

(Im)mobility Subcontracted: Nesting Hierarchies, Uneven Distributions and the ‘Roma Inclusion’ Projects in Europe

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This paper explores social mobilities and trajectories in relation to particular mechanisms of subcontracting and of unequal distribution of capitals in the emerging field of EU funded projects for poor and socially excluded populations in Europe. It discusses some of the struggles for possible mobilities and its limits amidst continuing production and reproduction of privileges, disadvantages and structural orders in these project-cum-policy worlds constraints. By examining a particular case of a large-scale and multi-sited project and other similar project schemes, described by some of its proponents as one of the most ‘participatory’ projects for Roma in Europe, the article illustrates particular mechanisms of power and knowledge reproduction that facilitates some kinds of mobilities while also reproducing certain constraints and limits on these possibilities (for some subjects and some social trajectories). It develops an ethnographic critique of situated and nesting hierarchies of management and brokerage leading to reproduction of particular setups, privileges, unequal economic distribution and (mis)recognitions of capitals, which allows for particular emergence of particular kinds of contested ‘expertise’ in the uneven field of so-called ‘Roma inclusion’.

Key words: mobility, immobility, Roma, poverty, capitals, development projects

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INTRODUCTION

This article¹ explores differentiated experiences of (im)mobilities, mechanisms of subcontracting, hierarchies of knowledge, and unequal distribution of capitals in the emerging field of (not only) EU funded projects for poor and marginalized populations in Europe.

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By taking as its empirical point of departure experiences within several cases of large-scale multi-locality projects, one of which was described by its proponents as one of the most ‘participatory’ projects for Romani groups in Europe, this paper illustrates particular mechanisms of power and knowledge reproduction embedded in particular structural forms and its implementation. It develops an ethnographic critique of situated and nesting hierarchies of management, brokerage and research leading to reproduction of particular inequalities, privileges, unequal economic distribution and (mis)recognitions of capitals, which allows for an emergence and maintenance of particular kinds of ‘expert’ subjects and differentiated kinds of ‘expertise’ knowledge in the field of so-called ‘Roma inclusion.’² Similarly to many development projects, these projects can open up avenues for possible social mobilities and transformations – not only for its beneficiaries but also for the brokers and project-implementing workers – but are also often limited and structured by particular boundaries and protracted temporalities, which contribute to particular production and reproduction of (more or less) inequality and asymmetric positions. Despite its official presentations and rhetoric highlighting its ‘participatory’ methods, strivings for ‘empowerment’ and proclaimed ‘bottom-up’ logic centred upon the involvement of poor Roma, many of these kinds of projects’ and their implementations are marked by contradictions and embedded in a structurally reproduced logic privileging particular kinds of subjects of ‘experts’ (with particular capitals) who occupy certain social and power positions in relation to locally and regionally emerging, and frequently Roma (though not exclusively), actors who tend to stay on the lower positions (or, ‘move less’) in the hierarchical order of the projects. The structures are simultaneously deployed in action and outcomes of practices in a highly uneven distribution of capitals and recognitions. These operate in symbolic and social forms, as haunting³ remnants of the past in present inscribed in ambient surroundings (Lea, 2020), but produce some important material differentiations, foreclosing and enabling certain possibilities for present and future action. These structures (and infrastructures) shape particular forms of struggles for social (and other) mobilities. This text sets up to explore relations between social (and other) mobilities⁴ within these structures of project and policy world.

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- 2 I use the term ‘field of Romani inclusion’ to refer to the transnational field of structures, forces, actors, institutions, relations and infrastructures operating on various scales in different forms, ideas and practices and cutting across national, international, local, regional, non-governmental or governmental institutional lines. Similarly to what Ruben Andersson (2014) has called the ‘illegality business’ in his study of mechanisms and institutions managing migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, this mobile assemblage evolves around disjoint modes and mechanisms of ‘governing’, ‘intervening’, ‘development’, ‘inclusion’ policies and projects but also involves activist and academic struggles. Many of these projects and policies have been framed and formulated in terms of ‘Roma inclusion’. Other studies have deployed similar analytical focus. For example, Huub van Baar’s original works explore historically configured nexus and ways through which ‘Roma’ have become the target of different EU-wide programmes that simultaneously aim at ‘inclusion’, ‘protection’, ‘empowerment’ while also making them a ‘security’ issue (see e.g. van Baar 2018a, 2018b; van Baar, Ivasiuc, Kreide, 2019). Others critically explored the rise of ‘ethno-business’ (see e.g. Kóczé and Trehan, 2009), focused more ethnographically on agency and mobility within ‘Roma-related development and policy’ (Ivasiuc 2018; 2020) or asked why Europe’s Roma policies fail (Rostas, 2019).
- 3 Tess Lea coins the term of ‘policy hauntings’ to examine ‘the deeply saturated effects of past policies, enduring and shaping conditions in the present, soaking into ambient surroundings (sometimes felt as static) and carried psychically. It helps explain why privilege and impoverishment are enabled, affecting possible futures.’ (2020: 89–90).
- 4 As Ana Ivasiuc (2020) aptly pointed out, critical studies of social mobilities in the context of development

Methodologically, this paper draws on a wide range of research experiences from different projects and carried out across different time periods mainly through ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, focus groups and/or archival research (both in historical archives and 'archives' of particular projects). In this sense, it is not based on one particular research project but rather reflects an accumulation of observations across different periods of research since 2005. Most of my long-term empirical projects were carried out in Slovakia and in Great Britain (Grill, 2012a; Grill, 2012b; Grill, 2018a; Grill, 2018b) but I have also participated in various applied research projects evaluating particular schemes and EU-funded projects in Slovakia (see Škobla, Grill, Hurrle, 2016; Hurrle, Grill, Ivanov, Kling, Škobla, 2012). This long-term trajectory and experiences inform the reflections for this article.

When referring to particular trajectories I focus more on those who are situated on the lower parts of the hierarchies and structures of these projects and/or who have experienced certain kinds of social (and other) mobilities. Due to my particular positionality, social locatedness and modes of immersion⁵ in the field I have spent much more time carrying out fieldwork among those who are the 'target populations' for these projects, as well as among those who are daily interacting with their 'beneficiaries' in their capacities as local project, social and community workers on the ground (locally and regionally, in particular in the case of Slovakia and Great Britain but also elsewhere). I have spent less time in the social worlds of those who design and manage different projects from the administrative and political centres. While I have acquired a solid knowledge of different structures and actors in the case of different parts of Slovakia – in most cases, 'scaling upwardly' in these projects' structures and ranging from specific localities and sites of intervention, regional and national coordinators in the city of Bratislava – I have not carried out first-hand observations in these international 'centres' and among those situated on the 'top' of these projects (for instance, in Brussels). I have encountered these actors on different occasions and studied different project documentations and reports. In that sense, my reflections and insights are moving across different scales and hierarchies (both socially and geographically) but empirically emerge much more out of 'bottom-up' immersion, engagements and participation. This locatedness and modes of immersion into the field is also reflected in the writing of this article, which starts from one particular point of view and trajectory that is then situated within a space of multiple points of view (cf. Bourdieu et al., 1999). Additionally, other sources that inspired these reflections are multiple conversations with Roma and non-Roma friends and acquaintances on the bottom edges of these projects, as well as observations of different academic and non-academic (so-called) 'experts'. Many academics have been actively involved in different projects and the field of Romani studies have been with different forms of academic engagements in more applied projects. Many academics have experienced a wide range of ambiguities and ethical dilemmas during these engagements and their own participation in these projects.⁶

projects and policy worlds has become one of the blind spots in the field (but for some insightful exceptions see e.g. van Baar, 2012, 2018; Ivasiuc, 2020; Durst and Nyíró, 2018; van Baar and Kóczé, 2020).

- 5 As a part of my PhD research I carried out a long-term participant observation and lived with several Roma families in Slovakia and in Great Britain for over two years between 2006–2008. I first started my ethnographic fieldwork in Slovakia and learned Romani before moving alongside other Romani migrants to several British cities. Since the end of my fieldwork I have continued with regular field 'revisits' up to date and carried out other research projects.
- 6 Some academics have become very critical to the dominant forms in which the projects operate in the field of 'Romani inclusion'. Others deployed more pragmatic positions and see these modes of engagement as important despite different dimensions that they found problematic. Many participate in these fields as a part of their moral commitments for public engagements in the issues of social justice, equality while others more

ON TRAJECTORIES, MOBILITIES AND THEIR LIMITS

In June 2015, I was talking to a young Romani friend who had worked for the past eight years with issues concerning Roma migrants in one British city. In her mid-thirties with longer light brown hair, Adriana⁷ first came to the UK together with her relatives after Slovakia accessed the EU in 2004. Without knowing much English initially, she quickly worked her way up through various unstable and manual jobs alongside other (mostly Central Eastern European) migrants. But just like in Slovakia where she excelled during her elementary and high-school education and everyone in her home village praised her as being ‘very smart and intelligent’, Adriana proved to be a quick learner. Unlike many fellow migrants who struggled with the language acquisition, she quickly improved her English and found her feet within the new set of rules and requirements of British system. Although she had some previous experiences of working in the NGO sector in East Slovakia, moving to Britain without adequate social connections, symbolic and cultural capitals (in the field of ‘Romani inclusion’) meant that she too found herself queuing in front of job agencies organising the incoming flow of cheap Eastern European labour. And she too first entered low-skill jobs in Midlands’ cities alongside other Eastern European migrants. After spending more time and settling in the UK, she not only mastered English but also started to help other Roma migrants, initially only within the family circles and networks of acquaintances from her home village (informally helping and acting as an intermediary/broker-helper with various requests and communication) but eventually working in different positions with various organisations and projects aiming at migrants’ ways of settling in their new homes. It all started with filling in forms and applications, reading and explaining the official letters many migrants received but could not understand, accompanying migrants on their medical appointments, making phone calls to check on multiple bureaucratic processes or being present at appointments from job centres. For many arriving migrants with little or no knowledge of English and understanding of new system, the intermediary and interpreting help of Adriana was of crucial importance for settling in in the new contexts.

Like many other young Roma social community workers, most of her jobs since then were relatively short-term temporary contracts in which she worked as a community worker or helped with a research as an assistant or interpreter or simply someone who would become ‘the person to talk to’ (as one common friend often phrased it) when researchers and journalists wanted to ‘study’ Roma or to get an ‘insider’ or ‘native point of view’. She was subcontracted by different institutions that run different projects (not only) for/with recent migrants from Central Eastern Europe. During my first period of fieldwork in 2006–2008 she was often referred to as a person-to-go-to for all who were searching for an ‘insider’ and a ‘Roma voice’. Although she never called herself this way, through various circumstances for many institutions she has become referred to as: ‘a person to go to if you want to hear the Roma experience [in this British city]’. So when I was doing my doctoral fieldwork I would be often referred to her by people in state and non-state organisations working in the city – ‘Do you know Adriana? You should really talk to her.’ These were

as a form of socio-economic and symbolic mobilities and career opportunities or as ‘research objects’. Most have also struggled with balancing and navigating the pressures of neo-liberalizing academic and ‘development’ projects’ worlds and engagements. I hope that the critical reflections presented here will be read as an invitation for critically reflect upon particular structures and forces operating in different social spaces and fields of so-called ‘Romani inclusion’, and not misinterpreted as personal critiques.

7 All the real names of persons and projects have been anonymised by the author. I would like to express my thanks to Adriana and all the other interlocutors who have shared their experiences and perspectives with

often the comments of people who worked in the world of organisations and activism. At that time, we had already met and known each other for some time. Even prior to meeting her, I had already got to know her family and friends during my fieldwork in East Slovakia.

In that particular British city in which she lived and worked she came to be often seen as a key local contact on Roma working 'on the ground' – someone who has been working with and has close contacts with the Roma migrants' networks. But she would differ greatly from the majority of emerging 'experts' in that her knowledge and experiences would be situated and shaped by her own trajectory, living and interacting with other Roma migrants, and through her engagements 'from below'. This would contrast with other actors who started to interact with her and who at times presented themselves as 'Roma experts'. Their relations with Roma migrants have been rather scarce and in some cases practically non-existent. They had other knowledge 'of' or 'about' Roma – one that was derived less from first-hand experiences and interactions alongside Roma and much more from academic, activists or policy worlds (in which they encountered more scholastic knowledge 'about' Roma and [if they did] interacted more with Roma and non-Roma actors with distinct social trajectories and class positions than those who were the usual 'beneficiaries' of the projects they coordinated). Many have met them only through (mostly) Roma workers like Adriana or through other brief encounters in research (like interviews or focus groups) or institutional context. But they have different contacts and networks connecting them to the state, NGOs or activists' structures working with Roma, migrants or other minority groups (locally, nationally and internationally). I remember how one of these introduced herself once at one event: 'I'm a Roma expert!' The very same person became one of the key points, coordinators and 'expert brokers' in several large transnational projects with different partners across several EU countries and cities and was frequently consulted by the local institutional actors.

Adriana identifies as Romani but for some of the institutions and people who did not know her well this categorisation was not always clear. Some simply assumed she is from Slovakia and to others she 'appeared as different' from the way they imagined Roma from Central Eastern Europe. These imaginations were classed, raced and gendered. Journalists, researchers or 'project experts' who would try to cover something about Roma in the city would be often referred to contact her. These forms of encounters, however, were often asymmetrical as many of these actors contacted her for help, for perspectives and for 'Romani voices' and – in general – for knowledge but then rarely reciprocated in more symmetric ways (if at all). After all, at that time the field of those who would be working with Roma migrants from Central Eastern Europe in different British cities was relatively small (this has changed since then with many self-proclaimed 'Roma experts' emerging). As a Romani woman she has carved out a position of trust and recognition (both among different Romani migrants and 'non-Roma' institutions, though the latter ones have not always seen her through this category), and translated in a particular cultural capital and recognition of certain knowledge amidst the newly emerging field of Romani-migrants industry which started to grow in the UK (in relation to the trans-European emergence) and which was composed of the non-Roma (and fewer) Roma migrants and British nationals. Few years later she became a co-founder and key figure in one NGO working with young Roma migrants and activists. It was a move that she hoped would

me. I am aware that by anonymising and not giving enough concrete details about the projects I risk being criticised for generalising too much or working within 'not-enough-specific' examples. I hope that the readers will understand my reasons for choosing this strategy of anonymising and of writing this particular text. Throughout writing this article I have faced and debated various ethical dilemmas and questions. At the end I have chosen one particular strategy presented here with a hope it allows for respecting and protecting the privacy of the key actors. Nevertheless, it also implies certain limits regarding the writing possibilities.

allow her to move from ‘service-provider’ and the tedious tasks of ‘all the time assisting with and filling with applications’ (the work she at times described ironically as: “call there, come here to translate, fill in this and that form, etc.”) to what she saw as ‘more meaningful activities’ leading her in the direction of capacity building and working with disadvantaged youth. She was hoping that she could work more in the empowerment initiatives among young Roma migrants, as well as do more capacity-building and activities that would build up more ‘Roma pride’ and challenge the racism, discrimination and other forms and forces of oppression faced by migrant Roma. At the same time, the organisation composed mainly of Roma youth (but also non-Roma allies) has established itself as a contact point for all those who are interested to write about or to get to know about migrant Roma (journalists, photographers, researchers, students, state/non-governmental workers, etc.) and created a space and recognition for Roma youth living in the neighbourhood (and in the city more generally).

ON UNEVEN TERMS: PARTICIPATING IN ‘PARTICIPATORY’ PROJECTS

As we were talking on one sunny day in June 2015, she told me again about another project they were supposed to be involved in for a long time. I recalled that she mentioned this big ‘participatory’ project already a few months ago. However, she has not heard from the persons who contacted them regarding the possibility of participating in the project since then. Now they told her that she has very limited time to do the research and to write the report. They also urged her to sign her (sub-)contract as soon as possible since setting up the project was delayed. While it took them a long time to come back to her, she was expected to reply immediately. And these expectations were not only about replying. She was asked to sign a contract, set up the focus groups, co-design ‘participatory’ methods for ‘consulting’ with the other Roma in their supposedly self-reflective self-assessment exercise. She was then given a very tight deadline to do all of this. This developed in the context of a project, which declared to be ‘participatory’ and ‘empowering’ (the local Roma) from its beginning throughout the three years of its official duration. She felt ambiguous about these conditions but at the same time these did not surprise her. It was not the first time she found herself in these asymmetric conditions and in which people running certain projects turned to the supposed ‘beneficiaries’ and those working on the local grounds in asymmetric ways. Long periods of waiting for more instructions and for possible contracts’ arrangements saturated with uncertainties were then replaced by pressures to act and to deliver within relatively short-term deadlines. This logic and conditions, however, was not unique to her experiences and can be seen as symptomatic of many projects in the field of ‘Romani inclusion’. The amount of time spent and devoted to planning, setting up the projects or going to the workshops and international meetings in which those who run, manage, implement or do research about, come together was higher than the actual time they spent on the ground. As a matter of fact, many of those who were running these projects barely engaged or participated in the local dynamics or actors on the grounds on a more regular basis.

Two years have passed since our meeting. In July 2017 I was catching up with her in Slovakia over a cup of coffee at her parents’ home. We met while I was revisiting places and networks of my long-term ethnographic fieldwork with old friends and acquaintances and while she was visiting her family. After spending almost a decade in the UK, in which she has carved out a career, finished her undergraduate studies at an excellent British University and participated in a number of projects with Roma, she had taken an uneasy decision to move on. All these years she has worked hard in different projects while she also studied at the University. She was

torn in between and uncertain about what to do next but at the end she decided it was a time for her to try something else. She felt certain ambiguous weariness and exhaustion. When we talked in the summer 2017, she did not regret her decision to leave, though she was nostalgic about certain aspects of life in Britain amidst new challenges in her life. While she missed the UK and her friends and allies at times, she also complained that the (life in general in the) 'UK has worsened; it's no longer what it used to be' and added that she would not mind searching for a job elsewhere. She has just finished her MA degree in Hungary and found herself in limbo searching in between/for jobs in Slovakia but also thinking about applying for positions at other places elsewhere in Europe. She confessed that she would prefer the next job opportunity not to be in the UK (though it was paradoxically there where she had more possibilities due to her previous work and networks). After many years abroad and seeing her parents getting older, she also felt that she should be closer to them. This ambiguous limbo was also related to not knowing the social networks and people working in the 'Roma inclusion' field in Slovakia. Although she had some local and regional contacts and also met some of them while working in the UK and studying in Budapest, she has not carved out her trajectory in the field in Slovakia. Her professional experiences, undergraduate and MA degrees combined with a knowledge of English, Slovak and Romanes made her very competent and qualified for a number of job opportunities but the lack of social networks (social capitals) and of certain cultural capital in Slovak, British and more EU context⁸ also made it a bit challenging to find a job at first. She felt a bit out of place and liminal in between.

After some catching up, our conversation over the sweet coffee turned to the (same theme of 'participatory') project once again. She smiled with an ironic wink of bitterness and told me how in one of her MA courses last year one of the principal researchers-cum-coordinators came to talk to the students. In his lecture, he was presenting the outcomes of the same project (in which she participated) and narrating it as one of the great success of participatory research. Disagreeing with his generalising and uncritical account of the project, Adriana raised her hand and told him about some of her experiences. In her critique she argued that what he was saying is simply not true and does not resonate with what she could observe first hand as someone at the other/bottom end of (sub-)contracted continuum – as someone situated at the key site of the assumed participatory efforts who observed and lived through some of its issues and pitfalls. Surprised by her remarks, he toned down his celebratory rhetoric and after the discomfiting moment he continued to give a talk. After the lecture he came to talk to Adriana to ask about her experiences. Similarly to many others who often strive for project promises and objectives to be kept and who formulate their critiques in light of the failings observed among the beneficiaries' communities, Adriana's critical intervention turned her into a figure of 'institutional killjoy' (Ahmed, 2012: 16; Lea, 2020). The term, coined by Sarah Ahmed's term for feminist killjoys who, by questioning certain dominant norms and expectations inscribed in dominant racial, gender and social orders, pose and come to be seen

8 This lack of social contacts and capitals was related to her own position in the field of 'Romani inclusion' in the UK. In contrast to other figures and persons who occupied higher positions on the nesting project hierarchies, who have established themselves as contact points with different EU-funded projects and consequently travelled to different partner countries and EU power centres, she was mostly working with and for them but was not given the same opportunities to travel and exchange experiences. So while others were participating in different mobile assemblages of projects, networks, and workshops and – in doing so – accumulating social (and other) capitals and presenting projects and experiences, she was not exposed to these worlds to the same degree. This too reflected the unequal distribution of capitals, mobilities and intensities of participation and it is linked to different pathways and capitals that facilitate certain making of 'expertise' category in the contested fields of struggles.

as a problem precisely because they are exposing particular problems (and often encounter efforts at silencing, managing or off-loading them). Tess Lea (2020: 49) deploys Ahmed's notion in the context of policy interventions in Aboriginal Australia in order to describe: 'those who, working hard to pull benefits from policy opportunities, insist that contracts be honored, promises be kept, accounts be held, corruptions be resisted, projects have fidelity, and people be respectfully supported. Thus insisting, they call into question the compromised, belittling, or discriminatory ways that things are ordinarily done.'⁹ Many (young) Roma (but also non-Roma) who worked and collaborated in these kinds of projects find themselves in the ambiguous positions. The support from these projects and funding is vital for their engagements and activities (individually or as a part of some NGO or other institutions). They carve out their engagements and working pathways within these niches thanks to these asymmetric relations and interdependencies forged in different projects. But many also grow to be critical of the way these structures and assemblages operate and of the discontinuities that wear them out. But being critical is not always converted in outright critique of the projects' workings. Since many of their efforts, possible mobilities and careers in the field of 'Roma/social inclusion' are produced within and depended on the very same structures and networks, not all chose to openly criticise. Oftentimes their relentless efforts at making these projects work and at generating transformations in the lives of the marginalised Roma, some underpinned by moral commitments or by other interests and yearnings, allow for some openings. Paradoxically, the disjointed nature of projects can also provide certain autonomy and independence from – at times even resistance to – existing dominant nation-state and institutional structures operating in the field of Roma development and policies, which have been saturated by the hauntings of the past and by the more recent shift from welfare to punitive workfare (cf. van Baar, 2012; Grill, 2018b).

NESTING HIERARCHIES

When I looked up the official project website description and documents, I read that what makes it distinctive from others is the involvement, participation and empowerment of Roma on the project from its beginning to its end. It claims that it will be the 'first' and 'most comprehensive' project in relation to the participation of the Roma actors in European context. In light of the experiences of Adriana and some others who have participated in different countries (that I had the opportunity to meet), this claim appears rather problematic since it took almost two project's before many of the local organisations and 'communities' were involved more and asked to start doing some kind of participatory research with the Roma (in some cases without being consulted or without being told what should be its main focus).¹⁰

9 In the field of 'Romani inclusion' and different projects the issue is further complicated by the fact that very often those who dare to speak out or speak up do so not only within clearly delineated oppositions to different actors and institutions perpetuating forms of racism or antigypsyism. The lines and boundaries might become more blurred and the critique more difficult when raised in the context of the very structures, projects or policies that themselves tend to be associated with 'speaking out'/'up' or with aid and development projects. For instance, many members of the staff of these projects see themselves as politically progressive and as 'doing good' and often criticise the states' punitive and disciplinary policies, inequalities and racialisation of Roma. When someone speak up about the structural issues or undelivered promises of some of these projects, (s)he might become seen as a 'problematic' person.

10 Other conversations with other project's participants from other countries and sites participating in the project seem to point out to certain pattern in which it took a considerable time and produced great ambiguities and

But Adriana was not surprised by some structural features and temporalities of projects that seemed to fit the recurrent pattern: 'it's just like always... another project.' Her friend, who was also involved in different projects with/for Roma groups in the same city, commented that this was just a 'business as usual'. Like several times in the past, Adriana felt moral dilemma. But this time even more so as she felt upset. Perhaps this was also related to her own process of transformation over time. With more experiences and knowledge 'in/of the field' she became more critical of the ways many projects and interventions operated in this field. She asked herself if she should participate in this? Upset, unsettled and uncertain she finally said yes. After all, even if it was managed 'in not very participatory way' and even though she was offered almost three times less than was the originally promised amount, she accepted. She felt that this is unfair and asymmetric but, after all, she also knew that her living and work has been built around this disjointed dependency on others¹¹ who have better connections to the funding awarding bodies. Despite her critical posture, she also hoped that it might possibly bring some other positives (for instance, new experiences for some other Roma youth and possible new connections for future). It also brought some needed money in her otherwise rather fragile income, which often depended on the constant struggles to secure some project-based and short-term contracts. But her ethical dilemmas and ambiguities were further intensified by other experiences with other projects in the past. She told me: 'And then they come to say that they want to do an exhibition after several years' long project... but when we [with her friends from their NGO] decided not to take it, they just offered it to another organisation in the area and they did it for them.' If the small NGOs, organisations or individuals refuse to participate (when contacted by larger organisations or funding bodies), then the more powerful with available financial support find other actors (or other localities) who are willing to do the job as they are all in the same niche full of competition for scarce resources and under often highly asymmetrical conditions.

Her non-Romani colleague collaborating with her on various projects, often sarcastically joked about the growing number of researchers, projects and journalists: 'yet another researcher or expert who wants us to organise focus groups for them'. They – be their researchers, policy-makers or so called 'Roma experts' – have proliferated in the past decade. 'Most of them come and leave and then we never hear of them again', she remarked critically. Some of these paid for the focus groups, others did not. Most of them came with interpreting agents as they did not speak the migrants' language or expected Adriana to translate for them. The power asymmetry in these relationships and encounters were telling. 'They only come when they need... Or when they need to spend some money they were given for Roma', she further remarked. Despite these asymmetries, these projects' envisioned key to succeed seemed to rely on contacts with people who are similar to Adriana and others –

uncertainties (among the local levels' participants) regarding the concrete actions and visions that the project envisaged and that were to be translated and converted on the local scales. Some other examples and more success(ful) stories often relied on preexisting and ongoing work of organisations and individuals that became involved in this big project but frequently drawn upon and continued with multiple other engagements and projects with the communities. And when the big project finally translated into some more specific actions after these extensive periods of waiting (at least, from the point of view of those 'on the ground') they often incorporated it into the existing activities or used the previously established connections and networks in particular localities.

11 These figures ranged from researchers, brokers, local social and community workers to policy makers but all of them with more established connections to, and capitals within the world of funding for various projects and transnational and national fields of 'Romani inclusion', NGOs or state institutions delivering social policies.

i.e. on people who have become known as particular localities with certain activities, with trusting relations to potential Roma beneficiaries and with a record of projects. Closer look at many of these projects reveals that they frequently rest on the accumulated forms of capitals and connections over time. For instance, for the regional and country coordinators and brokers, this entails having experiences with different projects in their countries and with an established reputation in the (mostly national but also international) field, and in particular possessing some connections with those (like Adriana and many others) who have already established some kind of community-engagement processes *before* becoming contacted and involved in this type of projects. In the particular case of the large multi-sited project mentioned above, this seemed to be the case in many of the project sites in different countries. Many had established projects in sites and communities with already established capitals and capacities and pre-established relations between service providers/community workers and local communities. Considering the temporary nature of different projects and the time it takes to develop trusting relationships for any meaningful participatory projects, counting with the pre-established history of community engagement creates particularly fruitful conditions of possibility for these interventions. At the same time, this often led to working within a network of established local contacts and sites that have become 'over-intervened' over time and in localities with multiple projects while not investing in finding, reaching out or building trusting relationships in other places. But finding localities suitable for these projects moves precisely through and alongside the pre-established social networks, assemblages and capitals in the field of 'Romani inclusions' and state and NGOs organisations in which many of these institutional actors know each other in different capacities. Whenever a newcomer researcher arrives to the networks' centres of these (trans)national fields of Romani interventions and/or studies (for instance, in contacting a Romani activists or NGOs known for its work with Roma marginalised communities in Slovakia that are based in the capital city of Bratislava), she is often told to: 'I will put you in contact with XY from XY organisations in XY locality!' As much as these reflect generosity and helpfulness on the side of these brokers, with more time spent in this field one also realises that these networks and channels operate in some kind of relatively limited and limiting social circles and spatial 'reaches'. This is especially the case for a short visiting researchers who do not spend much time in the field research, or who come for relatively short-term visits as parts of some international cooperation and networks. At times these contacts and networks relate to some shared experiences from previous projects or collaborations but also from stories of fun moments from different kinds of training, workshops and social events organised over the years for people working in different projects or schemes in the field.

Adriana's story and experiences might lead us to risk the simplistic conclusion that this is a story between two kinds of formations – the local and those administering the projects from the center – with the first who are working on the local level with 'communities' and the emerging class of professionals and self-declared 'experts' and brokers in the 'Roma inclusions' (be these academics, project managers or other actors). At times, this can be also reflected in some kind of structural over/under-representations of the Roma and non-Roma staff in different positions and hierarchies.¹² While one can structurally identify

12 It does not necessarily mean that there are clearly cut formations, dichotomies and divisions that are neatly inscribed into ethno-racial vectors difference. Deploying relational and intersectional analytics (cf. Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016) highlights the gendered, classed and raced (and other) dimensions of these processes and asymmetries. One also needs to account for further intersecting differentiations, trajectories and histories.

larger percentage of non-Roma in the higher positions of these projects it does not mean that there are no Roma participating in these kinds of projects.¹³

But rather than assuming certain dichotomic or homogenizing visions of these policy and projects' worlds, it is better to think of it as disjointed 'mobile assemblage' of 'forces, materials and actors' (Lea, 2020: 80) operating with shifting and relational 'nesting' hierarchies. The person who was one of Adriana's bosses in the project felt also frustrated with his own superiors and structures of the project. In contrast to many who depended on different short-term projects and part-time contracts and sub-contractors at the bottom of these projects' hierarchies, he was not directly 'dependent' (in terms of its income and strategies of survival) on the project. It was one among multiple other commitments that he had to juggle and manage due to his position at the University (an institution that would have taken some time for collaborating and participating in the project). But he too was frustrated by those who were managing the project from above and possibly all the bureaucratic administration it implied. Like many other academics today, he was overwhelmed by increased working duties, tasks and pressures under the conditions of neoliberalizing academy. And he was not alone in experiencing frustrations and ambiguities connected to the project. As I heard from other researchers, coordinators and local assistants from different countries involved in this particular project, there were delays, difficulties and unclear instructions concerning the key objectives and means to achieve them (and through what kinds of concrete sets of strategies and tools) behind its pompous façade and rhetorically catching mantra of 'participatory research' and more 'bottom-up approach' rhetoric. The fact that the project was administered by one organisation (responsible for its budget, contracts and payments) while its implementation and contents were coordinated by another international organisation added further to the bureaucratic complexity and layers of inter-dependencies, subcontracting and delays.

Some of these have also been inscribed in the geopolitical powers and legacies of 'West'-'East' classificatory matrix, while others relate to kinds of scientific disciplines and past engagements. These perspectives allow for seeing how the present possibilities of mobilities and immobilities have been historically conditioned and haunted by particular past intersections and configurations. We must analytically dissect these trajectories, relations and dynamics of fields in order to account to particular entanglements of being Romani person, woman/man of particular social classes and positions, from certain countries, from particular regions and localities with particular social positions in the field. This is of crucial importance as it allows us not to essentialise and not to homogenise the wide range of Romani experiences and their 'social locatedness' shaped by different forces, structures and gridding hierarchies.

- 13 For instance, one common pattern of many projects is that Roma tend to work more on the local level as social or community workers or some Roma youths are appointed for short-term 'internships' or 'fellowship' working in the bigger organisations but appear much less in higher or intermediary positions within the 'Romani inclusion' projects. At the same time, it must be noted that there is a growing number of Romani actors who occupy higher positions within these project structures and hierarchies.

It is important to note that this article does not deploy the category of 'Roma expert' to refer only to non-Roma actors. The 'Roma expert' category includes both non-Roma and Roma 'experts' who themselves claim certain knowledge about (working with) Romani groups, or are seen as, and recognised by others as possessing (more or less of) certain 'expertise'. This category can be racialised and racialising and classed and classifying within the existing relations and structures of the field. But this perspective should not be misinterpreted as reproducing dichotomic perspectives reducing this dynamic to struggles of two social formations: 'non-Roma non-local experts' category vs. 'local Roma' in the margins. The ethnic or racial categorisation must be seen as one of the capitals, qualities and structuring forces that can be simultaneously recognised and valorised in some contexts while stigmatising and derogatory in others. Since the 'Roma expertise' here is treated as a processual and relational category and knowledge that is situated in particular contexts and fields, it must also be seen as a question of 'more-less' accumulation. It is a matter of accumulating different capitals that are then translated and converted across different scales and recognised with differential intensities and meanings in different yet

Adriana's superior in the project got involved in the project thanks to his academic trajectory and recognised record of working on Roma-related issues, as well as his public engagements. This does not necessarily mean that all these recognised academics have been empirically working on/working with the specific 'Roma' groupings or on specific issues (addressed in the projects) in question.¹⁴ However, the authority bestowed upon them through their academic trajectory and position with its credentials and their previous works with Roma generates certain recognition-cum-capital. When those managing the big project search for national or transnational 'experts' they often turn to the academics or long-standing activists with accumulated 'academic' capital, symbolic recognition and social networks.

Because these academic experts or researchers with a track record of some kind of engagement and research tend to be too busy with his/her own work and multiple commitments, s/he tend to work in collaboration with some junior researchers, which are then subcontracted – these junior collaborators, local Roma and non-Roma social or community workers or some 'Roma NGO' implementing the actual project's activities and carry out field research (and at times also co-write the research report). S/he is usually busy with his other works at the universities or other institutions, overwhelmed by admin and coordination works or other projects that s/he needs to balance out in his/her fairly precarious juggling across daily routines. Nevertheless, they are keen to do this because often they are politically committed and, in some cases, it can be also an opportunity for extra income.

THE LOGIC OF SUBCONTRACTING

The world of international and national projects, and the Roma-related ones are no exception in this, have been characterised by the neo-liberal forms of managing and of subcontracting. The spectacle of Roma exclusion and poverty, reiterated and reproduced through a circulation of images, political statements and the ever-increasing deepening poverty conditions affecting Roma groups across Europe, creates a quickly developing 'nexus' (van Baar 2018a, 2018b), niches and demands. In the project described above, there is a core of researchers who designed the project involving several European countries. They are the ones who

interrelated social fields. In this sense, it also acquires particular spatial coordinates and arrangements of power in time.

14 As a matter of fact, many academics who end up working and participating in these projects might work on 'other Roma groups', on different phenomena and themes, or in other disciplinary fields. This might make their experience and knowledge being rather distant from the everyday realities of the other particular groups that might be under question in the projects they become involved in. At times, the homogenising assumption of 'Roma' category qualifies one as potential 'expert' and can translate into 'authority' figure that becomes contacted and contracted even if s/he has no record of research on that particular group. At times, this logic resonates with certain 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003) in which 's/he-the-expert' has been working on 'Romanian Roma' or 'Polish Roma' but with relatively little consideration to the concrete phenomenon or experience in the particular work, methods or aims of the project. To illustrate this with a concrete example, one can look at different events and the patterns of invited speakers on the theme of Roma migrations and mobilities in the aftermath of EU enlargement. Many researchers invited for different panels and institutional spaces would often derive their invitation more through long-term work on/with Roma, from certain authority in the field and recognised expertise through previous trajectory (but not necessarily one that would empirically conduct a research or work with the Romani migrations) in the field of Romani studies as academics or as Roma (and to some extent non-Roma) with political or activists' trajectory in the field. By writing this I do not want to imply that many of these researchers do not deliver good results in these positions. Here I am simply pointing out the mechanisms for being recognised as having certain expertise that lead to being consulted, invited or appointed to certain positions within the existing structures of 'Romani inclusion'

developed the project and secured the EU funding. However, when granted the amount of money their organisation subcontracted another organisation (not necessarily with experiences of working with Romani or with ‘participatory’ methods) only to administer and manage the international partnership ‘technically’. First subcontract entails first cut, as the operational costs and managerial salaries are relatively costly. Then, ‘local(cum-national) experts’ from each country are subcontracted to coordinate the actual research. But some of them further subcontract others (this time usually more local NGOs or individual Roma activists or locally operating community workers in concrete localities/sites of intervention) to do the research and to work on the ground. The resulting structure consists of a particular disjointed apparatus of nesting hierarchies of social positions and infrastructures, which are also reflected in the logic of several ‘subcontracting’ and the lower one goes on the subcontracting scale the lower tend to be the wages, terms and standards of contracts. There are several layers of subcontracting and internal differentiations, which results in a particular logic of uneven distributions that perhaps might remain hidden to the outside world under the layers of discourses and claims of ‘participatory methods’, human and Roma rights hashtags and progressively-toned lectures at conferences or cultural centers. This rhetoric might operate a bit like an ideological foil, mystifying illusion that we are all equally interested and invested in the same way while working towards greater good of ‘Roma inclusion’ – be these the project managers, the locally operating community workers or the poorest Roma who are the supposed beneficiaries. And yet despite the ‘participatory’ or ‘empowerment’ key words and ‘egalitarian-cum-emancipatory rhetoric’, these projects, structures and infrastructures re-produce certain conditions and privileges, and operate within highly uneven logics. For instance, one can examine the managers and ‘experts’ whose salaries or trips to conference cost disproportionately more than the budget allocated for work and participation of the local workers (or, the possible rewards or incentives recognising the participation and collaboration of the Romani beneficiaries). A closer look at some projects and their budgets reveal how a large percentage of project finance go to operational costs, international visits and workshops in relation to proportionally lower costs related to the contracts for the local contacts and intermediaries in the field.

Take, for instance, the case of Slovakia before one of the calls for EU funding for projects for marginalised communities. There was a proliferation of various organisations who have never worked in the field of Roma-related projects but possessed the necessary skills to write the project proposal, which in turn secured them funding. This required not only writing skills but equally demonstrating the capacity and fluency of communicating in English and in the required terms and expected style and key themes. Not many local grass-root NGOs working with (as opposed to those working ‘on’) Roma could compete with the young managerial-style of people socialised in the environment of writing projects and forging the impression of an expertise. Consequently, there was a number of NGOs with approved projects but without knowledge and staff – which then started searching for some NGOs or individual workers (with actual experiences from concrete localities) who could be subcontracted to deliver what their project proposal stated as deliverables and

field. More recently, another form of expertise and its legitimization arises from struggles of younger generation of Romani scholars to challenge the previously established academic orders, structural inequalities and hierarchies in the field of Romani studies. Drawing on postcolonial, critical race, subaltern and intersectional studies, various authors formulated their critiques for different kinds of knowledge production under the claim for ‘nothing about us without us’ (see e.g. special issue of *Roma Rights* journal called ‘Nothing About Us Without Us?’ Ryder, Kóczé, Rostas, Dunajeva, Bogdan, Taba, Rövid, Junghaus, 2015; Kóczé, 2018; van Baar and Kóczé, 2020; Kóczé, 2018, van Baar and Kóczé, 2020; or Stewart, 2017 for a critical response).

goals. Many of my interlocutors from the field of social and community work in Slovakia shared stories of how they were contacted by organisations they have never heard of and with no previous record or knowledge of working in the field but with a project with funding.

ON DIFFERENTIAL WAITINGS AND TEMPORALITIES

Due to its structural set up, bureaucratic infrastructures and multiple sub-contracting structures all those situated more on the local level at the last phase and end of sub-contracting continuum (as the projects get delayed, waiting for re-starting, get extensions, etc.) were frequently exposed to multiple uncertainties and 'subcontracted' waitings. 'They tell us that maybe they will extend us, maybe they won't... but then they say that we will continue but there might be a gap [between the end of their current contract and their new one]. But what we're supposed to do during this time without getting paid?' This is how one Social Worker in east Slovakia characterized her predicaments and existential insecurities stemming from the uncertainty of working in a project funded by the EU structures and administered by national centre in Slovakia. Her experience resonated with many other workers who were relegated to the position of waiting for possible renewal. It was not just the renewals of the projects or extensions but, in general, the experiences of Roma and non-Roma field-workers (social workers, community workers, assistants, etc.) in many of these projects were structured by the project-based contracts that frequently took longer to be signed and to be finally paid and in most cases were accompanied by delays and periods extended periods without contracts and income. For many, these presented both financial issues of economic precarity but also existential insecurity and demotivation. In some of the projects observed in Slovakia (see Škobla, Grill, Hurrle, 2016) one could observe that many of the Roma social and community workers developed skills and competences, established trust with the beneficiaries of their projects and many also started to study again in order to increase their qualifications in order to become more eligible for the positions advertised in the calls of some of the EU funded projects.

Here, waiting has produced several effects. First, waiting and – its surrounding uncertainty – for contracts or for project extensions of contracts leads to periods of intensified precarity among those with valuable knowledge, networks and position in the local-level and regional-level community work. Second, waiting for these also leads to reproduction of certain forms of domination,¹⁵ which many in these dominated and subordinate positions coped with by searching for alternative pathways of social mobilities, of income and consequently of 'exiting' the field of 'Roma inclusion' field. Some learned how to endure waiting and how to survive the punctuated rhythms of project-based working lives. These were often those who skilfully managed different forms of income or could rely on additional forms of support from their family and social networks. Many of these workers confessed weariness and exhaustion over the disjointed and punctuated rhythms of these projects with extensive delays before they start. Some can wait, others cannot – or cannot afford to wait and must search for other forms of income. Some also refuse to accept these conditions and leave (by their own decisions or by circumstances that force them to leave). It was not uncommon that in Slovakia many of the field social and community workers

15 I draw on a growing body of sociological and anthropological studies examining these dimensions of waiting. See e.g. Auyero, 2012; Ozolina-Fitzgerald, 2016; Hage, 2009.

became unemployed¹⁶ for rather extensive periods of time in between the project ‘gaps’ or ‘extensions’. This process of waiting was differentiated between those who counted with sufficient economic resources or alternative incomes and those without these socio-economic capitals to support themselves (and their families or closests). This process was also gendered (and also related to age differentiations). While for many young male social and community Roma workers these jobs granted certain symbolic prestige and recognition among their social and family networks they did not necessarily translate into materiality expected from certain upwardly ascending social mobilities but at times did not even grant more socio-economic stability and security. For instance, in my fieldwork I have observed how many of the talented youth social and community workers opted for other jobs, other survival strategies and paths that allowed them to pursue their aspirations. This was intensified among young male workers who find some forms of respect and recognition but could not live up to the masculine yearnings of being a principal breadwinner or carving out certain lifestyles in relation to their male peers and among their families (and to support them). For many who decided to work and dedicate themselves to social and community work in the punctuated rhythms of projects and the ‘in-between’ disconnects from more permanent forms of income, this was simply not possible due to the salaries and gaps. Some have managed to combine the formal jobs with more informal income generating strategies. But others grew weary and exhausted with the projects’ and policies’ structures and the socio-economic precarity and uncertainty inscribed in the type of work struggles, contracts and income but also, crucially, in the punctuating temporality of these works. The punctuated temporality entails that some periods of working with salary are entangled by periods of working on ‘preparatory-time’ (preparing the project or work before the actual project/contract start), on ‘extra-time’ (in order to meet all the requirements these often imply working overtime), ‘indebted’ or ‘promised time’ (working while waiting for the delayed payments due to the project administration’s delays) or working on the blurred lines of ‘volunteering’ and ‘paid job’ (emerging in the context of jobs in which certain moral commitments towards the beneficiaries or project appeals on moral duties and engagements, even though these cease to be part of your paid job).

This highlights the existing paradox present in many of these projects and development structures. First, these (frequently Roma) local actors are crucial for any of these projects but they often balance their lives and works in conditions of socio-economic precarity and insecurity. When the organisations apply for funding, their success is often legitimised by the impact it can generate among certain beneficiary groups. In recent years, the rhetoric of participatory research and local empowerment has entered the field of Romani studies and ‘inclusions’. The local Romani actors¹⁷ are presented as the ‘voices’, ‘activists’ and subjects ‘empowered through participation’ on the ground. They play a fundamental role for any participatory research, as they are the key links, nodes, bridges and intermediaries with trustful networks of social relationships and with access to ‘community’ actors. This is all the way more important especially in the case of relatively limited temporalities of the project durations. Due to the limited timelines that most projects count with, it is generally difficult to develop more trusting and long-term relationships with local communities and networks.

16 During these periods they joined many of their long-term unemployed beneficiaries as they waited for the unemployment welfare support from the state.

17 I am aware that there is a wide range of heterogenous actors and do not want to homogenise this category. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to explore these differences across these local actors in greater detail (but see e.g. Škobla, Grill, Hurrle, 2016 for more descriptions on different categories of actors).

Additionally, it is often them who end up co-conducting the actual participatory research or those who operate as gate-keepers and research assistants. But, importantly, they are mostly *included* but practically never on equal terms and not under similar conditions to those who are *including* them (and possibly also the ‘communities’ on the ground). They are included because of their ‘difference’ (and of their ‘practical knowledge’) and yet for the very same reasons they structurally occupy subordinate positions in the field of ‘Roma inclusion’. This is manifested in multiple forms (one of the clearest ones is the difference in contract conditions for ‘experts’ and for the subcontracted local ‘Roma’ workers on the ground). The commitments to more egalitarian encounters and to participatory methods is highlighted discursively by different proponents of these projects yet experienced differentially by those who embody and occupy the ‘in-between’ positions between projects and beneficiaries on the local level.¹⁸ Crucially, for many of the young on the ground these Roma-focused projects reproduce these sets of positions and inter-dependencies rather than forging particular social mobilities and conditions for upward social aspirations in the field of humanitarian or development and poverty-reducing projects with groups. They allow them to gain some experiences, acquire new forms of capital and in the general conditions of precarity they also represent one possibility of income and means to engage with local communities. But this does not necessarily translates into experiences of social mobilities, more equal working conditions and more equal recognition of knowledge in the very structure of the project design and operation. While these offer certain springboards for possible social (and other) mobilities, they also remain situated within highly uneven terrains. What we can observe in many of these projects is the continuing bordering and converting practices and differential distribution of knowledge (what counts as what kind of knowledge and how this is translated into the salary and contracting conditions). While many of these young workers gain particular access and generate certain forms of aspirations and hopes, these often encounter realities of working on the bottom of the social world that is mostly project-based and relatively uncertain in terms of possibilities to carve out more long-term securities and continuities. These young professionals might experience certain limited social mobilities but ones that are marked by punctuated temporalities and socio-economic precarity.

FORMS OF CAPITAL, UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION AND RECOGNITION

Similar to many young Roma professionals, Adriana ticks all the boxes that can potentially make her an ideal candidate to work in a number of transnational, national, regional or local institutions and projects developed in the fields of ‘Roma inclusion’. However, what she lacked in comparison to other actors that have experienced more socially upward mobilities through their engagements in the field of ‘Romani inclusions’ was certain forms of capitals accumulated throughout her trajectory and through social positions she successively occupied in the social fields. Following Bourdieu’s theorisation of forms of capital and the struggles for their accumulation (Bourdieu, 1986), one can summarise these as operating in this particular ‘field of Romani inclusions’ context as following: a) *Social*

18 In her work on diversity in institutional life, Sara Ahmed (2012) refers to these similar contradictions and paradoxes of ‘being included’ and of deploying celebratory rhetoric of ‘diversity’ as ‘non-performatives’ that do not generate what they name.

capital – an accumulated volume of social contacts that can be activated in the field (e.g. acquaintance and friendship ties used for getting a job or project, for forging alliances; trusting relationships with Roma communities in particular localities but also with different organisations and their workers; political and clientelists¹⁹ networks); b) *Economic capital* – a volume of financial means available – for example, for investing in attending workshops, in studying and gaining higher educational degrees (in case the positions require better qualifications), the capacity to survive and support oneself for certain periods of time in which the projects get extensions and delay contracts and salaries; c) *Cultural capital* – a form of cultural knowledge (e.g. knowing the language of ‘projects’, knowing how to navigate the system, the state system of social benefits, knowing EU and national schemes, but also knowing different languages, knowing how to administer and coordinate projects, and others);²⁰ d) *Symbolic capital* – a combination of the three forms transformed and converted into particular forms of recognition by others in the field – for instance, being recognised and seen as a ‘Roma expert’ by others which can then augment one’s chances to being appointed to higher positions. But while Adriana has accumulated some of these forms of capitals she also differs greatly from those in greater positions of power in terms of its accumulated volumes and intensities. For instance, her social capital of social ties and networks does not connect her to the ‘upper’ levels of these networks and circles of the transnational field of ‘Roma inclusions’.

For young Roma, their engagements can significantly contribute towards increasing the participation of Roma in these projects and contributing to the transformation of the field. Adriana speaks Romani, Slovak, Czech and English and she has also recently obtained her MA degree from internationally recognised University. Crucially, she also has a number of work experiences with networks of Romani migrants and Roma from East Slovakia in Great Britain and elsewhere (these include some networks of activists, academics and social/community workers on the local and regional levels). It is a mixture of these capitals and her experiences, which makes her particularly suited for a good number of positions in the field. She has been exposed to particular international projects and discourses that predisposed her to adapt relatively quickly to other circles that structure the transnational field. For instance, in contrast to many local Roma and non-Roma workers and organisations operating on the local level in Slovakia she understands the projects’ structures, EU mechanisms and policies and is fluent in English – all of which also contributes to her capacity to orient and to operate with greater ease in this field.

At the same time, her forms of capitals do not propel her to enter the higher positions in these projects. Or, perhaps the persons from the ‘core’ of these kinds of projects do not

19 For an interesting account of clientelist habitus, see Auyero and Benzecry, 2017.

20 For example, many of the country/national coordinators or key researchers in the ‘participatory’ project discussed above are often people with many years of academic and more applied research experiences, engagement or accumulated social and cultural capital. These forms of capital, to use Bourdieu’s words, can consist of existing networks and social connections accumulated over years of attending various national or international workshops and conferences, cultivating knowledge but also ways and ‘knowing how to talk’ or engage in the act of ‘conversions’ and ‘translations’ across different scales and contexts in ways which they fit within the currently existing projects and keywords in ‘fashion’, as well as succeeding in manifesting certain trajectory or history of working with/at recognised institutions or well-known projects.

21 This does not mean that her position and perspectives have not been marked by activists and academic debates that has emerged in the last decades in the field of Romani studies. As a matter of fact, during her time spent in Budapest (but also before) she has been exposed to these debates, networks and spaces (and her perspectives have also developed in time). But she has arrived to these after her previous engagements with projects in the UK among Roma migrants and also in Slovakia.

really know her as they barely go to the local levels and instead, they turn to and trust those with more academic or activists' capitals who also manage to skilfully convert and move across different scales in this transnational and national networks. Additionally, her trajectory is different from that of many other Romani actors shaped by their participation in academic, activists and artistic trajectories.²¹ Her social capital of contacts, social ties and networks connect to some academics, bureaucrats, activists and policy-makers but not to those who would involve her directly as co-researcher or co-coordinator but rather as someone who collaborates on the ground (locally or regionally) at the moment when the project already had established all its structure and – as a last – arrives to search for appropriate Roma and non-Roma persons on the ground. Before it arrives to her through particular country researcher with the connections and recognition in the transnational circuits of 'Romani inclusion' fields. So it goes from the project managers to a professional researcher-cum-academic who then asks her to do fieldwork (as s/he himself does not have too many practical connections with the field, nor does s/he has a time to do research considering all the demands and other work commitments).

At the time of her participation in the 'participatory project' mentioned above, one might ask why she does not seem to be the person who can be contracted 'more directly' or contacted from the beginning in different social position. Perhaps it is related to the structural issues and subcontracting chain's logic that made her less visible within the nesting hierarchies, knowledge distribution, structures and networks. Perhaps the key connects to the kinds of accumulated capitals and (in)experiences she lacked in relation to others with more recognised volumes and forms of capital. How can we explore her participation under rather uneven and differentiated conditions in terms of her salary and 'waiting times', her contract conditions but also in terms of the co-production and knowledge she can contribute to the project? How can we understand structures and distributions in this disjointed field that make many 'field workers' (for instance, community and social workers) work with 'beneficiaries', consult and collect data on the ground, write notes and reports but are not equally counted when these projects launch workshops or when the country coordinators get invited to international conferences? What makes these workers to occupy rather subordinate positions of being dependent on other brokers (or other 'Roma experts') and different in terms of their contracts? One may ask on what terms and in which ways can these kinds of project structures contribute to reproduce certain types of knowledge production and exchange, perhaps more dialogical (than many others in the past and present) but certainly not on more equal terms. I do not want to simplify and reduce my argument and to state this is mainly because she is Roma (though the historically produced structures and racialised, classed and gendered forms of exclusions from these spaces and structures certainly play an important part of the story and is haunting the present forms). But to understand these processes one should not only look at racialised ascriptions but also dissect the structural position and social trajectories with which these ascriptions frequently intersects (and of which it is a product). It also has to do with certain limits, borders and acts of brokerage. There is always a class of intermediaries, the 'Roma experts' or 'human-rights experts' who saturate the field of 'Roma inclusion'. What is it that Adriana lacks in relation to others? Perhaps she lacks in the amount and intensities of networks, of knowledge, of project management's experiences, and or recognitions of all those who have become trained in particular world of projects and all those who managed to carve out certain impression and performance of expertise among the funding bodies. However, what many of these experts often lack is precisely what they claim to re-present or to have most – i.e. 'local knowledge' or relationships of trust with the local Roma communities. But what is

this ambiguous and contested category of local knowledge? It can be seen as a practical and embodied knowledge but also as a category that is evoked and deployed as a kind of capital in the struggles in the 'Roma inclusion' field. This local knowledge, as seen in the case of those denominated as 'experts' (at least in the case of this 'participatory' project), can oftentimes consist of rather 'experience-distant' knowledge of the Roma lives and conditions but *relationally* the vision of 'local knowledge' is often presented and *performed* to the funding bodies or partners in the project with whom one communicates and meet in different 'partner' cities and workshop venues across Europe on their meetings. Nesting hierarchies and chains of brokers within these networks and mobile assemblages operating across different scales contribute to making of conditions that allow for the shifting, contested and ambiguous meanings of 'local knowledge' and for its asymmetrical co-production (between differently situated actors at the local level of interactions with beneficiaries).²² This point resonates with what N. Gheorge (Gheorghe and Pulay, 2013) and others described as a crisis of an activism that appears as more distant and estranged from 'the local forms of knowledge' and practices (Beck and Ivasiuc, 2019: 11).

In the last decade, many young Roma (and also non-Roma) in Slovakia who have worked in different projects as local social or community workers managed to also university education. Unlike the case of Adriana who has graduated from international Universities, most of them study at regional Universities or other educational institutions that cannot compete with the more recognised Universities (both nationally or internationally) in terms of their reputation. Some of the coordinators and researchers from the national centres often question and criticise the quality of these regional Universities and their educational level. However, this also means that many of these young professionals with University degrees are not recognised as equals in terms of their knowledge or skills.

Additionally, a crucial element for constructing certain continuity in the disjointed series of 'Roma inclusion' projects in many localities, has been the ability to learn how to juggle and navigate within several different projects run simultaneously or within partially overlapping temporalities. In many contexts, this has turned out to be the key for guaranteeing a long-term engagement with local communities and for allowing the organisations to keep the same staff over the years in what is otherwise precarious and permanently interrupted trajectories (depending on projects' start-end dates) without any continuities. In some cases, it has been also a strategy to secure more stable economic income. However, in many cases it also means that organisations and various actors present the results and give evidences of certain activities for a several different projects from which they received the support. The mega-project with which we started this reflection was no exception here. In many of these projects, people on the ground navigate several projects and supports at the time. Referring to a similar case, one researcher from Slovakia described this practice as 'double reporting'.

22 For instance, in some of the international projects with for the international partners or for policy makers from EU centres, the local 'Roma expert' can be the same person/institution from the partner's town municipality who present results of 'Romani inclusion' at international workshop but the very same person, on another occasion, might be complicit in segregation of Roma families or disciplinary policing of the informal settlements of poor Roma in their local/regional governance. Or, it can be someone whose life is marked by significant class differentiation in relation to the poor and marginalised Roma they claim to represent or to have the 'expert knowledge'. These can be Roma or non-Roma who engage in the accumulation of different forms of capitals converging and converting themselves into more or less recognised 'experts' (with its ambiguous and highly contested meanings). These acts of converging and converting move across different scales.

CONCLUSION

When thinking about the reproduction of certain power structures and the accumulation of different forms of capital (without the political will to 'redistribute' it), the question of development projects related to Roma begs a question of other forms of distribution of resources and capitals. In other words, it invites us to think of other possibilities and of doing *otherwise*. This rethinking would mean going beyond the self-congratulatory rhetoric, beyond the projects' worlds in which one achieves one's recognition more through social connections, attendance of conferences, or through social media posts and debates. It would imply reflecting upon how one acquires particular mastery of inhabiting and moving across the hierarchies in this mobile assemblage and networks of structures, as well as of particular mechanisms through which one gains certain kinds of recognitions. Perhaps the time is ripe for a more direct form of support, which would circumvent the dominant forms of accumulation of 'expert' capitals and structural asymmetries and financial exploitation of the niches in which those who count as more powerful kinds of brokers – those who made themselves at home and made themselves a name in the 'Roma business' – would reflect upon their privileges of 'conversion' role (in particular, the financial ones but also other, associated ones). But perhaps it is a time to reflect a bit more critically on the whole system and structures that keep producing and reproducing certain privileges while those who are the supposed beneficiaries and all those on whose work 'they really depend' and whose 'work results they often harvest' (the Roma and non-Roma local workers, NGOs who get their hands dirty in everyday social and community work, implementing projects and which results others symbolically re-appropriate, convert and translate across different scales and spaces), and on whose behalf they should be really acting (poor Roma), only get the small crumbs left under the wealthy tables of subcontracting and nesting hierarchies. It would also mean involving these locally operating actors on more equal terms and, rather than imposing their visions from above (even if these are phrased through the idioms of 'empowerment' or 'participatory', taking the pain to work and involve them in the participatory modes).

This article has examined the possibilities of social and other mobilities within particular structures and conditions present in the field of 'Roma inclusion projects'. In particular, it focused on those who are situated at the lower ranks of the projects but play an important role in their implementations – i.e. Roma and non-Roma social and community workers and/or activists acting within certain projects' structures and interacting with local Romani (or other) beneficiary groups. For many of these project workers, their engagements and participations in these projects operate as a possible springboard for generating certain forms of social mobilities, aspirations, modes of recognition and accumulation of particular capitals and knowledge. But these experiences and mobilities are also limited, marked and structured by project-limited punctuated temporalities, nesting hierarchies and discontinuous and frequently precarious socio-economic conditions.

During one of the presentations and reflections on lessons learned from one big project, one of the organisations workers concluded her presentation with emphasising the importance of 'Involving Roma as equals rather than as a token gesture'. Her important point nevertheless begs for asking how does this involvement on equal terms should look like within the existing structures? Does it imply recognition of equals only in symbolic terms? Many projects are based on the 'recognition' and value of participants' views. However, it is of crucial importance to ask also under what social conditions and more equal relationships are strived for? Would it also imply some structural rethinking in terms of contracts and conditions and recognition of knowledge? It was my contention here to show

that as long as we stay only on the level of symbolic recognition and rhetoric of ‘participatory’ or ‘empowering’ dimensions without redistribution of privileges, contracts and conditions under which different actors participate we might continue to reproduce the existing orders more than transforming them.

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