



“You become one with the place”: Social mixing, social capital, and the lived experience of urban desegregation in the Roma community

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ABSTRACT

Policymakers are eager to create socially mixed neighbourhoods, even though evidence for the positive impact of social mixing is patchy. In this paper, we examine the relationship between social mixing, social capital, and the lived experience of residents affected by the desegregation of an urban Roma area. Using qualitative data from a participatory action research (PAR) process in Hungary, we explore the two-way relationship between desegregation and bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital. Our results suggest that desegregation has complex and contradictory impacts on lived experience, and that these relate to changes in social forms of capital. Our findings speak to the heterogeneity of the Roma segregated community, and to the multifaceted nature of social capital as a resource. We conclude that the presence of strong negative neighbourhood effects, acknowledged by marginalized residents themselves, indicates that social mixing can contribute to the enhancement of wellbeing and social mobility for many segregated Roma families. However, desegregation alone is insufficient, and further policies are required to increase socio-spatial integration and deal with the social, economic, and cultural causes of extreme poverty.

1. Introduction

The spatial segregation of extremely poor and stigmatized communities can limit life opportunities for marginalized populations, decreasing their ability to build bridging and linking relationships with wider communities and institutions. However, this lack of social mixing can also create strong intra-communal links that act as a powerful shared resource. The concept of ‘social capital’ can be a useful tool to analyse these double-edged outcomes (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

This paper investigates the impact of urban social mixing (desegregation) policies on segregated Roma communities. It charts the impact of a social mixing initiative in the Hungarian city of Szeged, using an approach that explores its impact on the lived experiences of affected Roma residents. A recent study suggests that approximately 3% of the Hungarian population (300,000 people, the vast majority of whom are Roma) still live in segregated environments (i.e. ‘gypsy areas’), including at least 1633 segregated spaces (Domokos & Herczeg, 2010). More widely, the trajectory of the Roma in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) is towards ghettoization (Powell, 2008; Vincze & Raț, 2013). Desegregation of these urban Roma areas, which is achieved by moving poor

Roma residents to more socially heterogeneous areas, has become an official goal of Hungarian local development policies, and ‘desegregation plans’ are now a mandatory element within integrated urban development strategies (IUDS) in all Hungarian cities. More broadly, the creation of socially mixed neighbourhoods, and the avoidance of spatial forms of racial, ethnic, or class-based segregation, are policy goals across the global north (Cheshire, 2009; Lees, 2008). These initiatives assume that the creation of socially mixed neighbourhoods has inevitably positive effects, increasing both social capital and quality of life for segregated communities. Such assessments often treat the Roma community as a homogeneous entity (Bolt et al., 2010). Our research questions this, drawing attention to the variegated experience of desegregation within the Roma community.

In this paper, we examine the relationship between social capital, social mixing, and the lived experience of marginalized residents in a new (and as yet uninvestigated) context: the municipality-led desegregation of an urban Roma neighbourhood in Szeged, Hungary. Having established a long-term relationship with the community through participatory action research (PAR), we were able to ask two key questions: What relationship existed between desegregation and

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different forms of social capital within this segregated Roma community? How did this affect the lived experience of participants?

We draw on a wide literature on social mixing and social capital to theorize the process and impacts of desegregation, while retaining a focus on the accounts provided by the community themselves. Our approach fills a research gap identified by Slater (2006) and Gordon et al. (2017), who argue persuasively that the experiences of those who are displaced during social mixing or gentrification processes are often problematically absent from research in this area, with scholars instead focusing on ‘objective’, list-based criteria for the measurement of well-being and social capital. The article is divided into six sections. Section 2 introduces key theoretical concepts (social mixing and social capital), before the context for the research is outlined in Section 3. Our methodology for data collection and analysis is described in Section 4, before our findings are discussed in Section 5. Our discussion and conclusions (Section 6) formulate policy recommendations for practice, while advancing current theories of social mixing and social capital.

2. Social mixing and social capital in segregated urban spaces

Policymakers often associate the spatial segregation of poor communities with negative “neighbourhood effects” (Bolt et al., 2010; Cheshire, 2009). Urban policy-making strives instead to create socially heterogeneous neighbourhoods, working from the assumption that a mixture of racial, ethnic, and class-based characteristics supports social cohesion; increases social and economic mobility and reduces socially limiting ties; and creates opportunities for new connections with neighbours, so that material and non-material benefits can be more widely shared (Bolt et al., 2010).

However, the empirical data supporting policymakers’ commitment to social mixing is not clear-cut. Evaluations have tended to focus on “hard” indicators such as income and/or employment (Cheshire, 2009; Oreopoulos, 2003); safety, health, and crime (Katz et al., 2001; Ludwig et al., 2001); and school performance (Solon et al., 2000). Other studies have measured self-reported wellbeing (Gordon et al., 2017; Kearns et al., 2013); the strength of social networks; area reputation (Musterd, 2008); and social cohesion (Mugnano & Palvarini, 2013; van Kempen & Bolt, 2009). While some of these researchers have argued for the positive impacts of social mixing (Katz et al., 2001; Kearns et al., 2013; Ludwig et al., 2001; Raynor et al., 2020), others consider that it has few, if any, benefits. Indeed, some authors argue that social mixing can be harmful in certain circumstances (Bolt et al., 2010; Cheshire, 2009; Lees, 2008; Mugnano & Palvarini, 2013).

Critics of social mixing have argued that it is simply a positive substitute for the devalued notion of gentrification: a neoliberal process of displacement that emphasizes individual responsibility, consumer sovereignty, and market-based urban processes. Slater sees desegregation and gentrification as types of “collective irresponsibility” (Slater, 2006, 753), because both displace the poor without tacking the enormous socio-economic disadvantage of impoverished urban environments, and without combatting the “survival of the fittest” logic of capital (Slater, 2009, 294). The effect is not integration but a new type of economic segregation, as middle-class gentrifiers benefit at the expense of poorer social groups.

For Lees (2000), the major motor of gentrification is not social equality but investment flows, as the interests of capital are increasingly backed by a fiscal pragmatism (Lees, 2008) rather than a logic of collective goods (see Bajmócy et al., 2020 for a discussion of the prevalence of this in Hungary). The effects of this are social as well as economic. The goal of social mixing is to “socially construct the middle class or middle-income groups as a natural category ... and ... push the idea that we all should somehow be/become middle class and that we all want to be middle class” (Lees, 2008, 2463). Such processes not only treat the middle class “as the exclusive agents of urban restructuring” (Slater, 2009, 296) but contribute to the construction of the poor as ‘abnormal’. Furthermore, social policies tend not to target self-segregated,

homogenous rich/elite neighbourhoods, meaning that “mixing” is seen as desirable only at the lower end of the income scale (Lees, 2008). Further critiques have pointed out that social mixing does not automatically generate positive social impacts in the shape of new bridging ties, and that the displacement of communities can actually result in a decline of bonding capital and neighbourhood benefits (Bolt et al., 2010; Cheshire, 2009; Lees, 2008).

It is especially unclear whether initiatives to increase social mixing are effective in decreasing ethnic types of segregation. Policymakers rarely identify ethnic minorities as the specific targets of desegregation policy, and such policies tend not to address the particular social and cultural concerns of specific ethnic groups, in part because they tend to view ethnic segregation as a secondary consequence of socio-economic segregation (Bolt et al., 2010).

Those who argue for the positive effects of social mixing ground their arguments in a series of assumptions about forms of social capital. They believe that a more diverse community will promote the sharing of this resource between more and less “resourceful” residents (Costarelli et al., 2019), leading to greater individual and communal access to resources, improved quality of life, and enhanced wellbeing. However, while scholars tend to agree that social relations can significantly influence opportunities for social mobility, the definition of ‘social capital’ varies between studies. Some frameworks identify two types: ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Others suggest three, adding ‘linking’ capital to form a tripartite framework (Pretty, 2003).

‘Bonding’ capital describes inter-community ties based on trust, solidarity, and reciprocity: where bonding is strong, social relationships form a closed, homogenous network that supports everyday survival, yet can also limit social mobility. ‘Bridging’ capital enables mobility between social groups, creating a loose and informal network that enables friends, acquaintances, and neighbours to access one another’s resources (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). These concepts map easily onto the assumptions of Granovetter’s social network theory (Granovetter, 1973), where strong ties provide social and spatial integration, security, and resources for group members, while weak ties (e.g. integration with social institutions like the education system or labour market) support upward social mobility (Lockwood, 1964). The distinction also resonates with Lin’s (1990) more recent opposition between macro-integration (instrumental actions producing types of system integration) and microintegration (social forms of integration, including expressive actions).

In tripartite frameworks, the interpersonal and institutional dimensions of bridging capital are separated, with the concept of ‘linking’ capital used to describe power-laden connections between formal and informal social organizations, such as civil society organizations (CSOs), family supporting offices etc. (Pretty, 2003).

Little research has attended to the relationship between social mixing and social capital amongst Roma communities affected by desegregation policy in Europe. Instead, the focus has been on the dynamics of exclusion, from ‘Romaphobia’ (McGarry, 2017) to ghettoization, to inadequate access to education and the labour market (Bessone et al., 2014; Maestri, 2017; Powell & van Baar, 2019; van Baar, 2012). Ground-breaking work has tended to focus on the exclusionary nature of neoliberal “integration” policies in the areas of work (Szóke, 2015; van Baar, 2012) and housing (Bessone et al., 2014; Maestri, 2017), with a particular emphasis on housing precarity, informality and stigmatization (Bessone et al., 2014; Maestri, 2017; Crețan and O’Brien, 2019; Powell & van Baar, 2019; Crețan et al., 2020). Lancione (2017) has considered Roma resistance to eviction, while Málóvics et al. (2019a, b) discuss the inattentiveness of urban development plans to Roma ways of life. Yet social mixing and social capital have remained peripheral concepts in this research, and no recent studies have explored their relationship to the lived experience of Roma communities affected by desegregation initiatives.

This paper therefore fills an important gap, tracing the relationship between neighbourhood heterogeneity (social mixing), social capital,

and lived experience. Our research focuses on the relationship between social mixing and three types of interpersonal relationship: **bonding ties**, or intense, closed relationships within the segregated and wider local Roma community; **bridging relations**, or weaker bonds that overarch social classes outside of social institutions; and **linking relations**, or inter-class connections established within institutional settings. Our qualitative approach focused on the self-reported, lived experience of the Roma community in relation to these three types of relationship, comparing attitudes before and after desegregation.

3. Context

Our study explores the connections between social mixing, social capital, and lived experience within a poor, marginalized urban Roma community in Hungary. In a wider CEE context, researchers tend to define segregated communities in terms of ethnicity and a spatial concentration of extreme poverty (Vincze & Raţ, 2013). At least 300,000 people in Hungary live in 1633 segregated areas (Domokos & Herczeg, 2010), and the vast majority are Roma. In northeastern and southwestern Hungary, whole villages are now segregated following the

Table 1
Change in housing situation and social capital of stakeholders as a result of desegregation or social-mixing.

Unit of analysis Nr	Housing status	Compensation for moving out	Heterogeneity of new environment	Visits back to segregated area	Changes in social capital		
					New bonding ties (and resegregation)	Erosion of bonding ties	New bridging ties
1	Tenant	Rent	Near (no Roma neighbours)	Seldom	None	Yes	Weak
2	Tenant	Rent	Relatively far (no Roma neighbours)	Frequently	None	Yes	Significant
3	Tenant	Rent	Relatively far (no Roma neighbours)	Frequently	None	No data	None
4	Tenant	Rent	Relatively far (Roma neighbours)	No data	Yes	No data	No data
5	Tenant	Rent	Relatively far (no Roma neighbours)	Seldom	None	No data	No data
6	Without legal status	None	Far (Roma neighbours)	Seldom	None	Yes	No data
7	Without legal status	None	Relatively near (no Roma neighbours)	Seldom	None	No data	No data
8	Without legal status	None	Near (Roma neighbours - usury rent)	Seldom	To some extent	Yes	None
9	Without legal status	None	Near (Roma neighbours - usury rent)	Frequently until she died	To some extent	Yes	None
10	Without legal status	None	Relatively near (Roma neighbours - usury rent)	Frequently	To some extent	Yes	None
11	Without legal status	None	Near (Roma neighbours - usury rent)	Frequently	None	Yes	Presumably yes (data are not reliable enough)
12	Illegal squatter	None	Relatively near (no Roma neighbours - rent)	Frequently	None	Yes	Presumably yes (data are not reliable enough)
13	Illegal squatter	None	Far (no Roma neighbours - mothers' shelter, then rent)	No data	None	Yes	Presumably yes (data are not reliable enough)
14	Illegal squatter	None	Moved within the segregated area, still lives there	Moved within the segregated area, still lives there	Yes	Yes	None
15	Illegal squatter	None	Moved within the segregated area, still lives there	Moved within the segregated area, still lives there	Yes	Yes	None
16	Illegal squatter	None	Moved within the segregated area, still lives there during summer, during winter stays at a homeless shelter	Lives in the segregated area (summer)/visits frequently (winter)	Yes	Yes	None
17	Illegal squatter	None	Moved within the segregated area, then forest (as homeless), then nearby rent with Roma neighbours	Frequently	To some extent	Yes	None
18	Illegal squatter	None	Far (different settlement), then moved back to the segregated area as illegal squatter	Lives in the segregated area	Yes	No data	No data
19	Illegal squatter	None	Moved within the segregated area, still lives there	Moved within the segregated area, still lives there	Yes	Yes	None
20	Illegal squatter	None	Near (Roma neighbours - mini-segregated area)	Frequently	Yes	No	None
21	Owner	Money/new property	Far (no Roma neighbours)	None	None	Yes	Significant
22	Owner	Money/new property	Relatively far (no Roma neighbours)	No data	None	No data	No data
23	Owner	Money/new property	Near (Roma neighbours - mini-segregated area)	Frequently	Yes	No	None
24	Owner	Sold his flat before the beginning of desegregation (money)	Relatively near (Roma neighbours)	Frequently	To some extent	Yes	Weak
25	Owner	Money/new property	Far (no Roma neighbours)	None	None	Yes	None

‘flight’ of the white majority population. In urban areas, Roma neighbourhoods vary in terms of their characteristics and populations. Strong bonding capital tends to be a shared feature of these communities (Méreiné-Berki et al., 2017), but bridging capital is usually missing, and the efficacy of linking capital is questionable. Hungarian policymakers tend to regard segregation as something that city planning policy should combat, with initiatives that focus on the dispersal of stigmatized, poor Roma groups to more socially mixed environments (NFGM, 2009).

Our study focused on a Roma segregated community 1.5 km from the centre of Szeged, the fourth largest city of Hungary, located approximately 15 km from the Serbian border and 30 km from the Romanian border. The city is the administrative, cultural, and economic centre of the Southern Great Plain region and is home to 167,000 people. Between 4000 and 5000 of these are Roma residents.

Our research focuses on two segregated areas, home to approximately 400 Roma. This article deals with the effects of the desegregation process for the larger of these, called “Cserkő” by its residents. Until spring 2017, it was home to 250 people, who lived in 60 flats in 16 blocks (12 blocks containing 4 flats; 4 blocks containing 3 flats). Most of this accommodation lacked basic facilities, and 7–8 people often lived in a single flat of 35–40 square meters. Housing tenure, an important determinant of attitudes towards social mixing, was diverse: the area comprised (1) owner-occupiers; (2) tenants renting from the city council; (3) those who had lost legal occupancy due to unpaid rent or over-heads; and (4) illegal squatters (Table 1). The fluidity of housing arrangements makes it difficult to calculate the total number of occupants: according to 2011 census data, 217 people lived there, but this may be an underestimate. The number of squatters increased dramatically following the 2005 desegregation of another of Szeged’s Roma neighbourhoods, the “Reptér” (“Airport”). Many of the displaced families were persuaded to accept housing on farmsteads in smaller villages, often 60–70 km from Szeged, but some struggled to integrate into this new environment and therefore returned to the city, becoming illegal squatters in Cserkő. By 2017, low levels of formal education and of formal employment characterised the segregated area.

The official Desegregation Plan for the city aimed to move two families from Cserkő to an “integrated” (socially mixed) environment every year between 2007 and 2019. In practice, however, little happened until spring 2017, when desegregation began at a much more rapid pace. The city council moved a number of inhabitants, and then demolished their flats: to date, 9 blocks have been destroyed (6 of the 4-flat blocks and 3 of the 3-flat blocks). The council offered families no further support once they had moved.

Compensation for leaving varied with tenure status (Table 1). Tenants received new, higher quality social housing for a slightly increased rent. Owners either received the value of the property or an alternative flat/house in exchange. The city council initially displaced illegal squatters and families who had lost their legal residential status without any recompense, though more recently they have begun to work with the Local Roma Minority Self-Government (LRMSG) to offer “crisis flats” (local public housing rented at reduced rates) to some of this group (see Creţan et al., 2020). The eligibility criteria for this scheme demand that families should be able to “integrate to majority society”. Policymakers define this in terms of a “well ordered” house (i.e. clean and properly furnished, with a cultivated garden), a regular income, and a record showing regular school/kindergarten attendance for any children. Unsurprisingly, the compensation scheme creates different interests within the community, and conflict amongst Roma residents over the merits of desegregation policy: owners and tenants tend to support it, viewing it as an opportunity for a better life, while illegal squatters and families without legal status oppose it, since they face precarity and potential homelessness as a result.

At first glance, the desegregation process is not one of traditional gentrification (Lees, 2008; Slater, 2006, 2009). Firstly, it is not characterised by the entry of middle class capital to an urban area, but by the top-down, state-led “removal and relocation” (Elliott-Cooper et al.,

2020, 10) of poor and stigmatized residents to more heterogeneous and slightly wealthier parts of the city, with many receiving compensation for displacement. Secondly, some members of the community support the process, often because of negative neighbourhood effects (see Section 5). However, viewed from a wider and temporally more extended perspective, the situation is more complex. There are signs of an economically-led, “Marcusian” displacement process at work, as a result of rising property and land values in the surrounding area (Slater, 2009). The development of segregated communities is partly a result of the Hungarian state’s deliberate and systematic disinvestment in public housing (Slater, 2006), and this wider shift towards a privatised property and land market has seen the gentrification of local landscape around Cserkő (similar to the cases presented in Rose et al., 2013). Indeed, some neighbouring areas have developed into quasi-gated communities. The segregated area is therefore one of the largest remaining pieces of land for potential development within easy walking distance from the city centre, making it a valuable asset for the municipality.

Local housing policies also resulted in the Roma community of Cserkő experiencing a form of ‘un-homing’ (Atkinson, 2015; Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020), diminishing their social and affective bonds to Cserkő, fracturing of any sense of collective community, and reducing feelings of “belonging”. For example, flats in Cserkő did not have household meters for water services: legal residents (owners and tenants) ended up paying for public services for the whole community. Despite these payments, the community did not always have access to running water: burst pipes cut off supply, and were mended in an extremely tardy fashion (research diary). The tensions raised by this situation were exacerbated by the desegregation of the Reptér



Fig. 1. Some Roma houses have already been demolished, while others are still standing in Szeged’s segregated neighbourhood. Source: Photo prepared by Mihály Nagy.

community (Fig. 1), with established Cserkó residents blaming newcomers for negative neighbourhood effects, leading to significant conflict and erosion of bonding ties. Finally, even though city development plans have mentioned the desegregation of Cserkó since 2007, there is no public information about the future of the neighbourhood, or of the municipality's plans for the area, resulting in significant displacement anxiety (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). These processes constitute a kind of 'slow violence' (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020), a defamiliarization (Atkinson, 2015) and an un-homing (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). The result is that those with secure housing tenure increasingly expressed a desire to move away from the area, often signalled by the complaint: "Cserkó was not like this before".

4. Methodology

4.1. Data

To gather data, we applied qualitative methods within the broader approach of participatory action research (PAR). PAR is based on cooperation between academic actors and communities to create structured processes of inquiry leading to scientifically sound results that are relevant for the partnering community. Structured inquiry, combined with cooperation and activism (although not necessarily within the framework of PAR), are popular approaches in empirical research on stigmatized, segregated Roma communities because they can ensure partnership, trust, and honesty, as well as research validity, supporting deep ideographical observations (Clough Marinaro, 2017; Grill, 2012; Lancione, 2017). Our methodology is also close to that of other qualitative studies on social mixing that aim to grasp the experiences of stakeholders across several domains of life (Gordon et al., 2017; Kearns et al., 2013; Mugnano & Palvarini, 2013).

Our PAR project began in 2010 with the aim of supporting the social inclusion and mobility of poor, stigmatized, and often segregated Roma communities. It brought together local Roma residents, Roma leaders, and local middle-class actors, including researcher-activists, who collaborated around the basic ethical and practical goals of PAR (promoting equality and justice, fighting oppression, empowering the marginalized, and engaging in structured inquiry, continuous reflection, and action). The project has several elements: education (e.g. running an afternoon school for Roma children); community building (establishing community centres, organizing programs for poor families); welfare (collecting and distributing donations; organizing a local supportive network of individuals and CSOs); and political activism (representing the interests of Roma with the municipality; for a detailed account see Málóvics et al., 2018). The first and second authors of this paper have participated in all of these elements on a regular basis as researcher-activists. In an ideal PAR process, all parties are interested in structured inquiry, so that "lay" participants become "researchers", assisting with everything from the formulation of research questions to the publication of results. However, much PAR falls short of this ideal (Málóvics et al., 2018), as the different interests of participants tend to divide them (researchers extract from the community for publications, community members are impatient for action and change, Arieli et al., 2009, 273).

Increasing social mixing amongst Cserkó residents was not one of the original goals of our PAR process. However, in 2017 the municipality-led process of desegregation became a major concern for community members, who asked researcher-activists to "step in" as supporters and consultants, helping local Roma leaders and residents to shape policy in a way that ensured that it was beneficial to the community. This is an example of "community-driven issue selection" (Minkler, 2004, 687), but it is important to note that the interests of the parties were different. Roma participants wanted a desegregation process that better served their interests, and sought to communicate findings to the municipality in order to shape action, using a range of tools including petitions, policy recommendations, and researcher-facilitated discussions with local

officials. Researcher-activists sought to assist with this but also to publish findings from the process, an activity that was of no interest to many residents, who remained (understandably) focused on their own material situation.

This paper draws on multiple qualitative sources. The first author has kept a reflexive research diary of their work with the segregated community since 2015. Additionally, we collected qualitative data related to the research question in two bursts. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2016, before desegregation had begun (group B) and 14 further interviews in 2018 (group A), after 8 buildings had been demolished. 7 of these Group A interviews were with small groups who moved, 7 with small groups who stayed.¹ Because of the group format of these interviews, a total of 24 individuals participated (12 movers and 12 remainers), with an overlap between 2016 and 2018 of approximately 50%. In total, the interviews and research diary combined provide data on about 25 families who moved out of the segregated area. With the consent of participants, interviews were tape recorded and later typewritten and entered into NVivo for analysis, including notes on each interview's context. We anonymized and coded the responses, giving participants pseudonyms. Interviews with group A participants who moved are coded AM (after desegregation, moved), while those with remainers have been coded AR (after desegregation, remained).

Despite a longstanding relationship with the community, we found data collection challenging. The unstable housing situation of numerous community members, especially those who were illegal squatters or who had lost legal status, made choosing a unit of analysis difficult. Eventually we decided to consider as a single unit groups who had lived together more or less continually both in the segregated area and in their new neighbourhood. It was also difficult to categorise housing status, since this was far from constant. Between 2016 and 2018, several interviewees lost their legal occupancy status, while relationship breakdowns and divorces constituted a further source of housing instability (following one divorce, one member of the couple stayed legally in a segregated flat, while the other stayed without legal occupancy status, even though she was entitled to be considered an owner/tenant). Fuzzy situations also emerged where the legal owner of a property differed from those who occupied it, or where the owner was underage. In such cases, we decided to consider both actual situations and legal ones, since our aim was to record the impacts of the desegregation process on the lives of inhabitants, and issues such as the amount of compensation received depended on both factors (compensation was often unequally distributed within families).

This is easier to understand with an illustration. Consider the case of Klári (female, 50). At the start of the research project, she was homeless, then she lived in a rented flat with her boyfriend, before her sister let them move into a garage in the segregated area. Klári stayed there, sometimes with and sometimes without her boyfriend, before briefly moving into a flat in the segregated blocks that stood empty after desegregation. This was then demolished, so she moved back to the garage, then into usury rental accommodation,² which was subsequently sold. Her sister had obtained a new flat in the meantime, which she bought using the compensation for her flat in the segregated block. However, this was purchased in the name of Klári's sister's daughter, meaning that Klári's sister had no official legal claim to it. Klári sadly died here in the summer of 2019. These types of unstable tenure are likely to continue into the future, and they have significant implications for social capital and wellbeing (Cheshire, 2009). Our findings therefore

¹ Finding a relatively "calm" interview environment was a challenge. The community had fluid boundaries, and would enter each other's homes and join in conversations in a very informal way.

² In usury rents, people rent half a room or even just a bed or a wardrobe to live in, at rates way above market prices. Often 9–10 families live in the same house, sharing one kitchen and bathroom. Only people who have no chance of obtaining a formally rented property move to a usury rent.

constitute a snapshot of the situation in the present (March 2020), and any attempt to extrapolate from them to the future should be treated with caution.

4.2. Data analysis

We carried out data analysis according to a flexible theoretical framework. We adopted an iterative approach, adjusting the logic of analysis incrementally. For example, as the erosion of bonding capital emerged as a significant finding, we revisited our categories of analysis to search for deeper connections and causal relations.

5. Social mixing, desegregation, and the lived experience of Roma people

5.1. Bonding capital

As our previous research revealed (Málovics et al., 2019a), bonding capital in the segregated neighbourhood takes a number of positive material and non-material forms, but this influence is not unidirectional: bonding capital can reduce wellbeing, as well as promoting it. Furthermore, bonding capital weakened significantly in 2005, when displaced residents from the Reptér area (see Section 3) started to move to the blocks in question (Málovics et al., 2019b). The use of novel psychoactive substances by community members has also weakened social ties: this is a general problem in Hungary and in other East-Central European countries amongst marginalized youth (Kaló et al., 2017; Kupka et al., 2020). As one interviewee explained: “14–15 years of age and they use these, they smoke like hell. It hurts me to look at them... I do not see any motivation for anything. Why? Because of drugs... if I buy a shampoo he (the son) steals it and trades it for drugs” (János, AR, male, 51).

Bonding capital and the desegregation process are interconnected in complex ways. Community ties, compensation, and house prices influence the areas chosen by movers, with significant impacts on social mixing. As previously mentioned, community members had different types of housing tenure, and therefore received different levels of compensation for the loss of their homes. Owners and tenants theoretically had a greater degree of choice over the district to which they moved, its distance from the segregated area, and the number of Roma families already residing there. In practice, however, the Roma population in Cserkő is higher than in most other parts of the city (Málovics et al., 2019b), and the stigma that this group experience is reflected in house prices, restricting the compensation that owners obtained and constraining their choice. Of course, families who lacked legal occupancy were still more negatively impacted, receiving no compensation and few offers of alternative housing.

Neighbourhood heterogeneity is not an all-or-nothing arrangement (Johnston et al., 2002) and can therefore be difficult to evaluate. Table 1 summarizes the housing situation of the 25 study participants before and after segregation. The data include the distance of their new home from the segregated area, which is measured in geographical and cultural terms, based on the evaluation of participants themselves. ‘Near’, by the community’s definition, means a few streets away; ‘far’ suggests a move to another district altogether. ‘Relatively near’ suggests a move to an area that was already culturally familiar to the segregated community, for example, a place with Roma neighbours on a well-established route to or from the segregated area. ‘Relatively far’ suggests a move to a less familiar area, where the density of Roma was lower. This reflects a spatial reality: the segregated community used “routes” through other city districts to visit other Roma residents of Szeged, moving through shops, playgrounds, and other community spaces.

The further participants moved from the segregated area, geographically and culturally, the more likely they were to enter an “equally mixed” (Galster, 2007) community. However, the data suggest that the policy goal behind desegregation, namely the creation of socially mixed neighbourhoods, was not entirely realized. Two out of the

five owner-occupier families moved to houses close to the segregated area, where they had Roma neighbours; the other three moved further away, geographically and culturally speaking, to more mixed areas. Four out of five legal tenant families moved into social flats some distance away, with middle-class, non-Roma neighbours, while one tenant family moved to a house with Roma neighbours.

Following the situation of families without legal status and illegal squatters is more difficult, but we do know that five of fifteen families moved into empty buildings within the segregated area after their homes were demolished. One family stayed temporarily, living in homeless shelters during the winter; another left the segregated area (after living on the streets and in nearby forests during the summer, they moved to a nearby rental property with Roma neighbours). One further family moved in with relatives outside of the city, though they later returned to the segregated area as illegal squatters. One family managed to buy a flat in a mini-segregated area³ nearby, while four moved to usury rented properties nearby. Two families, including one single mother, moved into rental property relatively close to the segregated area, another single mother was accepted into a shelter. One moved to a house far from the segregated area without Roma neighbours. For these groups, then, social mixing was seldom realized: most fled to non-heterogeneous environments.

Both movers and remainers talked about an erosion of bonding capital as a result of desegregation. Those who moved to more heterogeneous environments reported particularly significant effects, and experienced difficulty in building new bonds; by contrast, 2 out of the 8 families who moved into houses with Roma neighbours reported no change to bonding capital, while the other 6 managed to build new bonds. Furthermore, half of those participants who remained in the segregated area wanted to stay in the same area after demolition. However, those who remained also reported a decline in bonding capital, which may be because the families with the greatest opportunities in terms of social mobility (greater resources, more stable jobs, legal housing tenure, good bridging capital etc.) were amongst the first to leave. Their absence may have meant a loss of community resources, since those that remained tended to be the families who were struggling with serious problems (e.g. illegal housing, extreme poverty, mental illnesses, and addiction). As one participant noted: “The community has also changed since desegregation began. Those who were valuable have left, only the waste stayed. Things get tough. Like rats, you have to move from one hole to the other. That’s it. They demolish it (buildings) and then there is other one (flat), you go there, that is all” (János, AR, male, 51).

5.2. Bridging capital

Our study reinforces previous findings that Roma segregated communities lack forms of bridging capital. The main reason for this is ethnic stigmatization, but poverty also plays a significant role. Stigmatization also heavily affects access to housing: many landlords “...do not rent out their flats to Roma. It does not matter if you have the money. They look at you and say: we are full” (Olivia, AR, female, 43). An alternative network has developed, where Roma families buy and sell homes and exchange rental properties, facilitated by agents for the conventional Roma brokerage of “mita” (research diary).

Exclusion of this type creates emotional impacts, in the shape of reduced self-esteem and feelings of shame, and a heightened awareness of cultural difference: “...Roma cannot fit in. I do not say that they are self-determining, but they are different. It is not better or worse. Just different. Our culture is different. They (Hungarians) immediately say that we are always

³ “Gypsy-houses” or “mini-segregated areas” are blocks of flats occupied mainly or exclusively by Roma families, often reproducing the living circumstances, institutional relationships, and milieu of local segregated areas. These houses are stigmatized by the majority society, and tend to be shunned by non-Roma residents.

fighting. But this is not fighting, we just simply talk louder..." (Péter, AR, male, 55). Access to the labour market is also a significant issue: unable to access credit, and facing discrimination when it comes to jobs, many within the community engage in informal, unofficial, or illegal money-generating activity. Numerous interviewees were openly tolerant of these activities, which included prostitution: "I do not blame her, because of course she is a mother, she has kids, and then she has her last 100 forints, and she does not know what she should spend it on..." (Tamás, AM, male, 40).

Two families managed to create new bridging relations after leaving the segregated area (Table 1). Both moved to heterogeneous environments, one as an owner, the other as a tenant. Their new bridging relationships functioned to assist them materially, as they accessed the labour market, social aid, educational programs, and even school camps for children. Their communication skills developed, and their self-esteem strengthened as they gained confidence in dealing with official social institutions and in adapting to new mainstream patterns and expectations. Both families also possessed significant bridging ties when they lived in the segregated area, and while their move ended many of these, they were able to create new relationships, perhaps suggesting underlying competencies in this area (*research diary*). A different tenant family who moved to a heterogeneous environment further away from the segregated area built some new bridging ties, but also described continuing social stigma: "When I moved here I started to have Hungarian friends... One of the neighbours wanted to call the police on me, but this other one, said not to say nothing, probably because they are also very loud" (Lajos, AM, male, 57). For the other cases, we either have too little reliable information to judge (8 families), or those in question did not manage to form any new bridging relationships (12 families). During interviews, a number of participants expressed the view that some families simply would not be able to adjust to a heterogeneous environment: "they are so used to this milieu, it's impossible for them to adapt to society" (Antal, AM, male, 35) said one, while another spoke of a family having become 'one with the place' (János, AR, male, 51).

5.3. Linking capital

As for linking relationships, several interviewees mentioned positive concrete relationships with state institutions, praising the support they received with administrative issues and with donations. Such positive mentions were always associated with certain institutional representatives (people), never with institutions themselves. Generally, the community lacked trust towards public sector institutions, with interviewees noting the need to allow sufficient time for 'thick' relations to develop. Certain institutional practices, such as the rotation of family support officers within the city, and the imposition of fines for 'poor' parenting, inhibited trust; interviewees were also afraid of the family support office, with its powers to take children into care. Six interviewees also mentioned discrimination by police, and a feeling that they treated the segregated area as "beyond-the-pale", imposing exaggerated fines for small infractions while refusing to intervene when help was needed: "... they did not do anything. They say: let those gypsies kill each other, we will have less problems then!" (Eleonora, B, female, 46). Three interviewees also mentioned that ambulances refused to serve the segregated area.

Our study has not revealed any structural relationship between social mixing and linking capital. This may be because linking capital plays a weak role in the observed context, or because the personal qualities, skills, and characteristics of institutional representatives played a greater role than structural features in facilitating or inhibiting linking capital. This might indicate a need for greater numbers of street-level bureaucrats (May & Winter, 2009) to facilitate social mixing. Supporting the Roma community through the desegregation process requires a number of different knowledges and aptitudes, including an awareness of the lifestyles of these extremely poor, stigmatized, and segregated communities; a knowledge of their cultural identity and habits; a desire to build long-term relationships with community members; and an

empathy towards their plight.

5.4. Social mixing, social capital and the lived experiences of participants

The lived experience of desegregation may change with time and circumstances. This poses challenges for the evaluation of the impact of social mixing on wellbeing in particular (Cheshire, 2009). Despite this limitation, our data show some broad tendencies.

Firstly, some of the movers who received compensation reported an increase in wellbeing, associated with an ability to access better quality housing in an improved environment. Four of these families perceived the move as an opportunity for social mobility, accepting the erosion of former bonding ties as a chance to move on from negative patterns and even as a condition for integration within the system. This was sometimes described in terms of 'growing up': "...the segregated area... gives a kind of security for you, but the problem is that this kind of security pulls you down as you get so much used to it... you cannot stand on your own feet... now that I am on my own, it gives me a kind of zip... this is the starting stroke" (Judit, AM, female, 29). These were often the families who already pursued bridging ties while living in the segregated area.

However, some of these movers also complained about loneliness, and about missing friends and relatives: "Company is very important. People keep together. You grow up in a community, it is difficult to leave such a community and start everything over" (Tamás, AM, male, 40). Several paid frequent visits to the segregated area to maintain ties (Table 1). Moving therefore had a double-edged impact on self-esteem. On one hand, living in a new, more heterogeneous environment could bring a sense of pride at having 'escaped' to better and less stigmatized circumstances, or even at 'being better' than those who stayed. Yet numerous movers also felt that they were unable to meet the expectations of their new environment. Some reported feeling inferior to middle-class "Hungarians" once they had left the safe environment of the segregated area behind. Five participants also mentioned the erosion of bonding capital as a source of diminished wellbeing in material terms, due to a lack of access to formerly shared resources and a need to make new kinds of decision: "... We fell apart. Because of this displacement. It was easier before, we discussed when the salary arrives, when and what to buy for, ok, we than buy this and that, and that's all" (Edit, AM, female, 48). As both of these examples indicate, the erosion of community ties could be acutely felt by those who moved to more socially mixed neighbourhoods.

The data show that those who moved into mini-segregated areas were the most satisfied with their new situation. They were able to keep, or to recreate, lost bonding ties, securing them material and non-material wellbeing gains: "I am very happy that I ended up here. The environment, my neighbours, they are so nice, we help each other. If I don't have any coffee, they give me some; if they don't have any, I give them some. Here we can rely on each other if there are problems" (Edit, AM, female, 48). Self-esteem generally remained higher in this group than for those moving to more heterogeneous environments (*research diary*).

By contrast, the wellbeing of those who stayed declined significantly. All participants in this group reported a loss of bonding ties, especially those who did not have a family. Feelings of isolation and loneliness were common "I try, but there is no one left to join with" (János, AR, male, 51).

6. Discussion and takeaway for practice

Our study confirms the findings of other research (e.g. Bolt et al., 2010), in that it suggests that there is a mutually influential relationship between social mixing, social capital, and the lived experience of the desegregated population. Leaving a segregated area was not always a straightforward choice: while some families in our study chose to move to heterogeneous neighbourhoods, others chose to remain, or move to less heterogeneous areas – similarly to other contexts (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). In both cases, the decision was connected to the perceived

material and non-material benefits associated with various forms of social capital, including the challenges of stigma as an impediment to integration (Creñan et al., 2020). This means that, in future, desegregation could simply lead to resegregation, as polarised enclaves re-form over time (Johnston et al., 2002). Furthermore, Roma families with illegal or insecure forms of housing tenure had little opportunity to move to a more heterogeneous environment. Economic disadvantage and lack of access to the housing market meant that desegregation simply displaced them into precarity, leading to immediate resegregation (either within the segregated area, or in other places where the poor are spatially concentrated, e.g. usury rentals, homeless shelters, or even nearby forests).

Policy interventions that are justified with a rhetoric of supporting social mobility for poor, segregated Roma residents can lead to exclusionary effects in practice. Our findings here replicates those from other contexts, including research on French “*villages d’insertions*” (Bessone et al., 2014), Italian Roma camps (Maestri, 2017), and “activation policies” in Slovakia (van Baar, 2012), which are similar to public work programs in Hungary (Szöke, 2015). These initiatives all tend to segregate and marginalize residents, instead of integrating them, and are organized on a neoliberal basis: they emphasize the individual responsibility of stigmatized, often segregated, marginalized Roma populations without touching upon the structural nature of their exclusion. Such policies really only benefit those individuals and families who are capable of “integration into majority society”, meaning also that they are willing to accept the norms of the stigmatising majority (maintaining legal housing tenure, a well-ordered home, a regular job, and school attendance, Bessone et al., 2014; van Baar, 2012).

The impacts of desegregation on the lived experiences of participants were often contradictory, and differed between groups depending on a number of factors. Both movers and remainers experienced disruption to forms of social capital when some families moved out of the segregate to a socially mixed area. Those who were already successful at building bridging capital tended to create new connections in heterogeneous neighbourhoods, but others were less able to achieve this – the ability to work within the structurally dominant conditions of majority society seems to matter here (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). Moving to a socially mixed environment represented a huge challenge for most (Cheshire, 2009). Similarly, for some movers, material changes (e.g. increased living costs), and a loss of bonding capital (leading to loneliness and decreased access to communal resources) meant that desegregation was associated with negative effects. In some cases, these were offset by better living conditions, increased opportunities, and the loss of perceived neighbourhood effects related to extreme poverty, stigmatization, and lack of access to public services (Cheshire, 2009; Galster, 2007). Similarly, movers experienced both positive and negative impacts on their self-esteem associated with escaping a stigmatized living environment, and experiencing cultural and ethnic stigma and prejudice in the wider community respectively (Cheshire, 2009). This indicates the influence of factors beyond income, such as relative social position, on the wellbeing of those who moved to socially mixed neighbourhoods (Cheshire, 2009).

The greatest gains were reported by those who moved to mini-segregated areas. They experienced the positive impacts of a change of environment and new opportunities to develop bonding capital, without loss of access to bonding capital. This resulted in lower levels of loneliness or lowered self-esteem, though it also seemed to correlate with a lack of new forms of bridging capital. For these families, there was no straightforward trade-off between material and non-material domains (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020).

Contrary to the diverse and contradictory impacts that movers experience, the families who stayed experienced almost entirely negative impacts. Many faced total uncertainty regarding the future because they lacked legally recognised housing status, and could not claim compensation for loss of housing. Desegregation caused them to lose bonding relations with more stable families in the segregated area, with

deleterious material and emotional consequences: many experienced un-homing, the removal of a “sense of belonging to a particular community or home-space” (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020, 12; Atkinson, 2015).

Segregated Roma neighbourhoods can be conceptualised as spaces shaped by multiple actors (Maestri, 2017) with different structural positions, interests, and attitudes. Our policy recommendations reflect the need to consider this diversity. Since desegregation processes are highly context-dependent (Rose et al., 2013), it is important to stress that our findings have limited applicability to social mixing processes targeting poor urban segregated Roma neighbourhoods in a way that relocates residents to more heterogeneous parts of the city. However, our research does suggest that a change of approach towards desegregation may be necessary.

First, we want to call for a nuanced position on social mixing. Rather than taking an unequivocal position that sees it as uniformly socially good or evil (Bolt et al., 2010; Lees, 2008), we instead suggest that it can make a positive difference for some groups, while harming others. It is not straightforwardly an ineffective or cosmetic policy, or a distraction from structural issues: for some, it represents a meaningful intervention that can provide opportunities for a better life. For others, however, it can significantly worsen conditions of precarity and (counter-intuitively) can reinforce spatial dynamics of resegregation.

Secondly, there are reasons to be suspicious of the official policy narrative of “serving the interests of the affected population”. The desegregation of the Roma community may disguise a straightforward, economically driven agenda of Marcusian gentrification. It is therefore important to ensure that the interests of the Roma community (very much including their economic position) are foregrounded in desegregation processes.

On the basis of our research, we suggest the following policy recommendations:

- (1) Our case showed that neighbourhood impacts may be shaped by policy in other areas (socio-economics, housing etc.) over an extended temporal frame. Thus, taking a historical perspective can help local actors to understand the ways in which segregated communities are subjected to forms of “slow violence” (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). Before formulating policy, it is necessary to comprehend the (potentially exclusionary) socio-spatial impacts of former local policies, and to reflect on the historical processes of structural exclusion, oppression, and stigma formulation. New policy must be attentive to this context if it is to support marginalized, stigmatized residents.
- (2) The definitions and language of policy must honestly reflect the full range of costs and benefits of social mixing. Definitions must be recognised as political, rather than merely analytical (Slater, 2009): the way that we frame questions of segregation and social mixing influences the answers we receive. For example, definitions of ‘displacement’ that include a wide range of social processes related to segregation and social mixing may capture a greater range of impacts. Similarly, as Slater has argued, using honest language, rather than “keeping with the discursive strategy of the neoliberal project” (Slater, 2006, 738) is important to capture the full range of costs and benefits of social mixing policies.
- (3) This reflection must extend to the potential for desegregation policy to act in tandem with neoliberal forces, to promote a narrow, middle-class view of ‘correct’ social ways of being. Instead, it is important to focus on assimilation as something that is not equally available to all groups (and not universally desirable). Some marginalized residents may be willing to adapt to the mainstream, but others are not.
- (4) In our study, mixing processes had costs and benefits that fell unevenly amongst the group. It is therefore important to treat Roma segregated communities as variegated and heterogeneous communities, in which there are a variety of material and

- subjective positions towards desegregation. They should not be treated as homogeneous entities where there is just one set of interests or attitudes.
- (5) Special attention needs to be paid to the most vulnerable within the marginalized community (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). They are often the least capable of adapting to neoliberal socio-economic policies that stress individual responsibility, including social mixing. They are also often those with the most to lose from social mixing, including acute forms of precarity and homelessness. To achieve this, we need to move away from a view of social mixing as a choice between abandonment and gentrification and to work on local alternatives, e.g. the decommodification of housing (Slater, 2009) and the “right to stay put” (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020) with social support.
 - (6) Social capital strongly influences the costs and benefits associated with social mixing for marginalized residents. Loss of bonding ties means a loss of resources, and the significance of this is highlighted by the fact that even families who want to move to more heterogeneous (less underinvested) environments do not want to be far away from the segregated area (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). Social mixing does not automatically improve bridging relations, and linking capital may only be available to support those who are willing to adapt and assimilate. Further policy intervention is needed to address these shortfalls and to support marginalized residents.
 - (7) As social mixing has complex and contradictory impacts on the life of segregated communities, across material and non-material domains, it is very difficult to reach any general conclusion about the balance of positive and negative effects in the longer term (Cheshire, 2009). Evaluation and monitoring of desegregation policy needs to be institutionalized, using a wider range of indicators of wellbeing, rather than income alone. To avoid the imposition of a set of indicators that reflect the prejudices of a dominant social group, the lived experiences of the affected population should be integrated into this evaluative methodology.
 - (8) If social mobility is a goal, then social mixing is only one element in a broader policy mix to achieve this. Our study reinforces the findings of other research (Bolt et al., 2010; Cheshire, 2009; Lees, 2008) that desegregation of socially mixed neighbourhoods is insufficient to improve wellbeing for poor families. Ethnic and social stigmatization, and ingrained poverty also must be tackled. Further support must be provided to ensure that Roma families are able to take advantage of inclusive urban environments (Lees, 2008). Other policies aimed at the alleviation of the complex social, economic, and cultural causes of extreme poverty, are also necessary if this is to be a success. Only then can social mixing become something more than a policy “whitewash”.
 - (9) Our results suggest that institutions, and particularly street-level bureaucrats, may be needed in order to develop forms of supportive linking capital. They must possess a thorough knowledge of the lives of poor, stigmatized, segregated, and oppressed Roma communities and an open and empathic attitude to building long-term personal relationships with stakeholders. Thus, the efficiency of public services in supporting enhanced social mobility and wellbeing amongst extremely poor, stigmatized social groups matters.
 - (10) The decision made by some Roma families to stay in segregated areas when given the opportunity to leave suggests that these participants were able to anticipate the negative, as well as the positive, impacts of social mixing. Thus, transparency and deliberative participation with and for marginalized residents in social mixing is important for ethical *and* practical reasons.

The present study has limitations. First, the desegregation process we studied is a recent one, and we cannot make any well-grounded

conclusions concerning its long-term impact on wellbeing or social mobility. Despite the strength of our PAR methodology in capturing the lives and experiences of segregated Roma people, thus ensuring that displaced residents do not ‘disappear’ from the places where researchers look for them (Gordon et al., 2017), short-term evaluations like ours are not able to grasp long-term social impacts. This indicates a need for longitudinal, cohort-based qualitative and ethnographic studies to explore the perspectives of communities on social mixing.

Secondly, being committed to the values of PAR with (1) its focus on the community’s own definitions of their interests and (2) its critical attitude towards ‘colonial’ assumptions like that of social mixing (Gordon et al., 2017) can result in a conflict-ridden situation for researchers. In particular, it is important to be aware of the dangers of constructing “the middle class or middle-income groups as a natural category”, or promoting “the idea that we all should somehow be/become middle class and that we all want to be middle class” (Lees, 2008, 2463). On the one hand, our research is driven by a concern for the wellbeing of the community we study, and a desire to see their material circumstances and wellbeing improve in tangible ways. On the other, we sympathize with critical epistemologies (e.g. conflict theory, critical race theory, or the ecological economic approach to environmental sustainability) that seek to acknowledge the legitimacy of the perspective of vulnerable social groups themselves, and to highlight the oppressive nature of a global northern middle class lifestyle on marginalized social groups, the global south more generally, and the natural environment (Wiedmann & Lenzen, 2018). However, our research reveals that this is not merely a set of methodological and theoretical concerns for activist researchers, but something that is also at work in the segregated Roma community itself. Some of our interviewees were in favour of state-driven, top-down desegregation initiatives, welcoming the chance to adopt an ‘oppressive’, global northern, middle class lifestyle as an opportunity to improve their lot. Others were excluded by the same programs, and experienced a decline in their wellbeing, raising questions about the extent to which such initiatives are compatible with ideas of the ‘right to the city’ for all social groups (Purcell, 2002). This points to the need for future research on social mixing and social imaginaries (Taylor, 2002), which treats segregated, excluded, and marginalized communities as richly variegated, and not as a homogeneous group.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

All three authors have contributed in equal measure to literature review, methodology, writing – original draft, review and editing.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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