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### Roma and non-Roma conflicts in the light of power relationships

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*The article summarises the findings of the first phase of an action research study focusing on how restorative justice approaches and practices can support conflict resolution within an intercultural context. The author will describe the relationship between the Roma and non-Roma residents in a Hungarian village. Consideration will be given to the “ordering groups” of the local community and will discuss some of their conflicts. It will be argued that these ordering groups may influence inter-ethnic relationships and impact how Roma and non-Roma members of the community may live harmoniously together.*

**Key words:** Roma, discrimination, action research, interethnic conflicts, power relationship, restorative justice

#### Introduction

This study introduces the results of the first phase of an action research that is being conducted by the Foresee Research Group ([www.foresee.hu](http://www.foresee.hu)) within the framework of the program called ALTERNATIVE.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this project is to provide an alternative and a deep understanding of justice and security based on empirical evidence, and on ways to handle conflicts within intercultural contexts in democratic societies. The project undertakes an interdisciplinary and inter-regional comparative investigation on how and why

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people, groups and institutions, through the application of restorative justice, are enabled to attain an alternative understanding and a new experience of justice and security (ALTERNATIVE 2011, 3).

In the beginning of the project, the partners of ALTERNATIVE conducted primarily theoretical researches and analyzed the relevant literature. Based on the results of this work the consortium developed concepts, later they theoretically elaborated, finalized and operationalised them. This is followed by an action research phase – I will introduce some preliminary findings of this phase within this article. The program will continue; taking the findings of the research into consideration, intervention and implementation will be realized which is based on the restorative approach.

The Hungarian partner of the program has been working in the village of Kulacs<sup>2</sup> since 2012. We have been building good relationships and mutual trust with the community. We have been gaining information about the key actors and the difficulties of existence in this village. This knowledge is changing continuously, as the action research is still going on. New encounters, new perspectives, new conversations, new conflicts can, and probably will specify the picture in the future. However, I can already describe some results, reveal typical oppositions and denote some characteristics of the local relations from an interethnic aspect.

Within this paper, I will describe the situation of the Roma minority in Hungary at first. The next chapter will introduce the village, where the program of the Foresee Research Group has been taking place. Later on, I will share some information about the methodology of the action research. After that, I will focus on the local Roma of Kulacs, their problems, their conflicts with the majority of the villagers and their experience about discrimination will be in the centerpoint of my attention. It was also important to introduce the groups of interests and conflicts of the community as well. As I will underline, these circumstances might have influence on the way the Roma and non-Roma live together. This is what I will introduce at the end of the article.

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<sup>2</sup> Within this study, all of the names are fictive in order to ensure anonymity.

## **Roma in Hungary**

According to a national representative survey the estimated total Roma population was 320.000 in 1971, 468.000 in 1993 and 600.000 in 2003 (Kemény et al., 2004: 11-12). Based on this data, the research carried out in 2010 estimated the number of the Roma 750.000, so approximately 8 per cent of the Hungarian population belonged to this minority (MC, 2010: 31). A few decades ago, differences between Roma and non-Roma were not so deep as nowadays. Under socialism, the state-owned industrial companies needed semi – and unskilled workers in large numbers. However, the Roma could only partially fulfil the requirements of the labour market because of their educational, health and housing disadvantages. In order to reduce the already existing disadvantages, nationwide campaigns began in Hungary. The programs focusing on the elimination of the Roma settlements set the objective of creating better housing conditions. The rate of the Roma pupils attending schools increased, due to the extension of compulsory education and the need for writing and reading, which appeared among the Roma. Because of the increase in industrial employment, the number of the Roma with a higher income increased by the early 1970s. Although, we can identify certain drawbacks of these programs, the living conditions of the Roma clearly improved within this period.

The situation of the Roma has been worsening dramatically since socialism collapsed. Social scientists have observed that disadvantages appear already in early childhood. According to the national survey conducted in 2003, there were relevant differences in the access to kindergarten between Roma and non-Roma children. In 2003, 88% of non-Roma children aged 3-5, while only 42% of Roma children attended kindergarten (Kemény et al., 2004: 83-84). The educational system from kindergarten to high school did not ensure equal educational opportunities for Roma children. In 2003, the number of segregated schools was 180, and the number of segregated classes mostly attended by Roma was 3,000 (Molnár, Dupcsik, 2008: 17-18). Among the Roma children the rate of dropouts, qualifying as private students and being labeled as mentally disabled and therefore sent to special schools or classes was much higher than the national average between 1993 and 2003 (Kemény et al., 2004: 82-90). The inequality between Roma and non-Roma was even more visible if we paid attention to universities: in 2003 40% of

youth population in the 20-24 age group attended college or university while this rate was only 1.2% among the Roma youth (Kemény et al., 2004: 89).

The employment rate of Roma has also dramatically declined after the transition of the socialist regime. In the 1970s there was no relevant difference between the employment of the Roma and non-Roma (Balogh, 2013). In 1989, the proportion of employment (Kertesi, 2005a) was 67%, which dropped to 31% in 1993 among the 15-49 year old Roma population. The employment rate of the general population is considerably higher now – nearly twice as much – compared to the Roma population (Kertesi, 2005b: 194). The data of the FRA Roma pilot survey confirm these results. The rate of paid employment of Roma aged 20 to 64 is significantly lower (reaches about 35%) compared to the non Roma (near 50%) (FRA, 2012: 6).

The national researches from 2003 and 2010 (MC, 2010; Letenyi, Varga, 2011; Babusik, 2004) show that the housing conditions of Roma households were very poor as well. 64% of Roma households lacked pipeline gas supply and one-third of Roma households were without toilettes and bathrooms. Half of the households were without sewage disposal system and one-fifth of them lacked running water.

#### *Attitudes, prejudice towards Roma*

Prejudice and discrimination towards Roma existed already in the era of socialism – although during the socialism it was forbidden to analyse the phenomenon of prejudice, so from this period we have only a little information about the attitudes against Roma. The research of Mária Márkus in 1967 claimed that the rejection of the Roma – at least in the three villages where their field work was conducted – was extremely high. Similar negative attitudes were observable in the late seventies among pupils (Józsa, 1979), unskilled workers (Hankiss, 1976) or in case of representative samples as well (Hann-Tomka-Pártos, 1979).

In 1989, the system has changed, socialism collapsed. In the first few years of the new political era, the activity, role and support of extreme-right wing parties and movements were negligible. Moreover, negative attitudes against the Roma – although they were still strong but–dwindled in the 1990s. Unfortunately, this positive trend altered after the Millennium. These changes had their stems in several factors. MSZP, the ruling party between 2002 and 2010, lost its credibility after a while. The supporters of the party decreased

in numbers immensely. Being averse to the MSZP, at the same time, meant being averse to political correctness – which ideology, language, and policy was the party's own (Bernát et al., 2012). One of the political opponents of the MSZP, the so-called Jobbik Party (Kiss, Széger, Héra, 2013: 278) and the Hungarian Guard (a paramilitary association which was supported by the Jobbik) introduced the politically not correct rhetoric (Gimes et al., 2008). The representatives of this extreme right-wing party uttered what was forbidden to name before. They started to talk about "Gypsy crime"<sup>3</sup>. They took an openly discriminative attitude against the Roma. They drew attention to the damage which, in their opinion, the Roma caused in the majority of the society.

The situation became worse thanks to the economic crisis in 2008. Fear and frustration of losing jobs and being impoverished made citizens inclined to vote for populist parties. And the parties reacted quickly; almost all of them drew up light, simplistic messages that people could easily understand (Rajasic, 2007). And sometimes these messages provided extreme solutions for social problems and often named a common enemy – who were very often the Roma.

Nowadays, in Hungary – similarly to other Eastern-European countries – Roma belong to the most disadvantaged social groups who suffer from the heaviest prejudice. As sociological researches prove the negative attitudes towards the Roma are intensive. According to a survey conducted in 2011 two-third of Hungarians would not let their kids play with Roma children. In 2009, 58% of the population believed that the crime is in the blood of the Roma. In the same year the rate of those who agree with the statement "there are respectable Roma, but the majority of them are not respectable" was 80%. The lack of tolerance and the phenomenon of exclusion were highlighted not only by researches but also by the existence of hate speech and hate crime incidents. In 2008 a series of murders resulted in the deaths of five Roma people.

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<sup>3</sup> The traditional Hungarian name for this ethnic group is Gypsy but the politically correct one is Roma.

## Description of the field

Kulacs is a small village in Hungary where the number of the local inhabitants was between 2,500 and 3,500 in the past few decades. The infrastructure in Kulacs has been upgraded. More than 95% of the houses have piped drinking water and piped gas supply, almost all of them are involved into waste collection and about 80% of them are connected to the wastewater collection network (KSH, 2011). Kulacs has a kindergarten, a library and one primary school with a gymnasium. A family doctor and a pediatrician are also available.

Kulacs is traditionally a religious village. Around the Millennium, the vast majority of the village (more than 80%) considered themselves as Catholics (Parokia, 2011). The settlement has a multicultural background as well, as not only Hungarians but members and posterity of the German, Slovakian and Roma minority live here. Today, Kulacs has German and Roma Minority Governments.<sup>4</sup> In 2001, about 4% of the people considered themselves Roma (KSH, 2012). In the opinion of the leader of the Roma Minority Government, this percentage is 8% today. The reason of the difference between the two data is not immigration or an outstanding rate of birth. It lies in the fact that in case of an official census the Roma citizens usually do not declare their minority background.

Civil activity is strong and supported by the local government. The website of the village mentions altogether twelve NGOs and fourteen bottom-up movements. For example, sport associations, a club for retired residents, a choir and a Home Guard can be found among the local initiatives. In 2013, Kulacs gives the floor to altogether 34 programs – a lot of them organized by the local NGOs. The local government has a newspaper. Apart from this medium the Catholic Church, a local NGO and the Roma Minority Government publish local newspapers as well.

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<sup>4</sup> The legal basis of minority rights protection in Hungary is the 1993 Act on the rights of national and ethnic minorities (Act 1993/77.). The most important innovation of the law was the establishment of minority self-governments both at local and national levels. Minority self-governments have primarily non-territorial competences, thus they offer a form of cultural autonomy for minorities.

## **Methodology**

The orientation of our work was based on action research which is an umbrella term that represents several practices. In case of action researches the researchers not only gain information from the field, they not only conduct studies on the target group. On the contrary, the researchers form “partnerships with community members to identify issues of local importance, develop ways of studying them, collect and interpret data, and take action on the resulting knowledge” (Smith et al., 2010: 408). The keyword is action. The researchers are not only objective observers who do not influence the field and who are not influenced by the field or even by themselves. Rather, the aim of the researchers is “to effect desired change as a path to generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders” (Huang, 2010). The researchers do not have to make a division between action and understanding. This is the approach, which in our hope, supports the achievement of the aims of the ALTERNATIVE project. Thanks to action research we gain knowledge from the field, we build mutual understanding and trust – what is crucial as we would like to facilitate people’s participation in the resolution of their conflicts within the next phase of ALTERNATIVE.

Altogether, we prepared interviews with 33 local residents within six months. We used the snow-ball method in order to get in contact with interviewees. The conversations were usually 1-1.5 hours long and were in most cases recorded and later transcribed. The questions in the interview guidelines were divided into three main issues: 1) History of the village, 2) Life story of the interviewee, 3) Conflicts in Kulacs. Another source of information was the desk research. We collected all kinds of information about Kulacs from libraries, internet, local residents, local newspapers and local government. Moreover, we were there on the field. We took part in events, such as the Ball of the Catholic Church, soccer games, Roma Day, graduation, consecration of a local monument etc. After the participatory observations we summarised our experience in a research diary. Besides, we did not only collect information but shared the gained information with the local community. We organised two workshops where we introduced the findings of the first phase of the action research. Here, local residents asked questions, shared with the researchers their feedbacks and even criticized the process or conclusions of the research.

## Roma in Kulacs

I would like to emphasise the fact that according to our interviewees the relationship between the Roma and non-Roma inhabitants is calm, which is definitely not the case in several Hungarian villages. Although, there were smaller conflicts in the past few years and sometimes tensions were also observable in Kulacs but still, *“our village is a peaceful island”* – which is an important value in the opinion of our interviewees.

Despite the fact that the situation is generally peaceful, Roma interviewees reported discrimination or discriminatory practices several times. Some of them thought that the Roma lived at the edge of the community until now (*“We have the same, old rules; the Roma settle at the edge”*), the teachers did not pay enough attention to their children (*“The children have to sit at the desks at the back, there is not attention paid to them”*) and their parents had less rights in the school (*“The gate is closed in the school. Roma parents would like to go in but they do not let them in. Hungarians would like to go and the door is open for them immediately”*). They talked about prejudice (*“I do not like it when they say that Roma would not like to work. They would like to but they do not have a chance.”*), disadvantage at workplace (*“They could tell us...I will not resent. “Listen to me, you are gipsy and we will not hire you!” ”*) and negative attitudes towards them. If an interviewee reported violence he or she surely belonged to the Roma minority. Some of the Roma introduced even life-threatening conflicts. *“Next to the forest they cut a dry tree they thought they could take away. Somebody reported it and a man appeared with his two sons and with guns. This man was the schoolmate of the interviewee, he was an acquaintance. This man called somebody and told him “listen to me, here is a father and his son bring the grasper, we have to bury them” and “I will shot the head of your father”. Those, who did not have a gun, came against us with axes, cudgels.”* Fortunately, no physical harm was caused in this case. The Roma were denounced because of stealing wood, the sentence was admonition. This was the official process. Non-officially the man who threatened the Roma *“was caught at the Day of the Village and got some biffs”*.

In the beginning of this study I already mentioned that after the Millennium the right-wing movements became stronger in Hungary. Jobbik introduced the politically not correct rhetoric (Gimes et al. 2008). They started to talk about “Gypsy crime”. They took an openly discriminative attitude against the Roma. This is the reason why members of the Jobbik or of the



Hungarian Guard are frightening and irritant for Roma. A violent conflict took place in Kulacs about nine years ago when members of the Hungarian Guard appeared in the village. They clobbered a young Roma, and shot the arm of another Roma. As a local resident told us *"Roma were assaulted from a car, my brother-in-law is disabled with his arm now."* According to our interviewees the cases were not reported to police and the offenders did not have to take the responsibility for their act.

Some of the non-Roma residents of Kulacs had clear knowledge about discrimination and prejudice that affect the local Roma. These people usually accept that solely Roma, who are in a disadvantaged situation, can not change their own life. These people highlighted the responsibility of the whole society and explained the difficulties of the Roma a lot of times with macro-sociological reasons. *"Under the period of socialism...a lot of gypsies were working in the collective farm. The system has changed...farms ceased... there is no work place since that time and they can not work."* These villagers emphasised that if the Roma had work they would have no problem at all. Lack of work gave an explanation also for crime that was committed by Roma. *"It is not an easy issue... Should they curdle? Moreover, they push the bike with firewood for two-three days...and the police bring them to the yard. If somebody steals the wood with a truck...I can understand if they catch you. However, it is a cruel situation if you can not heat."*

On the contrary, other non-Roma residents of Kulacs are less tolerant towards the local Roma. These people usually have a perspective which emphasise the responsibility of the individual. This idea is fed by the ideology *"if you really want to do something, you can"*. According to this opinion Roma should have been active in order to improve their life-circumstances. They thought that a few decades ago there had been no problem with Roma as *"they knew where to stay"*. Unfortunately, nowadays *"they can do what they want while Hungarians mustn't do anything."* In their opinion the village always had problem with this minority whose members did not really want to change their life. These residents usually warned of the thefts which in their opinion were committed by Roma. *"There are a lot of conflicts about firewood. While white people buy the wood Roma people steal the forest. I know somebody...they went to measure the forest...they realised that the trees could be cut so they hired people to work there. One month later...they arrived to the forest but it was not there. The gypsies stole it."*

## Groups of interests

We realized that the attitudes towards the Roma divided the village into two groups – but this is not the only factor that makes difference between them. The members of the two groups usually represent different ideologies. In addition, we can describe the groups with different backgrounds of religion. Besides, the two groups have usually different opinions about the work and achievement of the mayor and the city council. Moreover, one of the groups mainly consists of native villagers while among the members of the other group there are many newcomers.

These groups could be named as “ordering groups” with different cultures (Foss et al., 2012, 23) or with premises (Foss et al. 2012, 42). They could be defined as groups with different feelings, unmet needs, “incompatible interests or goals or in competition for control over scarce resources.” (Foss et al., 2012: 34) These groups show the multiplicity of local subcultures (Kremmel, Pelikan 2013: 17). Thanks to the identification of these groups we can describe the fragmented environment (Hydle, Seeberg, 2013: 9) of the village – what is an important aim if we would like to learn about and from the community. We hope that the information about groups and their conflicts could support our work and help us to understand the Roma and non-Roma relationships in Kulacs.

### *Conflicts between newcomers and native villagers*

We can observe one of the most important opposition between the newcomers and the native villagers. As the local government has been aiming to welcome new residents, the population in Kulacs has increased in the last twenty years. However, after a while conflicts appeared between the native villagers and the newcomers. Some of the dissents were born because of different claims: *“The newcomers from the city disapprove of the local shop, because it is not a supermarket and they cannot buy everything here.”* Other disagreements were based on the different norms. For example, some of the newly arrived people did not pay attention to their gardens—what can be quite unusual for rural people. *“The people who used to live in a city never run a garden, so it is weedy. The people in the village condemn this behaviour.”* The incomprehension could be mutual. One of our interviewees who arrived to the village a few years ago shared with us his opinion: *“Here is a freak that “oh, my god, the tree and leafs touch the house”... And it is the mania of the local*

*residents that they rake the stupid shifting sand as flat as a pancake.*" Some of our interviewees pointed at different habits of greeting. People at the countryside greet each other from a distance. People coming from the cities only say hello when they are close. This could be the reason that some of the native villagers think of the newcomers as impolite.

In the last few years, conflicts between the two groups became deeper. An important source of clashes was burning leaves in the gardens. In the opinion of the native villagers burning is necessary: *"Village. Here people are used to burning in the garden. They burn the weed. I agree; nobody should burn non-stop. However, at spring and at fall in that bloody garden we have to somehow deal with leaves!"* Some of our interviewees thought that burning was a part of the tradition in Kulacs – if somebody would like to change it, he/she would like to change the tradition of the village as well: *"We have an ordinary rhythm. The order of the feasts or the order of burning. A newly arrived who respects this order...there is no problem with them. However, if somebody wants to be smarter than us and tell us when we should do the burning...We do it and we'll do it this way."* On the other hand, burning is not only characteristic of the local community but a source of smoke as well – what can be almost unbearable for the neighbours: *"They are burning all the time. Without any break. Pyromaniac people live here, everybody fires all of the shit. They are not able to understand how harmful it is."*

"Burning" became one of the central issues of the local public speeches. The opposition between the two groups turned into a heavy struggle two years ago. That summer one of the newcomers, Peter left the windows open in order to cool the house. When he woke up in the morning, his room was full of smoke as somebody was burning leaves in the neighbourhood. *"I was so angry that I thought I would explode. I went there and shouted at him. "You motherfucker, I have to wake up at six to find my flat full of smoke!" I came back, logged in to Facebook and wrote a post "Smelly peasant, he is burning again".* This was a turning point, as the opinion appeared not only in interpersonal communication but in public media as well. Arguments and counterarguments followed the note of Peter who deleted his post three hours later and apologized for it – but it was too late. The news spread in Kulacs: *"a newcomer called us smelly peasants".*

The reaction was quite strong. An unknown person printed leaflets and dropped them into the mailboxes at night. The author warned that Peter had negative opinion about the residents of Kulacs. *"Folks, think about it, what kind*

of a man he is!" – voiced the last sentence. Peter had even personal conflicts with local residents. *"The policeman stopped next to me with his car and got off. "Wait a minute, did you really say this?" I answered "Yes, I wrote it but I would like to tell you what happened." "No, no. I'll never talk to you" – this was his answer, he got in the car and drove away. After this...for months, until the next spring... if somebody glimpsed me in the village, they pointed the finger at me... I was afraid to go to the other side of the village. There was somebody who came to my house and threatened me...that I should have not gone out at night, because I could have some troubles."*

Almost a year later, at a public hearing Peter managed to explain why he wrote his note. He was able to repent and say sorry. Thanks to this act, some members of the community were able to forgive him. Others were not able or did not want to do the same. And the "burning issue" became part of the canon, became a milestone by a long-long way. Among other strong conflicts, it was also an incident that represented how strong the collision could be between native villagers and newcomers.

*Active members of the Catholic church and residents who regularly do not go to mass*

The field (Bourdieu, 2005) of the village is fragmented by the conflict of Catholic and non-Catholic<sup>5</sup> residents. The problem of the former group is that non-Catholic residents do not respect them: *"They do not approve that we visit the procession at Easter or at Corpus Christe<sup>6</sup>. We go to mass. We practice our religion, our faith. And they do not like it at all. We are a good community, we exist and we respect each other. For some of the people this is annoying."* At the same time, non-Catholic residents would not like to not accept that *"everything comes via the Church. They do not feel it to be their own. They wonder why should I visit an event organized by the Church."*

This type of rivalry is more interesting as two leaders – the mayor and the priest – are also involved. According to an interviewee the mayor, who is an atheist, *"even allowed himself to say that he could have the cross removed from the top of the church."* We could observe their opposition when the Catholic

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<sup>5</sup> This is how the local residents named those people who regularly do not go to mass.

<sup>6</sup> It is a Latin Rite liturgical solemnity celebrating the tradition and belief in the body and blood of Jesus Christ and his Real Presence in the Eucharist. Available at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpus\\_Christi\\_\(feast\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpus_Christi_(feast))

Church organised its Charity Ball in which the mayor did not take part. In the opinion of the priest the mayor was invited by them. In the opinion of the mayor he received the invitation too late.

Here, I would like to highlight the fact that we followed the principles of the ALTERNATIVE and we did not want to reconstruct the “real story”. Instead of searching for an absolute “truth”, we collected and analysed the patterns, opinions and points of view, we just recorded the “struggle of discourses”. We accepted that different actors may have different, subjective interpretations.

#### *Conflicts that arose because of power relationships*

From the point of view of political power relationships, we can identify two regimes in Kulacs. One of them is the previous regime that was in power between 1990 and 2002. In that case both the mayor and the city council belonged to the group of the native villagers. Moreover, they clearly belonged to the right – which means, in case of Hungary, the ideology of “conservatism”, the value of tradition and the religion of the (Catholic) Christians. The other factor is the regime that is in power presently. In this case the mayor identifies himself as a liberal and a leftist person who has sensitivity for equality. Moreover, the representatives of the city council this time are open to the newcomers and respect the mayor. This is the city council where even a Roma is among the members.

One of the “ordering groups”, namely those who sympathise with the previous regime, think that there have been no investments in Kulacs since the new mayor, Lajos has been in power. For these interviewees, without investment there is no development. According to their critic, while other mayors write applications and try to find financial sources for developing infrastructure, Lajos does not pay enough attention to this issue. *“I can not imagine how nothing happens in this village. I got used to it that every four years we stepped forward. We only had electricity in 1990. We only had our naked bottom. Between 1990 and 1994 we built a gymnasium, a war memorial, a sewer, a treatment plant. In the next four years, we built piped drinking water. Storm rain water drainage. We had huge steps. However, since Lajos has been the mayor... [...] Almost nothing has happened here, in Kulacs.”* These inhabitants had even more complaints. They thought that Lajos favoured the group of the newcomers and he would not have liked to have cooperation with native villagers.

On the contrary, the other “ordering group”, namely those who sympathise with the present regime, think that spending money on infrastructure is not necessary. Furthermore, some interviewees emphasised that the members of the previous regime had been financially interested in investments – what had caused harm to Kulacs. As one of our interviewees revealed when he was talking about a member of the previous city council: *“He was the member of the city council for 20 years and at the same time he was the director of the Fapapucs Ltd which organisation works with watery issues...all of the investments were done by this company here, in the village. Of course, fee is an important question. There were huge fights about the fees. What is the result? Ten million forints savings for the village every year.”* Another problem with the previous city council was their boastful behaviour. According to this feedback, the delegates did not respect the local residents. *“You mustn’t play this way, humiliating people”* – shared his opinion with us one of our interviewees. Last but not least, I should highlight the situation of the Roma whose situation was worse under the previous regime.

According to the concept of identity of ALTERNATIVE (Pali, 2013: 43), residents can belong to any of the groups which I introduced earlier. However, there is more chance that fans of the old regime belong to the native villagers, are Catholic and are less tolerant towards the Roma at the same time. On the other hand, if somebody supports the new regime probably he/she is newcomer, non-Catholic and is more tolerant towards the Roma at the same time.

I would like to highlight that this formalization is simplistic. The classification can be misleading as for example not all of the people who were born in Kulacs belong to the “native villagers”. Neither all of the newly arrived people belong to the “newcomers”. Moreover, we could meet native villagers who (partly or fully) accepted the local Roma and some of the newcomers had clearly negative attitudes towards Roma. Still, this formalization is realistic and could help us to understand how the relation of “group of interests” influenced the interethnic relationships.

## Interethnic relationships and groups of interests

First of all, I would like to introduce a case that could be seen as a typical interethnic conflict. The affair was not a violent one and it was connected to soccer that is a cohesive force in Kulacs. Residents, many of whom were the members of the local soccer association since their childhood. *“Out of 10 only 2 did not play soccer as the member of our association. Out of 10 only 2. Everybody participated since the war. Even now... 70-80% of the boys are signed, I’m sure.”* Soccer gives the people in Kulacs a chance to meet, to share common experiences, and to take part in an activity. Moreover, playing soccer is free – and nearly the only opportunity for the locals to do some sports. Both Roma and non-Roma are welcome: *“Roma and Hungarians come to play soccer. It is very important that they know each other, they can see that the others do not eat human flesh, they are the same human beings...This is very significant in order not to have struggles.”* All of the guards at soccer matches are Roma; according to the leader of the association this fact is well-known and accepted by the fans. In his opinion, other villages that suffer because of conflicts between Roma and non-Roma probably do not have such a soccer association. As soccer is an *“opportunity to link to each other, they meet several times weekly, they get to know each other and even become friends”*.

The leader of the Roma Minority Government, Tibor is an active soccer player as well. As he shared with us, he had started to play soccer in a new team, which had been set up by villagers outside the soccer association, in 2012. It was an important opportunity for Tibor as a soccer player and simultaneously as the member of the city council: *“After the matches we went out for a beer. And while we were drinking our beers we could have a talk about the problems of the village.”* More and more people – altogether 25 players – joined the initiative.

It was a bolt from the blue when some of the non-Roma players of the group decided not to play with the Roma. *“They asked us not to play with them. I asked them, what is wrong. I was shocked. I asked them what about sublime purposes, community building...that we integrate the village and do not let the extremism in... “Are you excluding us? We have played soccer for months. What is wrong? Somebody was clobbered, biffed or kicked?” What was the answer? “No, nothing happened but this is the decision of the guys.”*

When the research group of Foresee arrived in the village, this conflict had still not been settled. It means local residents did not talk it over despite



the fact that people who were involved felt discontent or even harmed. The situation is still the same today. Roma and non-Roma play at the same place but in different hours.

This conflict might not only have an interethnic interpretation – this conflict might be affected by the fights of the local “ordering groups” as well. I summarised earlier why native villagers, fans of the previous regime or Catholic residents could have problems with the present mayor. As I highlighted: he identified himself as a liberal and a leftist person, he was an atheist and he was cooperating with the newcomers. I would like to reveal that the mayor not only presents a different ideology but he also challenges a lot of interests. Taking the maximum length of this article into consideration I will only mention some of them: he managed to build up a political ally that had success at the last election – thanks to this work native villagers fell out from the formal leadership of the village. The editors of the local newspaper were mainly native villagers – and the mayor forced them to involve newcomers in the work of their committee. He negotiated the former contracts of the local government – and reduced the fee of an entrepreneur who was an informal leader of the native villagers. He supported the newcomers in founding a new local NGO – and the organisation not only managed to involve a lot of residents into their work but they started publishing an alternative local newspaper regularly as well. In my opinion, the mayor offended interests and the actors who were attacked, reacted. And if anybody wanted to harm or attack the mayor, they might as well have harmed or attacked his allies.

Who are the allies of the mayor? For example Jozsef who is the leader of the soccer association. He is known as a “*friend of the Roma*”, whose sport association is open for Roma and non-Roma as well, whose Roma colleagues are the guards at soccer matches. He is not only supportive with the Roma but he is akin with the mayor – what may be enough reason for attacking him. *“The leader of the local soccer association belongs to the team of the mayor. It is a common team. For native villagers they are the common enemy, they have to be removed and the other guys will run the sport and the local government.”* Somebody else pointed out that *“I am afraid the soccer conflict is not only racism but politics as well. Local politics. Here is the era of Lajos and Jozsef is his relative. They have family relationships. In my opinion, those who did not want to play with Roma saw an opportunity to attack the system.”*

Not only persons but groups belong to the allies of Lajos – for example the Roma who are supported by him. According to our Roma interviewees



the relationship with the local government was quite bad before Lajos. *"When the old mayor was in power the struggle began. "We have to civilize them" This was the idea."* The Roma Self Government was not a partner in that period and clashes were more intense in the village. Abusing Roma by the Home Guard and violation of human rights were an everyday experience. As one of the ex-member of the Home Guard shared with us: *"If we slapped somebody, we paid attention not to cause any visible physical harm. If we caught a Roma, we called the other home guards and, we slapped him and kicked his ass. And warned him that there will be no social aid if he will talk about it."* Circumstances at the Roma settlement were terrible as the local government did not invest in infrastructure. As opposed to this, the new mayor, Lajos started a Roma settlement elimination program, invested in infrastructure and built upon the relationship with the Roma Self Government. Nowadays it is said by the Roma inhabitants that *"the local mayor tries to support disadvantaged people, "he eliminated the Roma settlement and made it clean", "he gave houses to the Roma", "he supported the Roma Self Government every time"*. It is interesting to cite here the ideology of the mayor as well. In his opinion the majority of the society is responsible for the Roma integration. *"If we would like to accept them...not for one year, not only in the framework of a Roma integration campaign but for years...permanently...it will have an outcome. [... ] In the first 4-5 years there was no result. Seven years later it started to perform. Nowadays... there has been conflict one or maximum two times... Nowadays, it is not trendy to scold the Roma on the streets."*

As I underlined earlier, if somebody wanted to harm or attack the mayor, they might have as well harmed or attacked his allies – and in case of Kulacs the Roma also belonged to this alliance. If this really is the situation, the conflicts between Roma and non-Roma are not interethnic. The real underlying reason for conflicts is the clashes of the "ordering groups" in the village. Among other factors, this could also be a reason why Roma and the cooperation with Roma were refused by some of the local residents. This could also be the reason why some of the local residents did not support or even caused harm for the Roma. For example when the mayor wanted to improve the district where Roma family live so intended to build there concrete road surface. The opposing party – mainly native, Catholic villagers who support the previous regime – resisted. Or when he wanted to cease the Roma settlement. He *"had to fight with the previous city council"* which at that time mainly consisted of native, Catholic villagers. Or when the director of the

Fapapucs Ltd. refused to work together with a branch of Roma workers who previously had been working for the company. The reason of cancelling the contract was that the leader of the workers became more active in the field of local politics and started to cooperate with the present mayor.

## **Conclusion**

Within this paper, I summarised what we had found in the framework of the action research program of the Foresee Research Group. The findings of the first phase of the research are not definitive. We are still working on the field. Probably, we will have more information as the action research is still going on and as restorative interventions will be applied. So probably, the picture will be specified or even change in the future. However, I denoted some characteristics and potential reasons of the local “interethnic conflicts”. I assumed that local power relationships and conflicts between groups of interests might influence how Roma and non-Roma members of a community live together.

This conclusion could have an important message about the possible reasons of emergence and dynamic of interethnic relationships. According to this idea, within the community there are supporters, enemies, temporary and relatively permanent allies. There are patrons, formal and informal leaders and also clients. These actors probably are able to cooperate in order to improve and support their community. However, they fight with or against each other at the same time. Roma are one of the actors of the field. If they have enough power and allies, they can resist, empower themselves, achieve their aims and reduce the chance to be discriminated. In this case, there is less chance that their fundamental human rights will be harmed. However, without power and allies, it will be not easy to resist and it will be more difficult to empower themselves and achieve their aims—what is equal to higher chance of discrimination and harms of human rights.

As I introduced in the beginning of this article, the aim of ALTERNATIVE is to provide an alternative and a deep understanding of justice and security. We hope that our action research and our intervention and implementation, which are based on restorative approach, will give support in handling conflicts within the community. We hope that knowledge and experience about restorative justice will be useful for all of the local residents – including

the Roma. We hope that values and aims of restorative justice will inspire conflicts resolution, in order for the Roma of Kulacs to gain a greater sphere of political influence, to find common allies, and to help to alleviate the discriminations they are facing today. As the approach and practices of restorative justice provide an ALTERNATIVE method to replace fighting and deconstruct hierarchical and power structures which regulate the community.

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GÁBOR HÉRA

## **Sukobi u romskoj i ne-romskoj populaciji u svetlu odnosa moći**

Ovaj rad sumira rezultate prve faze akcionog istraživanja koje se fokusira na to kako pristupi i praksa restorativne pravde mogu da doprinesu rešavanju sukoba u inkulturalnom kontekstu. Autor opisuje odnos između pripadnika romske i ne-romske populacije u mađarskom selu. Pored toga, on razmatra ulogu „grupa koje imaju moć“ na nivou lokalne zajednice i prikazuje neke od njihovih sukoba. On ističe da ove grupe mogu da utiču na međuetničke odnose i na to koliko skladno pripadnici romske i ne-romske zajednice mogu živeti zajedno u harmoniji.

**Ključne reči:** Romi, diskriminacija, akciona istraživanja, međuetnički sukobi, odnos moći, restorativna pravda