

## 14. Social innovation in the field of Roma inclusion in Hungary and Austria: lessons to foster social cohesion from *Thara* and *Tanodas*

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### INTRODUCTION

Be it the increase in poverty and unemployment, ‘Brexit’, or the current refugee tragedy – there is clear evidence that social and territorial cohesion is at stake in Europe. Historically, struggles for social cohesion were intended to repair the damages done by capitalist modernisation, such as the dissolution of traditional communities or widening class cleavages. Since the 1990s, social cohesion became a key European policy concern. While in line with the Lisbon Agenda the term has been de-politicised and framed as functional to competitiveness (Maloutas et al., 2008, p.260), social cohesion has to be understood as the contradictory and contested quasi concept with different definitions in different policy fields (Jenson, 1998). From a socioeconomic perspective, it deals with the exclusionary dynamics of social inequality and poverty. While equality was never achieved in centralised welfare regimes, there has been a uniformisation in the access to social services and infrastructure which was often not very attentive to diversity. From a political perspective, social cohesion includes participation, representation and mobilisation, questioning an understanding of citizenship based on nationality. From a culturalist perspective, some stress the right to difference as well as recognition, dignity and belonging, while others focus on essentialist identity-building based on ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’.

Due to this complexity, we define social cohesion as a *problématique* of enabling people to live together and yet to have the opportunity to be different (Novy et al., 2012, p.1874). It is a complex, multilayered challenge that can only be tackled in a transdisciplinary, multiscalar and multidisciplinary

mensional way. Therefore, in line with Patsy Healey, the policy challenge consists in finding context-sensitive ways of ‘living together differently’ (Novy et al., 2012, p.1874), that means an ongoing negotiation between the right to be equal and to belong and the right to be different. It is characterised by the tensions between claims for the recognition and respect for cultural, gender, age and other forms of diversity, on the one hand, and the more traditional socioeconomic claims for universal social protection and civic and social rights on the other hand. The adoption of the EU’s motto ‘United in Diversity’ in 2000 synthesises this *problématique*. But the heated discussions on refugees show that intercultural conviviality remains an unresolved challenge in fostering social cohesion, which is currently increasingly solved in a reductionist way: defending identities at the expense of appreciating diversity.

Sociocultural and ethnic discrimination has long been perceived as a key weakness of European welfare models. Assimilationist tendencies of European welfare states, which discriminate against ethnic minorities, are especially strong in the conservative Central European countries. Even if Hungary has been considered a ‘transition’ economy, a persistent path-dependency can be detected in its welfare model due to its historical roots in the nineteenth-century authoritarian-paternalistic Austro-Hungarian empire (Aspalter et al., 2009). Although the separation in the twentieth century has led to different pathways, there remain several structural similarities, as Hungary – despite its communist legacy – shows governance structures that can also be classified as conservative-corporatist, rather than under the broad category of Eastern or ‘transitional’ welfare state models. In the conservative welfare model, the *problématique* of social cohesion is facing structural ‘insider–outsider’ dynamics: the middle and lower classes remain protected (as long as they remain employed), but the specific social needs of newcomers (e.g. immigrants, refugees) or ‘outsiders’ (e.g. homeless people, Roma) are hardly dealt with. In light of these ‘insider–outsider’ dynamics, which entails that ‘outsiders’ are more affected by austerity policies than insiders, new creative solutions and broad alliances are required to contribute to Roma inclusion and to foster social cohesion. The European Commission, for example, has undertaken efforts to foster social inclusion of Roma, the largest European ethnic minority, via financial incentives and agenda setting.

This chapter explores the potential and limits of modifying and broadening the conservative-corporatist governance model in what concerns increasing social cohesion. More specifically, it presents an analysis of the socially innovative potential of two projects in the domain of Roma inclusion, focusing on their governance structures and approach to social cohesion: *Thara* in Austria and *Tanoda(s)* in Hungary. We investigate to

what extent these two initiatives are laboratories of social innovation to tackle the *problématique* of social cohesion. In the context of austerity, welfare state retrenchment and the re-organisation of social services in particular, social innovation has become a key issue of European policy discourse. As social cohesion, it is a contested term, which has increasingly been instrumentalised in a neo-liberal agenda as a policy to compensate for welfare state retrenchment – fostering markets and entrepreneurship (Jenson, 2015). However, this undermines the innovative potential of social innovations as transforming social relations and empowering disadvantaged social groups (Oosterlynck et al., forthcoming). Therefore, we conceptualise social innovation as defined by Moulaert et al. (2005; 2010) and further developed in the ImPRovE research framework<sup>1</sup> (Oosterlynck et al., 2013a; 2013b): successful social innovation has to fight social exclusion and contribute to empowerment by addressing both the material and the process dimension of social cohesion. First, social innovation contributes to addressing social needs hitherto neglected by the welfare state (material dimension); secondly, it contributes to a change of social relations among local actors and among these and institutions, as well as to empowering excluded groups (process dimension).

Our case study analysis (Wukovitsch et al., 2015; Bernát and Verseg, 2015) is rooted in a critical realist philosophy and is transdisciplinary, i.e. attempts to foster a dialogue with practitioners to improve respective agency (e.g. Cassinari et al., 2011; Novy et al., 2013). In both initiatives, interviews were conducted with stakeholders, including staff members of the implementing organisations, policy-makers or representatives of the respective administrative institutions and funding bodies. Preliminary results were discussed in focus groups and further feedback was used to refine the arguments. The focus of this multi-method approach was on mapping the policy field in terms of relevant actors and their governance relations, identifying innovative aspects and governance challenges such as striking the balance between diversity and equality (ImPRovE Social Innovation Team, 2013).

In the remainder of this chapter, first we briefly present the historical and institutional context of Roma exclusion in Austria and Hungary. Subsequently we describe the two initiatives and elaborate on their socially innovative potential with a focus on their contributions to Roma empowerment and the creation of social cohesion. In the last section we reflect on the strengths and limitations of these innovative initiatives in the context of their respective welfare regimes.

## 1. ROMA EXCLUSION IN AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY

Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe. While they are a small and heterogeneous group in Austria (approximately 0.3 per cent of the total population), they are an important minority in Hungary (more than 7 per cent of total population) (Bernát and Mosuela, 2014).

In the case of Austria, Roma settled in the country centuries ago. These autochthonous Roma – amounting to roughly 10 000 people – suffered terribly from the genocide during the Nazi regime (Baumgartner and Freund, 2007a; 2007b), as less than 10 per cent survived. They were given official status as an ethnic minority group in 1993 (Fink, 2011, pp.4–5). The group of allochthonous Roma – amounting to about 45 000 to 60 000 people – consists of immigrants from the 1960s and 1970s, their descendants, as well as more recent flows who migrated due to push factors in their home countries. Many of them do not come from within the EU (i.e. from Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Macedonia) and lack any official status. Some are asylum seekers. They are hardly seen as Roma in public as well as in political debates, since much public attention is given to ‘poverty’ migration, i.e. short-term commuters from South-Eastern European countries, who come to Austria and beg in the streets. They suffer severe prejudices, discriminatory treatment by the police and negative press reports. Apart from constitutionally codified minority policies, more systematic Roma policies have only been implemented due to incentives from the policy frameworks of the EU. A common feature of autochthonous Roma is low educational attainment (irrespective of gradual improvements made during the last two decades), resulting in above-average labour market problems for young people of Roma origin (Fink, 2011, pp.4–5). Although the Public Employment Service (*Arbeitsmarktservice*) offers qualification measures, supports employment and provides financial support, language barriers exclude part of the minorities from welfare services, despite the relatively high rate of unemployment in this population group (13 per cent) when compared with the Austrian average (about 5 per cent) (ETC Graz, 2012; Riesenfelder et al., 2011).

In the case of Hungary, the aforementioned ‘insider–outsider’ dynamics regarding Roma becomes apparent when looking at the school system, as there is a tendency to marginalise children from less educated and poor families (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2012). According to a 2014 survey on school segregation, ‘the distribution of Roma and non-Roma students across schools has become considerably more unequal in Hungary since the 1980’s’ (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2013, p. 5). The study from Corvinus University and the Hungarian Academy of Science identifies as the decisive factor for segregation that most municipal educational bodies fail to maintain the

representation of Roma students in mostly non-Roma schools (whether municipal or non-municipal schools). Distributing students according to residence would result in a more mixed composition of classrooms. However, students' 'free school choice and [low commuting costs] diminish the role of residential distribution because many students commute to schools of their choice' (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2013, p.40). Quite a few municipalities let their higher status ('elite') schools practise admission policies that tend to further segregate, and many allow segregated Roma schools to exist. All this undermines equal chances to quality education. Moreover, complementary support services are not widespread and disadvantages are not dealt with systematically. Another survey in 2014 showed that one of the main reasons behind poor school results was the lack of stimuli at home (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2014, p. 3). The survey was based on the comparison between Roma and non-Roma children of similar social circumstances of income, wealth and parental education in the same class, and pointed out that ethnicity was of minor importance in children's performance, whereas the home environment and financial status of parents made the real difference. The two surveys highlight the fact that unequal opportunities of Roma and/or poor children derive from the inaccessibility of quality education through segregation and poorer social environment affecting their cognitive skills.

In conclusion, Roma communities suffer discrimination and social exclusion in both countries. EU member states have since 2011 been obliged to prepare national Roma inclusion strategies within the broader framework of national social inclusion policies (Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2011, p.5). In Austria, the Roma strategy has received a prominent place in the National Action Plan against discrimination. The Federal Chancellery has committed itself to involving an advisory council as well as civil society organisations in its implementation (Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2011, p.22). Furthermore, it has become the national contact point for the 'Austrian Roma Strategy' (Bundeskanzleramt, 2013). In Hungary, in contrast, the focus is not on Roma, but on vulnerable social groups in general. The strategy seeks to reduce poverty and social exclusion, with special regard to the Roma population. The document entitled 'National social inclusion strategy (extreme poverty, child poverty, the Roma) 2011–2020' provides a framework for implementing the social inclusion objectives defined in the government programme. In line with the Europe 2020 agenda, it aims to tackle the barriers to Roma inclusion in a broader way, rather than only as a poverty policy.

## 2. THE *THARA* AND *TANODA* INITIATIVES' APPROACH TO SOCIAL COHESION

In this section, first, the two case studies are described. Then, the innovative potential of both initiatives is explored in terms of their contribution to (1) addressing social needs; (2) transforming social relationships; (3) empowerment; and (4) their contribution to social cohesion. Although both initiatives address the Roma minority, *Thara* is a single initiative located in Vienna, which coordinates several projects and associations to improve Roma access to the labour market, whereas the Hungarian 'study halls' (*Tanodas*) are spread all over the country – but particularly in cities – and address the improvement of school performance of Roma pupils.

### **The *Thara* Initiative in Vienna**

*Thara* means 'tomorrow' or 'future' in Romanes. The chief aim of this initiative is improving Romas' access to the labour market and relevant national institutions. Although organised as a project and financed on an annual basis, *Thara* has become institutionalised as a cornerstone in the Austrian national Roma policy. It tries to compensate for a long history of discrimination and stigmatisation by means of occupational advice for the Roma as well as sensitisation workshops and information events for members of mainstream society.

*Thara* started in the form of a number of labour market projects funded by the EU community initiative EQUAL from 2005 to 2007, and has received annual project support from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs ever since. From the very beginning, issues of labour market integration and ethnic identity were addressed in tandem. This has allowed Roma poverty to be dealt with as a multidimensional issue – focusing on low income, poor housing, low educational attainment – while also acknowledging it as the outcome of secular discrimination due to legacies of past deprivation. The first education and activation programme, for instance, consisted of a broad variety of elements, reaching from personal tutoring on career opportunities, computer and media workshops, social counselling, career and business start-up counselling and business behaviour training, complemented by workshops on theatre, music, dance and Roma history as well as language courses in Romanes. Later projects also included internships, with financial contributions from the Public Employment Service. Currently, four women are employed in *Thara*, two belonging to the Roma community. One of them is working as project leader, one as project coordinator and two as educational and occupational consultants.

The first project was based on a close collaboration between *Romanodrom*, a strong community player, and *Volkshilfe*, a large non-profit organisation that is non-partisan. This co-operation was difficult because there were about 20 to 25 associations with different targets. The lack of a clear umbrella organisation in such a fragmented and heterogeneous field increased tensions within the community. In the evaluation of the EQUAL project, a key conclusion was that the dependence on one strong community player – *Romanodrom* – resulted in one player holding the interpretational authority over all Roma affairs. This led to the decision to have one neutral player – *Volkshilfe* – doing the organisation in order to facilitate networking with all interested parties (Gneisz, 2010). Therefore, *Volkshilfe* has had sole responsibility from the second, nationally funded *Thara* project onwards. It turned out that the embedding of *Thara* in a large organisation has been a big advantage in the corporatist setting of the Austrian welfare state. *Volkshilfe* is well established and recognised for its capacity to manage complex projects. However, the specific way in which *Volkshilfe* manages *Thara* is in part due to the personal commitment of the organisation's managing director. In contrast to most other services of *Volkshilfe*, *Thara* is managed by the umbrella organisation at the federal level and not by the provincial departments. Community members have continued to be involved in decision-making and to be part of the project team. *Volkshilfe* facilitates networking with other stakeholders, one of them being Romano Centro, one of the biggest NGOs for Roma empowerment in Austria. However, the decision was also criticised, as non-Roma ('Gadje') would benefit from funding that was in principle reserved for members of the Roma community (Gneisz, 2010).

In the coming years, the governance of labour market projects is expected to change, as the European level has become important again in the new European social fund (ESF) programme period. With a funding opportunity of ten times the original budget, more Roma associations – also in other parts of Austria – might get involved in *Thara*, in order to make the project more participatory. They have already been invited to present their ideas for improving the position of Roma in the labour market. But since there will not be a classical call for proposals, small associations will depend on the participation of a big player such as *Volkshilfe* to get involved in an EU project, as barriers of liquidity and administrative capacity remain.

### **Addressing Social Needs**

Innovative practices introduced by *Thara* are new in the Austrian context, as they refer to different types of affirmative action for marginal

socioethnic populations. These activities emerged as a consequence of a mix of circumstances: new opportunities offered by EU policies on anti-discrimination, proactive action by key persons working in the labour market section of the national government, competent civil society organisations and the increasing pressures exerted by Roma associations.

Formally, the main social need that *Thara* addresses is labour market access for Roma. Right from the beginning, there was broad agreement that employability is not a single issue, but a problem rooted in multiple forms of discrimination and uneven access to mainstream institutions in general. Roma suffer from discrimination in job selection, but also from lower levels of education and formal skills. Improved access to the labour market often requires prerequisites with respect to education, health, self-esteem or networks. To identify relevant needs, the participation of individuals and organisations from the target group was encouraged.

### **Transforming Social Relationships (Building Trust)**

Community work has been crucial in the project's day-to-day business. Networking and close contacts with the community enabled activists to recognise diverse needs and to formulate strategies to deal with them. Awareness in mainstream circles has also been raised as a consequence of the general shift brought about by EU initiatives and their implementation in the form of national strategies. This changing public attitude has contributed to more openness and greater consciousness about the problems of Roma.

There were many conflicts between Roma and non-Roma in the first *Thara* project. Among others, there was criticism that Austrians would receive money that should be reserved for the needs of Roma. As one stakeholder explained, this perception was in part due to the top-down approach of the project and the fact that money was allegedly not spent in the most efficient way. This clearly illustrates the lack of understanding of the functioning of institutions and international funding schemes on the part of Roma associations; it also reflects the unequal power relations that exist in these types of projects. Small grassroots initiatives are disadvantaged and target groups are often beneficiaries without being involved in decision-making. Just one indication of the technocratic approach of the first project is the fact that the proposal was written by a civil servant with a clear commitment to anti-discrimination policies but little experience in Roma affairs. The original proposal had the merit to problematise the situation of Roma and argue for public action. But there was still little understanding of Roma issues and how to build an open and representative, but working consortium.



Many stakeholders justify targeted measures for Roma with reference to the long history of stigmatisation and discrimination and the requirement to build up trust between the institutions of the mainstream society and the Roma. But Roma are often very sceptical of public institutions and hesitate to ask for services or to apply for financial support. Therefore, despite anti-discrimination legislation, discrimination is still an issue in job applications and everyday life. Changing social relationships is a secular challenge requiring a proactive approach to build trust among Roma and non-Roma communities and public institutions. In the case of *Thara*, this was achieved by intercultural mediation, active involvement of community members and easier access to public institutions. Thus, several aspects of the *Thara* experience are innovative: not only the mediation between Roma and the institutions of the labour market as well as potential employers, but also the mediation among different groups and associations within the Roma community and their increased networking.

Indeed, there has been some success in raising awareness and changing behaviour of key stakeholders. Although Austrian welfare state actors usually defend mainstream approaches to welfare policies, *Thara* shows that they also recognise the value of having targeted measures as well. A clear indication of this is the fact that the Public Employment Service sends job seekers from the Roma community to *Thara* when they ask for support, since they have accumulated expertise. A long-term, more structural change of attitudes would, however, require the implementation of larger programmes instead of small projects funded on a year-to-year basis.

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment and participation were key issues in the first EQUAL project. Individual empowerment happened rather informally. A number of Roma women who work(ed) for *Thara* have even become leading actors in the community and started a career in delivering social services or raising awareness in the media. Individual empowerment in this case has contributed to creating a cognitive framework to handle the *problématique* of diversity and belonging. It has strengthened the pride in belonging to a special ethnic group as well as being a full member of the Austrian society. At the same time, it has not excluded personal choices to keep one's ethnic identity in private. To strike the balance between these diverging aspirations and life choices, the project actively integrated Roma associations and individual persons from the community.

In Austria, ethnic community funding is only provided for a small part of ethnic minorities, with rather limited resources (which, in addition, have

not been augmented in nominal terms for years). Projects such as *Thara*, that receive a relevant amount of publicity, can provide an essential contribution to framing discourses and fostering networking. The open governance model that was established in *Thara* has fostered in itself the collective empowerment of an ethnic community hitherto weakly organised, with hardly any relationship with the public administration.

### **Contributions to Social Cohesion**

It is assumed that social cohesion in Austria is obtained by providing universal services of high quality to all ethnic and social groups. Policy areas such as education, housing and health are allegedly open to the broad majority of the population, the key argument being that a well-functioning welfare state protects all citizens against social risks, thus making social targeting unnecessary. This is the justification of public bodies for being reluctant in implementing affirmative action for disadvantaged groups. There is a lack of experience as well as low intercultural diversity in existing personnel to target measures according to specific needs and contexts. The multidimensional approach used in *Thara* aims at tackling this weakness in administrative skills and public awareness. Proponents of *Thara* argue for proper support structures by Roma and non-Roma professionals to access public institutions, of which Roma are often frightened and thus try to avoid contacting as much as possible due to secular historic discrimination.

### **The *Tanoda* Initiatives in Hungary**

In Hungary, a *Tanoda*, meaning ‘after-school’ or ‘study hall’,<sup>2</sup> is a community space with its own independent infrastructure, typically operated by a non-governmental organisation, providing after-school services. But in the recent past, study halls operated by state schools have also been entitled to provide such services after compulsory classes. Study halls offer extra-curricular education tailored to each student to improve their skills and school performance. *Tanodas* mainly operate in disadvantaged areas and small settlements, as their target group consists predominantly of students aged 6 to 18 coming from low educated and poor families – many of them Roma.

The *Tanoda* movement in Hungary consists of bottom-up initiatives that involve a wide range of civil society actors and Roma organisations, in order to satisfy the basic needs of socially excluded children. The first *Tanoda* started in the early 1990s in Józsefváros, one of the poorest districts of Budapest with a significant Roma population. It was funded by

two foundations and later with EU resources. This pioneering study hall had to downsize its activities and eventually close down a couple of years ago, due to lack of funding.

In 2015 there were 189 *Tanodas* in Hungary, as they have become part of the national educational policy, and EU funds have also been allocated to expand the study hall system. They are very diverse in their aims, methods and current situations. Their origin, their institutionalisation, as well as their mainstreaming rely heavily on EU funding. A number of study halls collaborate under the informal umbrella organisation, *Tanodaplatform*, organised by educational experts and civil actors who all work in study halls and have several years of pedagogical and project management experience.

Study halls typically offer a set of services dealing with personal development in a holistic way. According to experts, poor school results have primarily been the outcome of poorly developed skills due to families' low socioeconomic status. Therefore, the study halls have intended to promote and develop basic competences holistically. However, these ambitious objectives often suffer from inadequate funding. In reality, activities are often concentrated on 'catching up' tutoring, i.e. on filling the gaps in basic school requirements. Study halls are envisioned to be innovative and autonomous professional workshops, independent of the public educational system. Ideally, the work is carried out by a 'self-help' local peer group, supported by teachers, social workers, parents and the local school, all working together democratically. The initiatives concentrate on disadvantaged and multiply disadvantaged pupils and students and on children of Roma origin, whose needs are inadequately met in the public education system.

The majority of the study halls we focused on do not work with full-time employees. In most cases, employees are on temporary contracts or work on a voluntary basis, which highlights that the most pressing problem is the lack of professional teachers due to funding deficiencies. Pedagogical approaches are diverse across study halls. In terms of the organisation of learning, pupils in general work in small groups, which makes it possible for them to get actively involved. But besides group work, individual tutoring is also widely used, and in some places this method is the most important teaching tool. There are even some tutors who practise traditional teaching methods, i.e. lecturing *ex cathedra*, although there is a systematic effort to use innovative pedagogical methods. In many study halls there is even an explicit mobilisation against traditional pedagogical practice. A group of study hall leaders have recognised that poor school results of children often derive from the incomplete acquisition of basic competences and so they strive to offer services that complement school education. Thus,

in these study halls an improvement of basic skills has become the most important pedagogical target – to provide long-lasting results and promote social cohesion.

### **Addressing Social Needs**

Study halls pursue three main goals in order to enhance social integration of vulnerable children via extracurricular education with a proper pedagogical approach: (1) providing catch-up activities and preparation for the secondary school graduation exam through a wide range of activities and pedagogical initiatives that conform to the needs of the broad target group; (2) to support the most disadvantaged students and pupils with the worst school results; and (3) to develop the talents of disadvantaged pupils in order to support their further training. All three goals address both general and individual-level social needs directly or indirectly, either in the short or the long term, thereby breaking the poverty cycle of vulnerable families.

Besides these immediate goals the after-school programmes also create an environment in which values of solidarity can thrive, along with a focus on the principles of democracy, equality and impartiality. In this respect, each initiative operates as a self-governing, informal institution serving social purposes: above all, they seek to ease educational disparities and the inadequacy of schools to provide opportunities for social mobility. Last but not least, study halls reduce the cost of social exclusion for the government.

### **Transforming Social Relationships (Building Trust)**

Study halls challenge the commodification of life chances and provide a complementary service to the official school system. By enabling children to access quality educational services, study halls contribute to the empowerment and sociopolitical mobilisation of socially excluded groups. Moreover, the principles of solidarity and equality practised in *Tanodas* can re-build and strengthen communities and enhance the process of integration of the entire community, both indirectly by spreading these values and directly by involving parents and families in some of the activities and programmes. Although small settlements are not always cohesive local communities, fragmentation can be tackled with community-focused initiatives such as the extracurricular programmes of study halls that cross the borders of generations, ethnicities and social groups.

At the institutional level, many study halls have established links with other educational bodies and have featured in the ESF-funded social renewal operational programmes since 2004. EU funds are directly

allocated to extend the *Tanoda* system, thereby building up a system of compensation for the lack of institutions in the mainstream school system that deals with the latter's deficiencies. While EU funds have made the *Tanoda* system possible, there are clear indications of passive subsidiarity due to a lack of funding by the Hungarian welfare state, as the aims and intended services of *Tanodas* do not totally correlate with the public school system.

### **Empowerment**

The main pedagogical aim of study halls is to develop the basic competences of children, assuming that poor school results are primarily due to the lack of numeracy, literacy and cognitive skills. Accordingly, innovative pedagogical tools have been developed, such as non-formal teaching methods, alternative evaluation techniques, the rewarding of pedagogical endeavour, and the provision of greater autonomy for children in how they want to learn.

Apart from an emphasis on individual development, study halls aim to improve communities and strive to establish heterogeneous spaces, so that study hall users can step out of its physical location and social boundaries. Also, study halls contribute to the empowerment of impoverished families by providing children with quality tutoring and extracurricular educational programmes.

Overall, however, empowerment is generally accomplished at the level of individual capacity development, whereas the projects' contribution to empowerment as collective emancipation is more limited.

### **Contributions to Social Cohesion**

Unequal opportunities for Roma people in Hungary derive from the lack of access to quality education due to segregation and exclusion, which hampers the development of their cognitive skills. *Tanodas'* social services, therefore, complement the mainstream educational system with an independent set of activities and idiosyncratic measuring and evaluation with long-term objectives. According to the interviewees, study halls recognise that the improvement of basic and broad competences is the most important goal that can provide long-lasting results and contribute to social cohesion. But remaining at the margin of the public education system, this long-term goal of empowerment has often been replaced with short-term concerns of direct tutoring in order to keep children's results at a level sufficient to pass the grades.

There is a deliberate effort at affirmative action to empower margin-

alised groups. These efforts are undertaken in a context-sensitive way, respecting local specificities and the diverse needs of different age, migratory background and socioeconomic deprivation categories. However, study halls are sometimes seen as segregated institutions where different social dynamics embroil low-performing and Roma students and exclude children with higher social status who might be equally in need of the study hall services. These dynamics then create a segregated environment where poor children do not meet either Roma or non-Roma children of other social status. These mechanisms exclude children who might need support but are not allowed in the study hall because of its stereotypical position in the community. As a result, study halls are sometimes seen as a place where 'the poorly performing Roma children go so they are not on the street', where even other Roma children cannot attend because of the low social status of such after-school programmes. If study halls are segregated through such social dynamics, then, it becomes questionable to think of the concept of integration at all in these settings. To sum it up, due to lack of public support, the limited extent of the system and burning short-term requirement does not permit study halls to attain the critical mass for large-scale social cohesion. Furthermore, they tend to deal inadequately with rural areas, where problems of social exclusion tend to be greater.

### 3. SYNTHESIS AND OUTLOOK

The two socially innovative initiatives presented in this chapter offer rich insights for fostering social cohesion in Europe, as they strike the balance between equality and diversity in a creative way. Neither *Tanodas* nor *Thara* question the existing welfare system. Both aim at improving its functioning by introducing adequate solutions to unanswered social needs of the Roma minorities emerging out of sociocultural discrimination. Thereby they aim at complementing universal service provisioning with affirmative action, but not at substituting existing services with more targeted ones. Yet they take on a role of compensating shortcomings in the traditional welfare regime, a situation the initiatives are not happy about.

First, we have looked into the socially innovative potential of these two initiatives in terms of empowering socially excluded groups. The *Thara* initiative responds to social needs by improving access to the labour market in a multidimensional way (by fostering education, self-esteem, social networks, etc.). *Tanodas* offer complementary educational services to improve equality in educational opportunities in a public school system that is significantly segregated. Both focus on individual capacity building and support the participants' pride in their ethnicity, while at the same time

fostering their perception of being a full member of the broader society. In both initiatives, social relations have been changed, and trust has been built between the Roma and the non-Roma communities and institutions. In these respects, they can both be considered as social innovation laboratories, experimenting with striking a balance between the respect for diversity and the rights and obligations of being part of a civic community.

Second, stakeholders in both *Thara* and *Tanodas* agree on the need for targeted national support measures for Roma, due to their long history of oppression, stigmatisation and discrimination. In Austria, however, there is fear among public authorities and funding institutions that stronger cultural identity as Roma – via the increase in non-German language skills and knowledge of Roma culture – might strengthen a culturally homogeneous ‘parallel society’. The same occurs in Hungary, where there is no political support for affirmative actions. Therefore, the study halls initiatives have remained entirely dependent on EU funding and several *Tanodas* have had to close down or curtail their activities due to irregular funding.

Third, *Thara* and *Tanodas* are initiatives dealing with the special needs of a disadvantaged segment of the population, aiming at fostering social cohesion as the capacity to ‘live together differently’ (Novy et al., 2012, p.1874). But they focus on awareness raising and individual capacity development to increase employability and to empower the target group individually.

Third, a key insight from *Thara* and *Tanodas* is that achieving social cohesion goes well beyond easing the material deprivation of poor households. Social cohesion is attained when a society is able to tackle the tensions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. Promoting empowerment as collective emancipation in the sense of sociopolitical mobilisation would imply problematising the ‘insider–outsider’ dichotomy and would allow a focus on the necessary institutional and structural changes in favour of ‘insiders’ as well as ‘outsiders’. ‘We Europeans’ have witnessed the recent erosion of the huge civilisational progress of welfare institutions after World War II due to neo-liberalisation (Judt, 2010; Streeck, 2013), a process very remote from the problems and possibilities related to intercultural conviviality. Increased social insecurity persists with and without scapegoats. It is a key sociocultural challenge to overcome the perception of the ‘outsider’ as potentially problematic: how to live together differently in a continent which has always been a melting pot of cultures and peoples? What are the common norms, laws and rules to be obeyed by all; and how to organise a governance system so that all inhabitants ‘have the opportunity to be different and yet be able to live together’ (Novy et al., 2012, p.1874)?

Finally, collective empowerment in the sense of sociopolitical mobilisa-

tion capable of triggering lasting societal transformations has never been on the agenda. This has limited the scope of the achievements of these two initiatives. In both countries, social services specifically targeted at Roma, by social workers, pedagogues and other professionals, are constantly under threat due to political pressure. Two factors are of prime importance – austerity and increasing xenophobia.

Austerity – strongly supported by the European Commission – has long undermined solidarity in Europe, up to becoming a real threat to European integration. In a context of welfare state retrenchment the complementary potential of *Thara* and *Tanoda* – and especially their innovative aspects in terms of multidimensionality – cannot be fully realised. As long as there is increasing pressure on socially innovative initiatives to compensate in a short-term logic for weaknesses of welfare regimes, there are limited resources available to focus on exploring their full potential for social cohesion.

Institutionalising social cohesion would require affirmative action and a firm political commitment to increasing the capabilities of the Roma population. As the current refugee crisis shows, to tackle this challenge constructively will be of crucial importance for the future of European societies, which have become increasingly intercultural. Unfortunately, it seems as if the current crisis is reinforcing path dependencies, thereby deepening secular deficiencies and reinforcing essentialist concepts of identity, ethnic homogeneity and enforced assimilation. Not even the arguments by economists – especially in Germany and Austria – who insist on the long-term beneficial effects of immigration in general and the current refugees in particular (Aiyar et al., 2016), seem to influence a diversity-adverse attitude. A young immigrant population could be an asset and an opportunity, if the political framework is well structured. But the public debate – dominated by mass media and right-wing discourses – reinforces a ‘fortress Europe’ perspective, spurring ethnic-cultural cleavages. Avoiding ‘parallel societies’ at all costs leads to an embrace of assimilationist policies, which have long been discredited in pedagogy as well as policy-making. All this blatantly contradicts the aspiration of ‘unity in diversity’. Given a clear political commitment, the multidimensional and long-term support for ethnic minorities could have become a decisive investment in building a Europe ‘united in diversity’. The many initiatives of empowering Roma, which have been supported by the European Commission over recent years, had exactly these intentions. The Commission promoted laboratories like the ones we have presented. Although the current political climate is most adverse, these initiatives contain long-term lessons for social cohesion by bridging communities and building trust. But when will they be learned?



## NOTES

1. *Thara* and *Tanodas* are two of 31 case studies conducted in the context of the research project *ImPRovE – Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation* ([www.improve-research.eu](http://www.improve-research.eu)) funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Union. Individual case study reports can be found at: [http://improve-research.eu/?page\\_id=170](http://improve-research.eu/?page_id=170). The comparison of the *Thara* and *Tanodas* cases was developed in the context of the COST Action IS1102 *SO.S. COHESION – Social services, welfare states and places*.
2. The terms ‘Tanoda’, ‘study hall’ and ‘after-school programme’ are used interchangeably in the remainder of the chapter.

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