. So Gyuri took me to their house when the programme was launched, and since then we meet there. I visit them regularly. At first it was quite hard to know what to talk about and what are the issues to be avoided, especially with regard to financial matters.

Mine is a relatively new patronage relationship. It began a bit more than a year ago. The leader of the local Roma self-government introduced us to each other. They live in a block in the city centre not far from us. They rent a one-room apartment from the city council. Three children and the parents. Most of the time the parents have at least part-time jobs, but it's quite uncertain. The older sister and her brother (both young teenagers) go to school and have very good marks there. The little girl (4 years) was abandoned by her mother and now lives with them. This was the first thing I ran into. Something that was really hard to grasp emotionally. At the beginning I thought this relationship would be about helping (and thus being in touch with) the children. Then I realized this would only work in conversation with the mother. On the one hand, if I did not let the mother decide which forms of help were the most adequate, I would question her as a mother. How would someone dare to do so? On the other hand, her kids are young teenagers; they have better things to do than spending time with a stranger. The smallest kid is an exception. She likes playing with me when I visit them. So we are in the middle of a long process of building trust and getting to know each-other. I am also a person who takes steps slowly, and I always question myself if I have the right to interfere in their lives.

It is vital to understand for the reader that on the one hand we had a clear desire to launch the programme and go beyond the usual forms of poverty alleviation. We wanted to build personal relationships, we wanted to provide some kind of "channel" of resources from our world to their world through these relationships and believed (and still believe) it is the right thing to do. On the other hand, we did not know what this would imply exactly. It is impossible to be prepared for situations that derive from the enormous differences between life-worlds (e.g. experiencing famine, child abandonment, children working instead of going to school, children experiencing or committing crime;

or living in a world where the institutions such as schools, health care, social care or the police are not designed for you; and also to experience that you are basically unable to solve these problems).

"I thought they needed help"

So we jumped into the patronage relationships. At this time the PAR process had been going on for a few years, and as social researchers we also had theoretical knowledge on poverty and associated phenomena. Still it is totally different to experience and get involved. We were of course sensitive to social justice issues, and I think people would say we are not prejudiced. But prejudice mainly derives from the lack of knowledge and experience. And certainly we had deficiency in this respect. It became very clear for us that if you want to help and in return you expect people to behave in certain ways, than you will build hierarchical relationships and they will have a good reason to unwelcome you. But also, if you try to help and in return you expect them to be happy or grateful, than you miss the point. But it is not always easy to act according to these considerations. So *what did we think of the families and people we cooperate with in the beginning? And how did it change?*

> I thought they saw their situation fairly well, and they wanted to change it, but they lacked the resources for this (or did not even know what would be needed for this). I also thought I could help them in this. Now I think the same, it has not changed. Of course I got acquainted with many of their strength and weaknesses. For example, sometimes I think they consume irresponsibly. But this phenomenon was something I was aware of and I could accept that. After all they bought chocolate for the children and not drugs. I felt I did not have the right to interfere. In the meanwhile I really got to like the little girl. I feel responsible for her. If things go haywire it really distresses me, but then success cheers me up. She won a competition in math at the school and I was on cloud nine for two days. I was really proud. Or when she invited me and her father's partner to the mother's day school ceremony that was really great.

> I thought they needed help. Now, I think, they have a lot of skills and competencies, and also bad and good qualities, just like everyone. It is not easy for them; and perhaps in certain cases I would make different decisions than they do; but this cannot really be compared (because I am not in their place). I also think the Roma people have much more realistic conception of the non-Roma than vice-versa.

> They were very sympathetic for me. I thought she was a really nice woman, but her relationship (with the kids' father) and this whole ambience tore her apart. She and her daughter tried to fix what was messed up by the males in the family. Now I think basically the same, I just see them in a more sophisticated way. I have

learnt a lot about their situation. Now I see the mother to be more potent. Not necessarily because she has changed, I just see how she meets challenges in life.

Just like in your case, my opinion has not changed too much either, just become a bit more detailed. They are a family, who would really like to be integrated into the middle-class society. That is why they differentiate themselves from those living in the gipsy yard. For me it is very sympathetic that she wants her children to get on better than she did. I think they really strive for this; they just lack the skills and resources. For example, to help the children to prepare their home-work, or to understand what does a mark the children get means with respect to their overall school performance. And of course they cannot afford a tutor for the kids.

When you see a child with a life like that, it makes you want to cry. They put her here, there, to residential care. In spite of this, she is astonishingly sweet, opti-mistic and cooperating. I thought I should help her somehow, especially that she also wanted it (e.g. to learn hip-hop dancing). I got to know her and her problems gradually: difficulties with reading, low IQ, special needs in learning (which had not been discovered before, although she was 15), not to mention the horrible things she had gone through as a child. I feel responsible for her, and I'm often desperate when I think about how she will get on in the world. It was a bit differ-ent with regard to her boyfriend. I was quite distrustful towards him. I remember he often complained he could not come to meet the tutor, because for him it was too difficult to get into the city. I thought this was just a lame excuse. Then I went to the waste disposal yard he worked at (instead of attending school) and I real-ized he was right. Now I really like and fully trust him. He is very autonomous and intractable. It's not always easy with him. Very often he goes into a direction and cannot be diverted. And I often think that is not the good direction. I try to be there for him. I do not think of this relationship with these two young people as "patroning". These are personal relations, and I am a supporting adult. Some-times I experience success (e.g. she learns swimming now) and I feel happy about it.

So these relationships implied a shift in the focus: in the beginning we realized "being poor" or "needing help" to be the main qualities of the people we cooperated with. Throughout the process of patronage this has changed into a large set of good and bad qualities; and we also realized a number of skills and coping strategies.

"I always try to take the next small step"

So we started to build up relationships, which is not always easy. What makes it even more difficult in our case is that we come from very different life worlds, with very different experience, and the relationships started with an asymmetric initial setting. As it is the case in all relationships, we give and receive, and it's more likely to work out if these two are balanced. So let's start with the first one. *What have we put into these relationships?*

The relation is evidently asymmetric to an extent, but of course I try to offer some kind of friendship. I think what they gained is that the children's approach to learning has changed. They always took it for granted that they won't succeed. I think the greatest result is probably the change in their mind-set. Now they say "it's gonna work out, I should come and learn with them, and together we'll make it". Of course if I spent more time with them the results could be more pervasive. Recently their mother said she also wants to finish elementary school (she finished only 4 classes).

Evidently a lot of emotional and material energy. Also in the sense that I try to come to grips with the inconceivable differences that separate our lives. I try to provide a supportive and tolerant ambience, where she can talk about her problems. This may have an effect.

We should ask them about this in the first place. I think I have put a lot into this relationship. Lots of energy, care, money. But this is natural, because they are important for me.

I always try to take the next small step at the given points, and to remind myself that what I see and do not understand probably has its reasons. I tried to keep in touch even when thing have really piled up. Of course, I have also put material resources into the relationship, but that is the easy side, you don't really have to make effort for that (of course when my friends altruistically give money for either the patronage or other issues with regard to our PAR process, that is a great thing). I am truly concerned about them and interested in their experience. This is something I also receive from this relationship when they let me in on this.

I think I have received more than I have given. What I have given is first of all my time. But this is not a burden any more. Of course, I pick up the little girl each morning and take her to school (otherwise she would not go), but this has already become a part of my everyday life. Sometimes I give money or do the shopping for them, so it cannot occur that the children have nothing to eat. So I am there. It seems to me that the mother likes to chat with me. She does not need my advices, she is just happy to be listened to. I think the little girl may be able to get the most out of this relationship in the long run. She really means a lot to me. For

example, I'm taking her to my mother's summer house next week. She has never left the town before. She gradually gets acquainted with the spaces that are self-evident for my children but not for her (e.g. cinema, confectionary).

"I have gained a relationship"

The relationship that is based on only giving will remain a helper-assisted relation. In order to go beyond the asymmetric "patron" role and to build up a symmetric relationship both sides must receive. How did we experience this? *What have we received from the relationship?*

It has completely changed my life (basically the whole PAR process). With them it is not working anymore. They have become parts of my life and probably will also remain. At first I was a bit frustrated, when they came to my office almost each day. I had my way of living, working till the evening, and now I had to put it down in the afternoon. Then I realized that this is much more important for me than fiddling with the power point. I have learnt a lot from them. He is a very reflective teenager (or young adult). I have learnt how the childhood experience (being abandoned, looking for food in the garbage, the constant necessity to prove you being worthy) affected the mind-set of this sensitive boy. His girlfriend is different. More like a child yet. She is very lovable. It is very pleasant to spend time with her. I have received that there is someone to care about.

I have received lots of things. In the beginning it was very interesting in the professional sense as well. I have gained deeper understanding about my research topic. But today this is not the major motivation anymore. They are rather friends to me. It is great that they listen to me, my problems, and tell me good advices. The asymmetry in the relationship is gradually dissolving. I spend a lot of time with their daughter, but they also look after my kids occasionally. I have re-evaluated a lot of things in my life; I got rid of many of my prejudices. For example, they are very much oriented towards the present, or distrust social institutions. These imply things that people usually condemn (e.g. do not turn up at the fixed appointments at the offices or at school; do not pay the fines). But in their position I would probably do the same. In the offices they really look down on them (which suddenly changes if they come with me) and they do not explain things for them in a way they could actually understand.

Basically, I like spending time with people who provide intellectual inspiration for me. I know this is elitist. My relationship with her has mitigated my "elitism". Of course we do not talk about philosophy or staff, but we can talk about some fundamental things of life (e.g. who is a true friend, who can you trust or count on). I can talk about these things with her, and actually almost solely with her. We talk

a lot about everyday life, and I am surprised at myself how I enjoy it. So, for example, this is a thing I have gained. The relationship also made me more sensitive to social problems (I know this sounds trivial, but that really is the case). It made me realize my blind-spots. Of course I have long been interested in social justice issues, but being in touch with them taught me a lot about the meaning of having temporary jobs and a huge mortgage loan on your house at the same time, or how they experience going to school, and what leads to bad marks or school leaving.

First of all, I have received trust. They let me into their world to an extent. When you don't know something you necessarily think in stereotypes, pre-fabricated categories. Certainly, your principles and past experience give you the feeling that there must be something beyond these stereotypes, but you simply don't know what. So an unknown world has opened up to me (at least bits of it). This allowed me to transgress my boundaries, to overcome my (formerly unrealized) prejudices. And of course I have received positive feedbacks as well. It is the most valuable when coming from the children.

What have I received from this relationship? Well, I have gained a relationship. Sometimes positive feedbacks as well, they seem to be grateful, but I try not to pay too much attention to these ego-boosting things. And I have received the feeling, that I am somehow connected to their world.

While we cannot deny that the patronage relationships are still asymmetric to an extent, this asymmetry is gradually melting, and every one of us experience both giving and receiving. This resulted in gaining understanding; more empathy and the realization and overcoming of blind-spots. And of course we have gained new relationships.

"Closing down cannot be a good answer"

Gaining new relationships also means that we have to manage them. And relationships have their ups and downs, they may also be demanding sometimes. So *have you ever felt that you are at the end of your tether?*

Of course. Actually not because of them. In the winter, with the help of my entrepreneur friend, we bought them 1.5 tons of firewood. They ran out of it within a month… So I called my friend again but he turned me down, which made me feel angry at him. I found myself begging, throwing in my lot with them. Then I tried to be a bit more reflexive, and reminded myself that I must be happy that my entrepreneur friend had helped a lot. Or another case is when we tried to motivate the boy to go to school (after his father was taken into prison he stopped going to school). I tried to come up with a motivation system for him, which worked for a week… I feel that his problems are beyond my tether. And I also reached my limits emotionally. The difference between our worlds is just too vast.

We were sitting here in our fancy suburban house, and 5 kilometres from here, their life was just falling apart. This is the worst feeling, but then I think about my possibilities. And I think all the possibilities are better than closing down the bridge between these two worlds again. And this makes me tick. Probably all of us have something to learn from this, and probably what we should learn is not closing down. But this also means we must cope with this inconceivable chasm between our lives. I must accept my inability and also joyfulness. Because that is tough as well, to rejoice at my things when they are in such a situation. So what makes me tick is the principle that closing down the borders between these two worlds cannot be a good answer.

When he started to go to school again and came to see the tutor almost each day, and also her girlfriend was preparing for the secondary school; that was a tough period. That was very demanding and time-consuming. And sometimes it is hard to cope with the enormous stress and aggression accumulated in these children.

The problems of the three children jointly exceed my possibilities. And all this is not just about the children, but also their parents. I just simply cannot take the problems of the mother. That would be too much. That is where my boundaries are now.

"It is getting easier to transgress"

We do not want to suggest that facing our boundaries and being at the end of the tether are delightful experience. Nevertheless, it helped us in many cases to exceed the limits and to transgress ourselves. What do you think of this? *Have you ever felt that you have managed to exceed your boundaries, to transgress yourself?*

Prejudices work in a strange manner. We say that we do not have any, but they are still there. On the other hand, they can be overcome. Once I went to visit them. It was evening, almost dark. I entered the garden and saw that there is some kind of get-together there. Eight Roma men were sitting around the table drinking alcohol. I though "no way, I'm not coming here". But what to tell them later, why I turned back. Eventually I entered, and had a nice chat with the house-wife as always.

I have also managed to overcome a lot of prejudices. In the everyday sense I was not prejudiced, but still, due to the unknown I used stereotypes in my thinking. This means, that I was surprised to see their responses to certain situations. For example, how self-evident it was for them to take in the abandoned little girl, while they could hardly make ends meet. Or to see how worried she is about her children going to the bad, due to the neighbourhood. Or to see how employers take advantage of them and how the schools and kindergartens are totally blind

to their situation, and still they want to live up to the expectations in the workplace or at school. Of course, I guess, I still have prejudices to overcome.

I have reached my limits pretty often, but it is getting easier to transgress. For example, when I understood that the only way to make the girl going to the school was to pick her up each morning and take her to the school, I though no way, this would be too much for me. But then it turned out to be all right and became natural. Or when the school started to contact me with regard to official cases; that was very strange. But this led to the possibility for her to take a comprehensive exam at the end of the year and continue her studies (otherwise she should have been dismissed because she was absent from school too much). Or when she first came to us and stayed over, that was a point when my husband crossed his boundaries. Of course there will probably be boundaries I will not cross, but I don't know yet what are these.

I constantly have this feeling. For me the crossing of boundaries is paradoxically in connection with keeping the boundaries: to learn to say no, to admit that I am at the end of my tether in certain situations. That is needed to keep my integrity and to do this in the long run.

Well, I still have a way to go in unconditional acceptance… We put a lot of efforts in education. He started to go to school again and really wanted to have a profession. But then he had to stop it again due to an eye disease. That was really hard, and I felt really sorry for him. But this made me rethink my role. And I'm not sure that my role is to make him finishing a school.

"Now I visit them because I would like to see them" (conclusion)

What we would like to emphasize about our experience with the patronage relationship is that, on contrary to how it is called (patronage), its ambition is to build up a long-term, consistent, symmetric relationship between people who otherwise would probably have nothing to do with each other. We have experienced that this kind of engagement has an enormous potential in transforming those taking part or affected. Our ambition is not to transform those living in poverty in order to "fit the society". We would like to transform and being transformed in the same time, which could be a small step in diminishing the systemic oppression the people we cooperate with face.

We think donations, development programmes and subsidies may all be important, but they are just one side of the coin. They can easily make us think that poverty, deprivation and exclusion are "their" problem, the transformation has to occur at their side. Our ambition was to go beyond this and put an emphasis on the transformation of "our side" as well – so that eventually we can eliminate concepts such as "their side" and "our side". We do not claim that patronage will surely have a long term effect on the opportunities and well-being of the Roma people we cooperate with (though we hope so). We

do not claim that this is a panacea, or this is a way for everyone. But we claim that when poverty alleviation relationships turned into kinship that brought about sea-change. So *what would you conclude from all of this?*

> Balance is very important. The gist is to build up a long-term, consistent relationship, which is not easy in any sense. Sometimes you have to hold yourself back in order to maintain your integrity; at the same time you see the enormous acute problems, and this makes you have a bad conscience. I think this is the most difficult part.

> I am a bit worried about the future. On the one hand about my responsibility, on the other hand about the little girl choosing a life for herself that I do not have a place in, or I cannot make my peace with. But we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

> In the beginning I visited them because I believed in the patronage programme, now I visit them because I would like to see them.

> I also think this is the most interesting. It had been launched as a goal-oriented relationship alongside middle-class norms, and it turned into a relationship where we just keep in touch. Perhaps this is kinship.

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