Real Bridges and Mental Borders in a Transylvanian ethnically mixed community

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"The carrying power of a bridge is not the average strength of the pillars, but the strength of the weakest pillar. I have always believed that you do not measure the health of society by GNP but by the condition of its worst off".
Zygmunt Bauman, https://theguardian.com/books/2005/nov/12/shopping.society

We are overwhelmed through different channels that we are "different" from the "Other", we are reminded that the "Other" is doing something or believe in something that does not conform to our cultural or social norms. It seems that the broader society struggles with different forms of alterity. Being categorized as "different' is more than a frame through which we understand the world, but it is one of the factors which define, cause, etc. different social processes on local level.

This article deals with formal (institutional) and informal (interpersonal) strategies of dealing with the presence of the most prejudiced and marginalized ethnic group – the Roma/Gypsies in a rural Transylvanian locality. The Roma were subjects of physical and social segregation back in the XIX century, when local authorities moved the already marginalized Roma families to the other side of the nearby river out of sanitation reasons on a dreary, marshy field. Soon, as a result of the rapid economic development of the locality, this area started to be populated by newcomers. Although, nowadays there are no such clear spatial borders between the old Hungarian majority and the Roma communities, the mental map of the local's still bear this separation.[1] The physical (river) and symbolic (ethnic) borders are continuously crossed, more or less successfully.

While the bridge materializes the illusion that the two sides of the river now form one single locality uniting old inhabitants with the newcomers, old institutions (church and school) with the new ones (police station), more subtle and symbolic bridges ensure a more valuable connection of separated communities. This symbolic bridge is the ritual kinship between Hungarians and Roma through Godparenthood[2]. Godparenthood relations in one hand extend the social network of the Roma families; on the other hand contribute to the maintenance and reinforcement of social cohesion in the community by granting new content to the work relationships between different ethnic groups.

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[1] Migdal, J. S. (2004): Mental maps and virtual checkpoints: struggles to construct and maintain state and social boundaries, pg. 3-26
[2] G. and P. van Berghe 1966, Mintz and Wolf 1950, Goody 1970