

Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, Groningen

Missional Communities Master in depth track

MASTER THESIS



TRANSFORMATION BY FAITH

Community Development as diaconia practice among Roma people,
by Roma Christians in Hungary

Kinga Lakatos

Budapest, 16 August, 2024

Supervisor: Dr. Erica Meijers

Examinator: Prof. dr. Dorottya Nagy

Acknowledgments

Intellectual work seems to be an individual accomplishment, but it is anything but.

I am indescribably grateful:

To Erica Meijers, for her great expertise, insight and patience, for the eye-opening literatures and for the “ADHD friendly” supervision.

To the members of my Community (Chemin Neuf Community) for making my studies at the PThU possible and for the support along the way.

To Eszter Dani for showing me how to be a pioneer, for calling me to work in the Together for one another program six years ago and for her friendship and encouragement.

To my Roma brothers and sisters (for the sake of data protection I don't use their names) for their faith and ministry, for welcoming me with open arms and sharing with me their experiences and expertise, joys and struggles, for allowing me to learn from them and for giving me endless hope.

To Márta Bolba, for welcoming me in the Mandák House to be able to finish the writing process, for our evening walks and shared meals, for our long discussions about social and church issues.

To my sisters Lilla and Noémi, who never let me down and checked upon me randomly but regularly during the writing process. Their support was priceless.

To Evelien Vermeulen-Smidt, for her friendship and for giving me new insights by her expertise in empirical research.

To Réka Juhász, for correcting my English from the U.S. with great care and flexibility.

To my brother Bálint for the technical support.

To all my family members, friends, colleagues and the staff of the PThU for their encouragements.

And last but not least to God, for showing me through this process, that “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9)

Table of contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1. The background of the study	4
1.2. Research question and Subquestions	6
1.3. Academic, Social and Ecclesial goals	7
1.4. Core concepts and vocabulary	7
Roma (gypsy)	7
Community Development	8
Transformative Diaconia	8
Exclusion and poverty as context	9
Faith-based practice	9
1.5. Methodology and positionality	9
1.5.1. Methodology	9
1.5.2. Positionality	11
1.6. The structure of the study and the methods applied in the different chapters	12
2. The context of the study, which defines the work of Christian Roma practitioners	13
2.1. Introduction	13
2.2. The definition of exclusion and poverty	13
2.3. Roma communities in Hungary	16
2.3.1. The number of Roma minority and the spatial distribution of Roma communities	16
2.3.2. Social, economic and educational circumstances	18
2.3.3. Language, culture	20
2.3.4. The belief system of the Roma	23
Conclusion	26
2.4. Roma and Roma ministry in the Reformed Church in Hungary	26
2.4.1. The Roma in Christian denominations and in the RCH	26
2.4.2. Roma and Roma ministry in the Reformed Church in Hungary	29
2.5. Conclusion	31
3. Theological understanding of Community Development as transformative diaconia practice	32
3.1. Introduction	32
3.2. Diaconia as agent of transformation	32
3.2.1. Introduction	32
3.2.2. Transformative diaconia	33
3.2.3. Community Development as transformative diaconia practice	36
3.3 Conclusion	40

4. Presentation of results of the empirical research	40
4.1. Introduction	41
4.2. The local context of the interviewees ministry and the result of the empirical research	41
The ministry of Peter and Martha	42
The ministry of Simon and Anna	47
The ministry of David	50
The ministry of Elisabeth	54
The ministry of John	58
4.3. Conclusion	61
5. The results of the empirical research in the light of the contextual and theoretical framework	62
5.1. Introduction	62
5.2. The results of the empirical research in the light of the contextual and theoretical framework	63
5.2.1. ABCD methodology	63
5.2.2. Transformative aspects	63
5.3. Conclusion	68
6. Conclusion	68
Bibliography	71

1. Introduction

1.1. The background of the study

“The first time in my life, I felt that I’m a human being and I have dignity” said a middle age Roma man, after a catholic mass held by the local bishop for Roma people to celebrate their culture and their presence in Hungary.

The Roma minority is the is the largest one in Hungary (9% of the society) and their presence date back to the early 15th century (Strategy of the ministry among Roma, 2013). Despite the fact that these ethnic groups have been part of the country's population for such a long time their social inclusion is still very problematic (although during the forty years of socialism—the forced assimilation through work improved the situation temporarily). Their social and economic situation is very precarious, most of them live on social benefits which is not enough to lead a decent life.¹

The Reformed Church of Hungary (RCH) operates on three different levels of diaconia: community-based (in the sense of congregation-based), institutional, and international aid. Generally speaking, on all levels the main goal is to provide services of care, support, financial aid and access to education for different vulnerable groups of the society (persons with disabilities, the elderly, persons with mental illness and addictions, socially isolated, disadvantaged and/or discriminated persons and children, etc.)² as well as be a contracting agent for certain public services.

However, the situation of the Roma minority shows that traditional and institutional diaconal services are not efficient when it’s about the deep running division in Hungarian society. In this context of acute poverty and exclusion the question of social and structural transformation is crucial because welfare and charity programs provide no social cohesion and create dependency from the social care system maintaining the poverty cycle.

The local RCH congregation could play an important role in this situation, not only because often the Church is one of the biggest social and educational service providers, but first and foremost

1 “The predominantly Roma areas are the most disadvantaged, both economically and socially. They have the poorest employment indicators, the highest unemployment rates, the highest number of families living in rough housing, the lowest levels of education and the highest rates of violent and violent crime. According to a 2010 survey, 27% of the Roma population aged 16-64 are only working, 15% are retired, and 55% of Roma households in the country have no family members in permanent employment. This means that the life expectancy of Gypsies in Hungary is at least ten years lower than that of the Hungarian population as a whole. The settlements with the worst indicators, where the proportion of Gypsies is particularly high, are most concentrated in North-Eastern Hungary and Southern Transdanubia, where the presence of the Reformed Church is also high compared to the national proportions.”

Strategy of the ministry among Roma “Reconciliation-health-hope: Concept of the Reformed Church in Hungary’s ministry among Roma”, 2013, 3.

2 More information on the structure of the diaconal ministry of the RHC and its different work units: <https://reformatus.hu/english/church-and-society/diaconia/>

because often the Church is the only presence in deprived settlements to create some social interactions and spiritual life. The question is however, how and with which methods, in order to generate sustainable change that build on the local communities' own resources (including the Romas) and not only provide short-term charity programs?

Transformative diaconia offers a theological understanding to be able to reframe the call and the task of the Church in context of poverty and exclusion. It is rooted in the liberation theology, which is a changing of paradigm in the diaconal and missiological thinking from the 1970s: according to the rereading of the Gospel, the poor were not seen any more as target groups of diaconia and mission, but active participants in the enfolding reality of the Kingdom of God on earth. God has a "preferential option of the poor"³, who are called to be in the centre of the Church and not on the margins. Community Development (CD in the following) is one possible method, how concretely these values of the Kingdom can be promoted in the life of a local congregation. In consequence, in this study I will use CD as transformative diaconia practice as theoretical framework.

As a response to this reality and need, in 2018 the RCH launched a pilot project to train Roma and not Roma parish workers and even pastors together according to the vision and methodology of Community Development (CD in the following). The name of the project was *Together for one-another*⁴. It was a pioneer project proposed by the nationwide Roma Ministry of the RCH to help local congregations in highly-concentrated Roma minority regions that are looking for new ways to interact with local and Roma communities. CD is an approach focused on neighbourly relationships and not on charity programs or events. It is the way how:

"The local church responds both spiritually and practically to people living in areas of high deprivation and poverty." (Meijers, Roy, 2021, 259)

This approach builds on the assets and resources of local community members, especially ones who are often excluded, vulnerable, and mostly the recipients of charity and hand-out programs. They become partners, designers, and owners of the CD process which aims to strengthen the cohesion and activity of the local community and improve social coexistence by developing self-organisational skills. This CD process can reduce inter-ethnic tensions and the transmission of the poverty circle and exclusion.

The Christian Roma volunteers and leaders play a key role in these local development processes not only as gate-keepers in the Roma community, but first and foremost as role-models and witnesses. They are living examples of their faith and actions often living in the same precarious circumstances as the people whom they serve.

3 This expression was first used by Pedro Arupe SJ., and then it was popularized by liberation theologian as Gustavo Gutierrez or Jon Sobrino. Pope John Paul II., used it also in the Codependium of the social doctrine of the Church, *Vatican*, (June 29, 2004)

4 "Reconciliation-health-hope: Concept of the Reformed Church in Hungary's ministry among Romas", 2013, https://ciganymisszio.reformatus.hu/documents/951/Az_MRE_ciganymissziós_koncepciója_V8f2n6l.pdf

As I participated in this above-mentioned training program as Community Development trainer, I had a chance to get to know many Roma Christian practitioners from different parishes and settlements.

As I got to know their everyday reality (which is tainted by poverty and exclusion), worked and prayed with them and saw their devotion the following questions arose in me:

How do they find the strength to act? From what source do they draw courage to stand up for change for themselves and for their communities? How do they experience transformation at a personal level in their relationship with God and how is this related to their engagement for social change?

With these questions I am addressing the underlying problem linked with the quote of the Roma man in the beginning of the introduction: How can participants of a CD process personally experience their own dignity, worth, and to be loved? How are these experiences connected with their engagement for social transformation? What kind of spirituality impacts CD in order to transform their lives and that of their local community?

My hypothesis is that these spiritual and emotional experiences are the conditions of a deep and lasting transformation first at a personal and consequently on a social level. These experiences are as important as the improvements of their housing, economic, and educational status.

In this study I want to give a voice to the experiences of Roma Christian CD practitioners and explore their understanding of what role Christian faith plays when it's about (personal and social) transformation. Based on interviews and the findings of the literature on transformative diaconia I will develop a theological understanding about the possible role of faith while serving in a context of exclusion and poverty with Roma communities through CD processes in the RCH.

The empirical research—which is the backbone of this study—is conducted with former participants of the above-mentioned training program. I have chosen this route as CD practices can wildly differ and by selecting former participants, I was able to ensure some form of learned methodology as a basis for the study.

1.2. Research question and Subquestions

How do Roma Christian practitioners engaged in Community Development as transformative diaconia (in a context of exclusion and poverty) understand their practices as faith-based?

1. How does the context of exclusion and poverty influence the work of Christian Roma practitioners?
2. How can Community Development as a transformative diaconal practice be interpreted from a theological perspective?

3. Which CD methods are used by the Christian Roma practitioners, which Christian values, concepts, narratives, images, biblical stories, etc. drive their work?

1.3. Academic, Social and Ecclesial goals

Academic goals

First and foremost, I aim to contribute to the theological understanding of Community Development as a practice of diaconia by listening to voices of the Hungarian Roma Christians about their faith and social engagement as they are rarely heard in this academic field.

Second, with the modest scale of this study I would like to add the Hungarian context to the international experiences, practices, and reflections on Community Development as a possible diaconal approach regarding poverty.

Social and ecclesial goals

First, I want to show the possible impact and importance of the spiritual aspect of the CD process. While CD is understood as a holistic approach, the spiritual dimension is often neglected in the process. I want to highlight the possible role and responsibility of the churches while engaging in transformative diaconia.

Second, in the context of the Reformed Church of Hungary I aim to encourage and inspire local churches and communities to rethink their diaconal concepts and practices in order to place the marginalised in the center. Instead of charity projects and the patronising approach of helper-helped imbalance, I suggest to transform them with partnerships based on the resources and assets of the local (Roma) community.

Third, I aspire to use these findings and the literature to further develop curriculums for CD trainings and practices in the RCH.

1.4. Core concepts and vocabulary

Roma (gypsy)

Both terms will be used in this study as interchangeable terms, because Roma people often call themselves gypsy (also in the interviews) and the term is also used in the academic field in Hungary. Although Roma seems as a more politically correct expression.⁵ As they have no country of their own Roma are considered an ethnic minority (with several sub-groups). They live all over the world but mostly in Europe (more precisely in Eastern and Central Europe). They possibly

⁵ In everyday life, in Hungary both terms can be used (and is used) in a pejorative as well as in a respectful way, it depends on the context.

originate from India, according to most scholars studying linguistic markers in the Romani language (Balogh, 2015). In Hungary they live settled and not as travelers. As they are Hungarians by nationality—to distinguish the Roma minority Hungarians from the Hungarian majority I will use the terms Roma and non-Roma. I recognize it is a contentious choice of term since the Hungarian majority do not define their identity in relation to the Roma—or by who they are not. Yet, for the sake of clarity and to avoid linguistic discrimination against the Roma I choose this expression.⁶

Community Development

According to the typology of CD approaches by Tony Addy (Addy, 2022) there are diverse understandings of what CD is. It is a very context-related practice and has different possible approaches to the idea of power.

In this study I will refer to CD as “Asset-based Community Development (ABCD)”:

This long-term process engages the CD worker to promote the participation and self-determination of local people. By that they will be able to analyse their own situation and problems; express their own needs; map and mobilize their own assets; work and carry out an action plan in order to better their situation. In this sense the outcome of the process is determined by the local actors and not by the CD worker or the sponsoring organisation (Addy, 2022).

This is the approach that the interviewees in this study learned during the above mentioned *Together for one-another* training however the local application and the practitioners’ personal definition of the approach (as we will see later) can differ from it.

Transformative Diaconia

To place CD practice in a diaconal framework I use transformative diaconia as an umbrella term that includes methodological guidelines, theological reflections, and practices.

There are different terms to express the change of paradigm in diaconal ministry: prophetic, empowering, comprehensive, liberative diaconia—all of which aim for individual, social, political, and economic transformation. Transformative diaconia was first conceptualised by Carlos Ham (Ham, 2014), as the recent model of diaconia, next to the charity and the reciprocity model.

Transformative diaconia is rooted in liberation theology. Its core concept is that marginalised people do not need to be lifted up or helped, rather included in society and viewed as the centre of the community (Dietrich, 2022, 99). In this sense:

“Salvation is not just an eternal issue to comfort people with hope for a better life after death, but rather a motivation to fight for a better life now, including the fight for justice and oppression. Jesus

6 There is a pun, invented by the Roma poet Tamás Jónás to break up the juxtaposition between the expressions “Roma” and “Hungarian”. He invented the term Romagyar that means Roma+magyar (magyar means Hungarian). This is a poetic solution to express that Roma are both Roma and Hungarians. In this sense there are the Romagyar (Hungarians who are Roma) and the magyar (Hungarians) which are almost the same words. However this term is not in use. <https://dokk.hu/versek/olvas.php?id=29119>

is seen as the eternal liberator and as the one who encourages the oppressed to fight for liberation and oppression.”

The biblical foundation of transformative diaconia is in the social criticism of the prophetic tradition in the Old Testament. Additionally, it is also in Jesus’ mission—who not only preached the Gospel—but walked and lived with the poor and by doing so he turned social and religious norms upside down.

Even if in the Hungarian context we can’t speak about a paradigm change in diaconia compared to western countries, I will apply this term in my study as it suits the best to understand the theological vision of the emerging practices: prophetic, contextual, empowering, convivial, holistic, advocacy promoting, relational.

Exclusion and poverty as context

Defining exclusion and poverty is a complex enterprise. These concepts are close to each other but cover different realities.

Under marginalisation or exclusion (hereinafter exclusion) I define exclusion as social discrimination depriving various groups from participating and the decision-making processes of society based on Nissen’s work (Nissen, 2014).

To define poverty, I rely on Meyers’ (Meyers, 2011) comprehensive analysis and in particular Jayakumar Christian’s multidimensional system. Christian and Meyers (Meyers, 2011) define poverty as a disempowering system that held the poor captive that operates on different levels: personal, biophysical, cultural, social, and spiritual.

Their understanding of poverty is context-related. The reality of the Hungarian political system and the socio-economic circumstances of the Roma that lead to powerlessness will be discussed in the second chapter of this study.

Faith-based practice

Under faith-based practice I understand every diaconia related activities and services which is driven by the faith of the practitioners and what they understand as their mission from God (as the practitioners formulate it themselves). In the context of this study faith based is understood as Christian faith based.

1.5. Methodology and positionality

1.5.1. Methodology

It’s important to note that there are no particular studies, research or theological reflections about CD as faith-based practice in Hungary as it is not a widespread diaconal practice or vision in the RCH. It is not widely known and practiced in society/social work either. Even less material is to be found about how it could make a transformational impact in the context of acute poverty.

I will use transformative diaconia as theoretical and theological framework mainly because the Roma issue in Hungary is viewed as a poverty issue (this question will be developed in detail in chapter two). Currently, the Roma Ministry belongs to the department of diaconia as part of the RCH. It was formerly part of the Mission Office. This transition requires a theological reframing to re-evaluate and further develop the holistic, congregation based, and CD oriented profile of this ministry.

I will use literature analysis and empirical research to answer my questions (a more detailed presentation on my methods can be found in the end of this chapter).

As empirical research I conducted semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016) with Christian Roma practitioners who are engaged in local CD processes. I chose to interview only Roma practitioners in order to let them speak for themselves. As previously mentioned, the essential approach of transformative diaconia (and of CD as well) is one where the poor and excluded people are not the object of the mission and recipient of charity programs, but are the actors, partners, and owners of it. By interviewing them I intended to place their experiences in the centre, which is in line with the transformative diaconia's understanding of the church. A church can only be considered self-identical when it redefines itself in its relationship with the marginalised by putting them at the centre (Dietrich, 2022).

As my researched context is the RCH, the interviewees are Roma Christians who are engaged members of the RCH. I have interviewed seven people from four different settlements in the Eastern part of the country where the concentration of the Roma population is high and the presence of the RCH is dominant, with the exception of one interview that was conducted in the middle of Hungary.

The interviewees are four males and three females practitioners. I made this choice to also give the opportunity to Roma women to share their experiences even though it is customary for the men to take the leading/talking role in the Roma culture. As I mentioned they are former participants of the *Together for one another* training program where I taught CD. After they finished the training, they stayed connected with each other and with the Roma Ministry of the RCH as it organises different nationwide gatherings and supports various local Roma Ministry initiatives (not just CD related ones). There are also two, yearly meetings for the former participants of the *Together for one another* training to network and exchange experiences and best practices. From my perspective there is no expectation that they follow the learned methodology (ABCD). It will emerge from the interviews how they understand CD and how far it can be categorised as such according to the theoretical framework.

The interview questions are about the elements and experiences of their faith that led them to be engaged in CD (motivation, the important elements of their faith etc...) and how these elements and experiences emerge in their CD practices.

I use in the study practice and ministry as equivalent terms, because as we will see in the interviews, they understand their work as ministry, a mission entrusted them by God.

To code the data, I will use a mixed method of inductive and deductive coding. The main themes are determined by the research questions (deductive) but how these themes take on meaning will emerge from the interviews (inductive).

To analyse the transformative elements of the CD practices, how these practitioners understand their work as faith-based, and to understand how the context of poverty and exclusion affects CD—I will compare the findings of the interviews with the theoretical framework of transformative diaconia and the context of Roma communities in Hungary and in the RCH.

For the sake of the English translation, I will use the intelligent transcription of the interviews. I reserve the right to alter sections to be grammatically correct without changing the intentions of the words of the interviewees.

1.5.2. Positionality

As a researcher I find myself in different intersections.

First, my first master degree is in Social Work specialised in CD and empowerment. I also work part-time as CD trainer for the *Together for one another* program of the Nationwide Roma Ministry of the RCH specifically tailored to parish assistants in the RCH.

My current master's study and research allows me to approach the CD methods from a theological viewpoint focusing on diaconal and missiological concepts.

This position provides me with exhaustive knowledge about CD as a different social work practice. CD is rare in Hungary in the context of the RCH. It's often confused with church building or development of the congregation as community.

This study allows me to merge social science and the theological approach of CD in order to enrich my reflections on what holistic development is.

Second, I'm a Hungarian white woman from a middle-class Christian family. I'm not part of the Roma minority. However, for the last 15 years I've been a member of a religious community—the Chemin Neuf Community⁷—which is originally a French Roman Catholic Community with a call to work and pray for unity among Christian denominations and reconciliation among the nations. As a Hungarian and protestant woman I find myself in a strong minority position (cultural, denominational, gender, and linguistic) in the Chemin Neuf community.

7 More about the Chemin Neuf Community in English:
<https://www.chemin-neuf.org.uk/about-us/history-of-the-community/>

My Chemin Neuf community has helped me to reflect on the questions and difficulties of minorities while making me more aware and sensitive to this reality. Yet it still doesn't mean that I can identify with the Roma minority in Hungary.

As a researcher, I can use my experience as a minority to understand the experiences of the Roma Christian practitioners better but at the same time I aim to keep a critical distance from my own experiences to analyse the findings of the interviews in their own rights.

Third, the interviewees are all graduates of the *Together for one another* training program. I have taught them so they have familiarity with me. This very interactive training is partly based on the methods of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy where the teacher is not the ultimate source of authority and knowledge. In theological terms, everyone was considered a priest, prophet and king, with his/her own authority, and knowledge and relationship with God. As a consequence, we were all equally teachers and learners. Even though we developed a primary relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ still I had the authority of a teacher.

On one hand this may facilitate a trustful and convivial atmosphere for the interviews, however I recognize that it may have impacted the degree to which the interviewees tried to give good answers to CD related questions.

My prior relationship with them may have also influenced how the nature of my visit was viewed. Is it a pastoral or sisterly visit with an interview on the side or is it a meeting focused solely on the interview? The findings can also be affected by the visit as it is not just about the interview, but also a time to exchange and share about what happened in the last months, pray together, etc. This brings into question how much they will share in the recorded official interviews versus how much is shared outside of the interviews during the convivial time together. Both could be relevant for the research. As previously stated, with the permission of the interviewees I will use all parts of these conversations, as well as my observations on the field, as long as they are relevant to this study.

A final note on the topic of the research itself—it was partly born out of our training experiences therefore I aim to use the results in some form in my future work.

1.6. The structure of the study and the methods applied in the different chapters

After the introduction in Chapter 2., I will briefly outline the context of the research which is the circumstances of minority in Hungary and in the RCH. For this I will develop first the definition of poverty and exclusion as theoretical framework, then I will use literature and the results of different researches and surveys, as well as quotations from the interviews which I conducted for the present study. By this I will answer the first sub question of my research questions.

To place CD in a theological framework I will develop a theoretical and theological approach based on literature on diaconia in chapter three, by this I will answer the second sub question of my research.

In Chapter 4., once the contextual and theological bases are established, I will present the results of the empirical research, by this answering the third sub question of my research. In this chapter I will lend as much space as possible to the actual words of the practitioners.

I will interpret these results in the light of the contextual part and the theological framework in Chapter 5., which brings all the elements together to be able to answer the main research question.

The concluding chapter contains closing arguments related to the main research question and to the hypothesis of my research and further recommendations for possible development of this subject.

2. The context of the study, which defines the work of Christian Roma practitioners

2.1. Introduction

How are Roma living in Hungary? What does it mean for them to live in exclusion and poverty? In the first sub-chapter I will develop a more exhaustive definition of poverty and exclusion to give a theoretical framework to understand the contextual part of this chapter. Since the focus of my study is on CD processes carried out by Roma Christians in settlements with a large Roma minority—in the second part of this chapter I will outline a general overview of the characteristics and circumstances of Roma communities in Hungary. In the third sub-chapter I will present the Roma ministry in the RCH in a measure that its relevant for the scope of this paper. By this we will gain a greater understanding of how the social and ecclesial context influence the work and the chosen methods of these practitioners. This overview will be used in the fifth chapter as well, as contextual framework to interpret the results of the empirical research. This sub-chapter answers the first sub-question of my research question.

2.2. The definition of exclusion and poverty

Defining exclusion and poverty is a complex enterprise. These concepts are close to each other but cover different realities.

Under marginalisation or exclusion (hereinafter exclusion) I define exclusion as social discrimination depriving various groups from participating and the decision-making processes of society based on Nissen's work (Nissen, 2014).

To define poverty, I rely on Meyers' (Meyers, 2011) comprehensive analysis and in particular Jayakumar Christian's multidimensional system as it is visualised in this image:

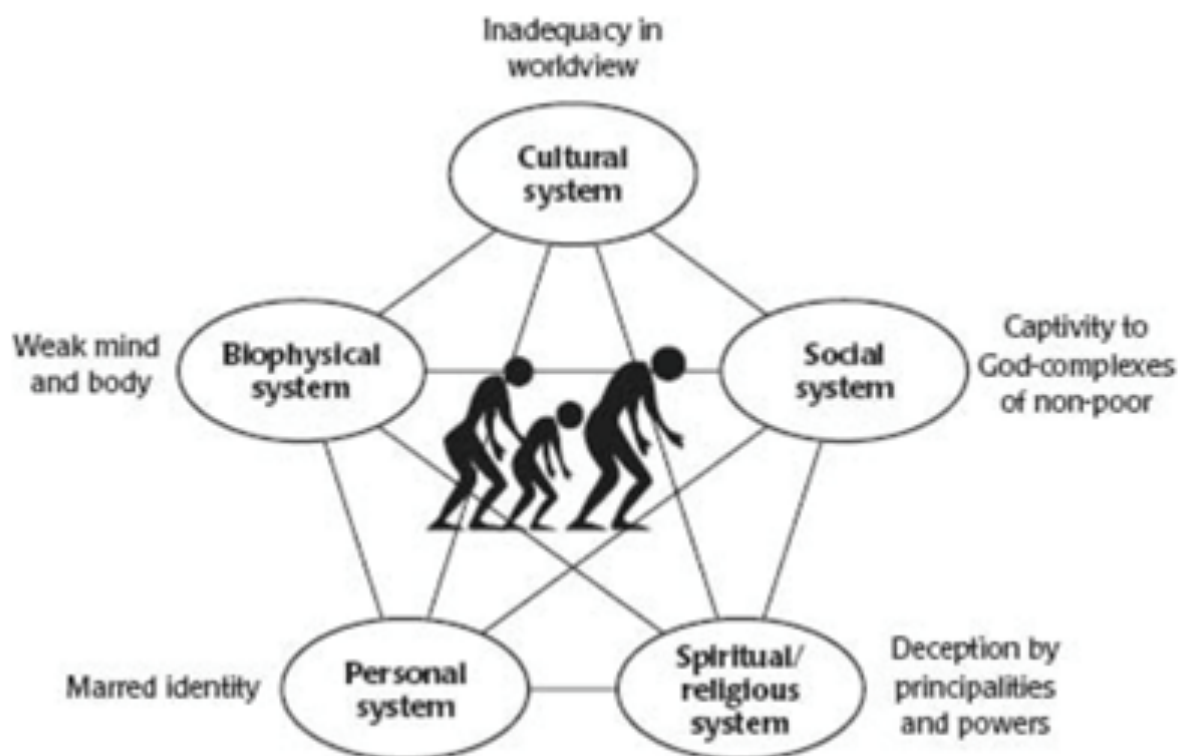


Figure 1. Poverty as disempowering system (Meyers, 2011, Kindle edition)

Christian and Meyers (Meyers 2011) define poverty as a disempowering system that holds the poor captive that operates on different levels: personal, biophysical, cultural, social, and spiritual. This system is a web of different subsystems which operates on different levels:

The personal system is understood as a marred identity of the poor—it is marked by trans-generational and life-long suffering, exclusion, and deception. The poor have internalised how the outside world views them: that they have nothing to offer and they are a burden and problem for society. This leads to a sense of identity loss and purpose for what they were created.

Poor people believe that they have no value, they are non-existent and they can't contribute in any positive way to the life of a community. The result of the marred identity is that poor people believe that they lack the freedom to act and work towards change.

The biophysical system contains the limitation of power and freedom to act due to malnutrition, chronic, or not well treated chronic illnesses, and lack of education. This system makes the poor vulnerable toward inadequate worldviews and the God-complexes of the non-poor (further explained in the next paragraph).

The social system is described as a captivity of the poor to the God-complexes of non-poor. This means that social systems that excludes and exploits the poor are rooted in the position of the non-poor, who place themselves superior, essential, and entitled to rule. The non-poor have the intention to keep the power imbalance, the status quo, and their privileged position as is. For this they use all means possible: religious systems, bureaucracy, law, mass media, narratives, structures, etc.

The cultural system that Christian (Meyers, 2011) calls *inadequacy in worldview* also maintains the powerlessness of the poor. He points out that, for example, the idea of *karma* in the Hindu culture reinforces the stigmatisation of the poor (they are in their situation as a result of their sins from their previous lives). But Christian also states that every culture have beliefs that support disempowerment, resistance to change, and justify unjust treatment of certain people.

There is a multilevel and interactive system that holds the poor captive. On the micro-level are typically the landowners, business owners, local police, and the local religious leaders. This micro-level is linked with the macro-level of disempowerment, which are the regional, political, economic, and juridical leaders. Both are embedded in a third, international or global system, that is tempted to play God in the life of the poor from the distance (transnational corporations, international financial institutions, etc.). And finally, on a cosmic level, Christian adds the reality of spiritual powers and principalities who are rebelling against God and His plans for humanity through deception.

The spiritual/religious system of disempowerment is described by Christian as deception by principalities and powers. The expression of this deception is the social system as pictured here above (Figure 1). Behind this system is the ruler of the world (John 12:31) who is also a liar and the father of lies (John 8: 44) and who is the Evil who works against life.

It is the Evil who says to the poor through all these systems that they have no place in the world and are forsaken by God. In the context of the Roma, the Evil makes them think "It's God's curse that He created us as gypsies." (This is a frequently reoccurring statement I have observed that they say.)

This understanding of poverty is very context-related so in the next subchapter I will take into consideration the reality of the Hungarian social and political system, specific elements of the Roma cultures, and the socio-economic situation of the Roma to understand in which ways these circumstances lead to powerlessness.

2.3. Roma communities in Hungary

Since the 14th century Roma people had a special status in the Hungarian society—they were considered outsiders but useful ones. There were multiple attempts to categorize them (as they don't have a homogeneous culture or language) and assimilate them but they have remained in a marginalized and controlled position. By the end of the 19th century, they have already lived a settled lifestyle in Hungary contrary to the still prevailing Western European idea that the Roma are traveling/migratory/nomadic people.

The Roma are categorised as an ethnic minority and not as a national minority—therefore they don't have an original nationality or religion.

2.3.1. The number of Roma minority and the spatial distribution of Roma communities

According to census (Census 2011, 2022), there were 308 thousand Roma in 2011 (approx. 3% of the population) in Hungary and this number decreased to 210 thousand in 2022 (approx. 2% of the population). The survey method used was self-identification and the question was not obligatory to respond to in either case. In 2022 there was an option to choose two nationalities (Hungarian and Roma, for example).

However, numbers based on research which used hetero-identification⁸ methods for example, research conducted by the University of Debrecen (UD) in 2010-2013 found that this number is much higher, approximately 867 thousand in 2011⁹ (9% of the population). This highlights that the 2022 census results were not representative of the real Roma population.

The census results are indicative of a tendency that Roma people are less likely to disclose their origin and ethnical-identity. It can be related to discrimination and negative views of Roma in Hungarian society which we will discuss in the following sub chapters. Since the real number of the Roma minority is much closer to the number identified by hetero-identification, I will use the results of the UD research as a reference.

The Roma population lives mostly in the country side mainly in small villages or in some major villages on the eastern, northeastern, and southwest part of Hungary near to the borders.

Over the last four decades we have seen an increasing number of Roma move to cities and to Budapest. Despite the increasing number of Roma population this *migration rate* is still proportionally lower than the general Hungarian population.

8 “The issue of who is Gypsy was approached from practice point of view by the survey of the UD in 2010–2013 using the modified version of the definition of Kemény. Those are Gypsies who are regarded Gypsy by their neighbourhood (Roma or non-Roma) on the basis of certain criteria (way of life, lifestyle and anthropological characteristics) and experience of living together.”
János Péntzes, István Zoltán Pásztor, Patrik Tátrai, Tibor Kóti, 2019, 142

9 “The survey of the UD in 2010–2013 estimated the number of Roma people to 867 thousand people (Péntzes & Pásztor, 2014) while the census in 2011 – according to the data of auto-identification – published a Roma population of 316 thousand people.”
János Péntzes, István Zoltán Pásztor, Patrik Tátrai, Tibor Kóti, 2019, 144

Due to the urbanisation of the Hungarian population (caused by better education, employment, and housing possibilities) and the growing Roma population in several rural regions the proportion of the Roma populations is higher (15-100%) than the ratio of the Roma minority in the general population.

We can also observe that the Roma minorities are settled country-wide, but more intensively on the peripheral and border regions.

The ratio of Roma population in Hungarian districts by the UD (2010-2013) survey and the places where the empirical research of this study was made. The ratios figure in %.

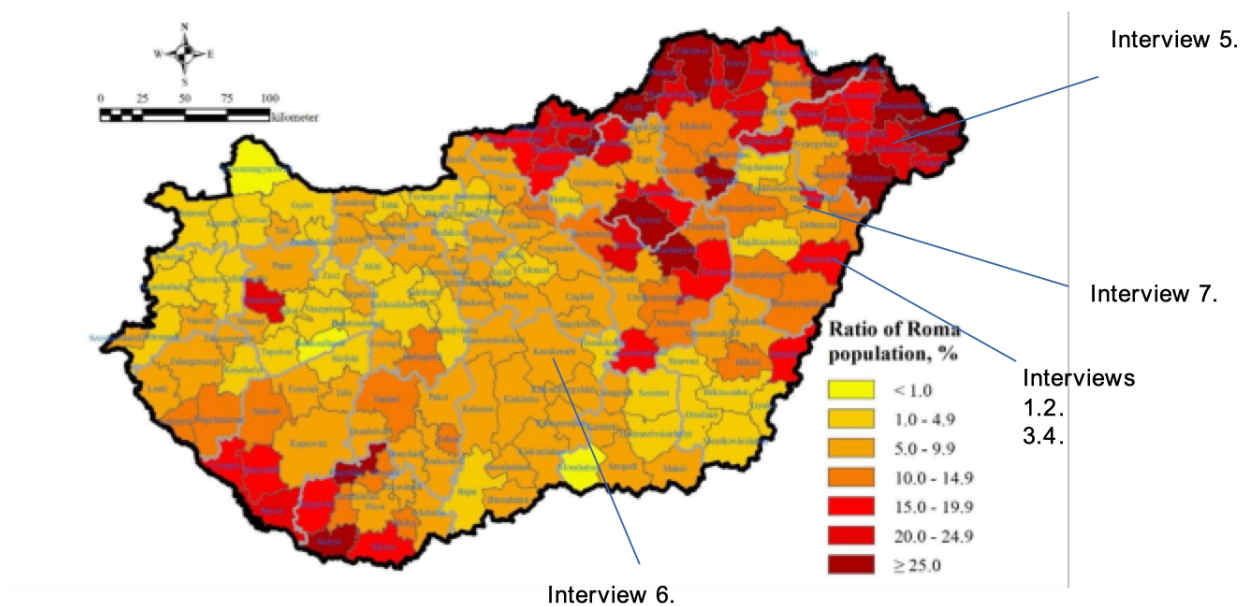


Figure 2. Ratio of Roma population

(János Péntzes, István Zoltán Pásztor, Patrik Tátrai, Tibor Kóti, 2019, 152)

We see, that the empirical research was conducted in the eastern and middle part of Hungary, where the RCH is also strongly represented.

We see, that Roma CD practitioners are visibly active in regions where the Roma population is high.

Due to their geographic location their segregation is almost inevitable. This leads to educational disadvantages and economic deprivation as we will see in the following section.

2.3.2. Social, economic and educational circumstances

We can't discuss the current social and economic status of the Roma in Hungary without mentioning the impacts of the regime change in 1989.

It's a well-known and accepted fact that the Roma suffered the most of the regime change from state socialism to capitalism (Binder, 2009). The radical downsizing of industrial production (between 1989 and 1994: 40%) caused a massive unemployment of Roma men (In 1970 85,2 % of Roma men between the age of 15-59 were employed. This figure was 29% among them in 1993.). The closure of factories also caused significant spatial disadvantages. It highly affected Roma workers precisely because they often moved to these peripheral areas for these work opportunities. The economic depression in these areas only increased in the last three decades (Binder, 2009).

In these deprived regions we can speak about the phenomena of spontaneous segregation in education, simply because there are no other, or very few non-Roma children in the settlements. Yet the experts agree that only the improvement of the educational outcomes and consequently better work prospects can make lasting change in the life of disadvantaged children.

As Láczy states (Láczy, 2022, 26):

“...there are a shrinking number of stimulating role models on the periphery, and that at school, gifted children have no peers to encourage them to achieve further. The main reason for this is nowadays not, or not as previously conceptualised, ethnic segregation, but rather the deprivation of settlements, impoverished environments, lack of wealthier, more motivated children, while it was also found that the traditional family model is stronger here, that young people's relationship with their parents is a strong source of emotional capital.”¹⁰

In the new regime the previous educational qualifications of the Roma became irrelevant. This mass impoverishment led to extreme and long-term poverty. The public opinion identifies the phenomena of poverty with the Roma population—meaning that poverty has an ethnic profile in Central- and Eastern-Europe. According to public opinion ‘the problem of the Roma would be solved if they would start to work’ (Binder, 2019).”

Nevertheless, the situation is more complex—due to their low education and spatial distribution the Roma minority is underrepresented in the primary labour market (contract work) but they are overrepresented in the secondary and illegal labour market, which is more difficult to calculate with

10 “A kutatás egyik megállapítása, hogy a periférián egyre szűkül az ösztönzést segítő példák száma, az iskolában a tehetséges gyermeknek nincsenek olyan társai, akik újabb eredmények elérésére ösztönöznék. Ennek oka mára elsősorban nem, vagy nem a korábbi értelmezésben megfogalmazott etnikai szegregáció, hanem a települések leszakadása, az elszegényedett környezet, a módosabb, motiváltabb gyermekek hiánya, ugyanakkor azt is tapasztalták, hogy a tradicionális családmodellnek itt erősebbek a hagyományai, hogy a fiataloknak a szülőkkel a kapcsolatuk erős emocionális tökélet jelent.”

precise figures. They are typically employed as day labourers, seasonal workers, or construction workers.

As a reaction to this situation, in 2011 the Hungarian government launched the Public Work Scheme (PWS):

“The most important task of the public employment system is to activate long-term unemployed people and to prevent permanent job seekers from getting out of the working life. There are the people of working age, with low education and no professional skills that are the most difficult to involve in employment. Public employment offers work primarily for these people.”¹¹

This system is legally speaking in-between the primary and secondary labour market, with an income lower than the lowest wage on the primary labour market but with social insurance for 12 months. Employers can be local governments and institutions, church entities, associations, etc. The number of public employees in a municipality is set by the government.

However, it is undeniable that public employment involves masses of people, mainly Roma, who have long been excluded from the labour market and who have not had a minimum stable monthly income. The tendency is that Roma men stay in the PWS until they find a more profitable source of income. However, Roma women are more predictably tied to this form of employment, so they can stay in the settlement, have flexibility to care for their families, and have a reliable fixed income.

Nonetheless, their economic situation stays precarious. I will not enter into the phenomena of the loan-sharks in these regions (and everywhere where poor and Roma people are living) but it's a big issue when it comes to their economic situation. Many Roma are living in a cycle of debt, because usually there is 100% profit on the loans (so if you loan 100 Euros, you have to pay back 200 Euros). Bank creditors also put them in very vulnerable situations.

On the other hand, the democratic regime and the entry into the European Union (2004) has brought a number of developments, notably at the legislative and social visibility levels:

Minority self-governments, including the Roma self-government were established; a Roma intelligentsia has emerged, increasing the numbers of Roma students in higher education (due also to positively discriminatory quota rulings); *Romology* chairs have been established in multiple universities to research and teach the political, legal, linguistic, cultural, educational, demographic, and labour market circumstances of the Roma. A significant increase in the number of publications on the Roma, and in the field of *Romology*, European awareness, guidelines and funds are now focused on the Roma issue.

While the social visibility and representation of the Roma increased tangibly—their economic situation deteriorated significantly. Discrimination and hostility in the public opinion toward them have increased compared to the previous socialist regime.

11 Information on the current status of Public Work Scheme (PWS) in Hungary, <https://kozfoglalkoztatás.kormany.hu/download/6/eb/02000/current%20status%20of%20Public%20Work%20Scheme.pdf>

Roma Christian practitioners often find themselves in the above-mentioned economic circumstances where they face challenges to provide for their families. They are typically employed in the PWS by the local government, or by the local church, or they depend on seasonal work. In this sense they share the economic instability of the people with whom they are working with—they are able to understand their situation from the inside. On the other hand, this vulnerability is often an additional stress and worry and makes their pursuit more difficult and unpredictable.

The PWS is low-prestige employment, typically considered *Roma-work*. The interviewees who are living next to the Romanian border in Eastern-Hungary (see Figure 2.) all shared about their financial situation and their struggles off the record. One couple said that they decided to work in a PWS because they can be employed by the RCH and they can *do their mission* even if they earn less. This means that they can work with the children and lead the home fellowship group full time for a minimum payment and not as a voluntary work as before. Another couple from the neighbouring village only have the possibility to be employed in a PWS by the local government, so they need to clean the streets, mow the lawn, do physical work. Although they are in poor health they have no problem with the work. What they regret most is that they do not have enough time and energy for the mission God is calling them to. Since the local congregations are in the same economic situation as the region as a whole, they can only afford to employ the pastor. Everyone else has to be employed through the PWS, which is not available everywhere, is time-limited, and is low-income employment.

The impoverishment of the environment, the lack of role models, and the segregated education often defines the direction of the Roma CD practitioners' work. As we will see from the interviews, they often start an after-school program to support the education of children and to open new perspectives in life for them, even if they themselves have only minimum educational background (elementary school or secondary school).

2.3.3. Language, culture

As I have already mentioned, the Roma minority is not a homogenous group. We can distinguish three major groups among the Roma in Hungary, according to their mother tongue:

- *Romungro* are 71% among the Roma. (Means Hungarian man, their first language is Hungarian)
- *Oláh cigányok* the *Vlax/Walachian/Vlach* Roma are 21% among the Roma. (Their mother tongue is Romani or gipsy.) Typically, they are the most despised Roma group. The other Roma groups distinguish themselves from the Valch Roma because in their eyes the Valch embody everything that is negative about Roma (dirty, stinky, stealing). That's why most Roma don't even admit that they belong to this community.
- '*Beás cigányok*', the *Boyash* Roma are 8% of the Roma in Hungary. (They speak an old Romanian dialect with elements from other languages.)

Many non-Roma are not aware of this diversity within the Roma population: there are the Roma in general, identified as a problematic, criminal, lazy and dangerous group.

There are several cultural characteristics and customs of the Roma, beliefs linked with childbirth, marriage, death, sexuality, etc... They have their own traditional music, dance and folklore with elements borrowed from different cultures and nations. These will be not elaborated here but it is important to mention because from the CD point of view local traditions, cultural roots, and richness of people are important to reinforce the value of self and identity of an ethnic group, or of a region/settlement.

Even though there are more and more research about Roma culture, language, and history—a big part of the Roma are not aware of their own background and languages. They are disconnected from their roots and see no value in it. Peter, a Roma practitioner explained it this way:

“There is a cultural aspect of the after-school program, because the children in this village don't know Roma dances, or don't know their language and we would like to see that these things become part of their identity. When they hear the word Roma, they shouldn't think ‘those who are despised, because they are thieves or prisoners’, but they should think ‘those who have a beautiful (and difficult to learn) language, those who have traditions, or folk costumes. In addition, show the non-Roma that as Roma people we can also offer something that will warm your heart.”

What is important to realize however, that Roma, as an ethnical minority are not identified by their culture or language in Hungary. The general opinion is that they are a burden, a problem, and source of disturbance which resonates with the definition of poverty. The adjective *Roma* or *Gypsy* is usually used in a pejorative and stigmatizing sense and means poverty (Kovai, 2015).

As Cecilia Kovai culture-anthropologist observes in the village of Gömbalja (Kovai, 2017, 80):

“When the Hungarians talk about their village as a we in any sense of the word, the Roma are automatically left out. When they complain about the lack of unity, the decline of community life, or even when they discuss how to promote their common concerns, it does not even occur to them that this overall social we includes the Roma. At most, the Roma are mentioned as a disturbing factor whose presence spoils the chances of rural tourism, or whose behaviour and habits disturb everyday life. On the one hand, the Roma is therefore irrelevant to village life, but on the other, Roma is a very significant figure whose presence is always a source of disturbance.”¹²

¹² “Amikor a „magyarok” a falujukról, mint bármilyen értelemben vett közösről, „mi-ről” beszélnek, abból a cigány automatikusan kimarad. Ha az összefogás hiányáról, a közösségi élet szűküléséről panaszkodnak, vagy éppen közös ügyeik fellendítésén tanakodnak, fel sem merül, hogy ebbe a kollektivitásba a cigány is beletartozna. A cigány legfeljebb mint zavaró tényező kerül szóba, aki jelenlétével rontja a falusi turizmus esélyeit, vagy viselkedésével, szokásaival zavarja a hétköznapiakat. A cigány tehát egyfelől irreleváns a falu életére nézve, másfelől viszont nagyon is jelentős szereplő, megjelenése mindig zavart kelt.”

The Roma respond to this consistent exclusion by judging themselves in relation to the non-Roma Hungarians. And here is where an important dimension of the Roma culture enters the picture—the kinship or the extended family. The Roma identity differs from a national identity, as there was no territory, no past as a collective memory, no elaborate material culture to build it on (Barnóczy, 2013). In Roma culture, kinship and belonging to a particular family are therefore greatly emphasised. According to Kovai (Kovai, 2015) kinship has two aspects. First, it determines the position of the family related to the Hungarians. Second, it's a way to distinguish different Roma internally, amongst each other. If, for example, you are from the *Lakatos* or *Balogh* or *Farkas* family it doesn't only clarify which subgroup of Roma you belong, but it also places you in a moral category. Internally, among the Roma, there are three moral categories. The first category is the Roma who embodies everything that is shameful and negative about them (dirty, underdeveloped, etc.—often also identified with the Vlach-Roma). The second is the Roma who poses as a *fake-Hungarian*, who is cocky and denies the Roma identity, also considered a negative category. And finally, there is the third category, the *we* or *our family*, the real Roma, who is not the dirty or the *fake-Hungarian* one. These dividing lines among the families are as strong as the dividing line between Roma and non-Roma, even if the categories can change.

For example, if a Roma family starts to have too much contact with the Hungarians in the village, or moves from the Roma slum to the village, they can quickly find themselves in the fake-Hungarian category.

In contrast to the non-Roma, Roma hierarchy and structure—especially in rural villages, where the Hungarians are always in power dominant above the Roma—is never reversible. This is part of the social order where the non-Roma are the patron or authoritarian father figures.

David, an interviewee compares the situation of the Roma with that of the Jewish people:

“If I could compare it [the situation of the Roma] to Jewish people's lives, they are similar on some level. They are dispossessed, they have no land, they have no attachments, they are marginalized, they live their lives as slaves in this society. Because above the Roma there is always a Hungarian who will oppress them or do something to them. If a Roma gets into a position of leadership, there is still a Hungarian above him. I have seen very few places, I can't even tell you one, where there was only a Roma who was not controlled by a Hungarian.”

In this societal construct the family is the place where the Roma identity is formed mainly to signify the difference between *us* and *them*. The network of these families creates an informal social and emotional capital, which is invisible and not decodable for the non-Roma majority but is the natural ordering principle within Roma communities (Kovai, 2015).

If a local congregation starts to build relationships with the local Roma community, it's necessary that they are aware of the web of extended families. If one family joins a church initiative, it automatically excludes other families due to the inner structure of the local Roma community. However, if one person joins from a family there is a big chance that the whole family will be

involved after a while. Very often the first active members of a CD initiative are the family members of the Roma Christian practitioner. To extend the circle stays problematic in many cases.

Because the church is often considered by the Roma as a place for the Hungarians, Christian Roma practitioners often face exclusion and suspicion by their Roma community, as they enter in the fake-Hungarian category by frequenting the church (the non-Roma). In addition, they struggle for acceptance in the church as well, given the stigma that they may bring the other dirty Roma to church, causing a scandal for the local churchgoers. This can result in a serious problem of identity because it is an in-between position.

John, a Roma practitioner experienced it in this way:

“If I could have, I would have really skinned myself so that I could be Hungarian or white or a different colour so that I wouldn’t be *the gypsy*. Worry that I smell of smoke or I’m dirty. These are things that are very difficult to say even. And when you feel that in the Hungarian society you are not Hungarian, but in the gypsy society you are not gypsy because you are studying, then it is even harder. Then who am I? And for me, it was very difficult, an inner struggle and fight to understand where I belong.”

2.3.4. The belief system of the Roma

Eszter Dani, a pastor in the RCH, who has worked with Roma communities for 30 years created the first Roma Ministry strategy (for the RCH) in 2013. There she states, that she has never met an atheist Roma. According to her observations and experiences all Roma people have some kind of faith in God, even if it's not specifically a Christian faith or rooted in a particular denomination. According to Dani Roma are very open to all kind of spirituality (Dani, 2022). However they have a very specific belief system, which they keep, even if they are officially a member of a religion (often the religion of the region where they live).

A connection with a higher entity, who can help and provide or punish, is present in the everyday lives of Roma people. Dani considers (Dani, 2022) as a possible explanation that as traveller and poor communities, Roma were more dependent on nature (similar to ancient farmers), vulnerable for diseases, at the mercy of others. It made them aware that they can’t control their own circumstances and of the existence of God.

Barnóczy (Barnóczy, 2013, 110) remarks, that even if there is no religion specific to the Roma, their religiosity has distinctive marks, which stems from their way of life:

“The Gypsies do not have and have never had a religion of their own, but their religiosity is uniquely and unmistakably Gypsy, regardless of the majority environment in which they live, i.e. the religion to which they belong. Their religious practice can be interpreted in terms of their everyday lives, the main strength of which is their variability and adaptability. Without an independent history

and consciousness of history, a unified language, a system of traditions, a separate state and organisational structure, their identity is based on their difference from the non-Roma (gádzsók)".¹³

I will not develop all the distinctive elements of their belief system, only want to highlight two Christian practices: the baptism and the burial, which are important for the Roma, but for different reason than in the Christian tradition.

Generally speaking, they have different beliefs, rituals, and magics liked to the world of the spirits, particularly around birth and death.

Dani argues (Dani, 2000) that to understand the importance of baptism for the Roma we need to understand first one of the main drive of Roma lives—avoid impurity. Impurity is not the same as dirt. The lower parts of a sexually active being, the earth and ground water are considered impure. If anything pure touches these, it becomes impure. Impurity works as infection; it is impossible to wash it away and to avoid this there are many regulations. The reason Roma try to avoid impurity so vigorously is because it is considered the cause of most sicknesses. Children are pure after their baptism until they become sexually mature. During this time, according the Roma beliefs, children are very strong and resistant against all kind of sicknesses. Mothers and babies are impure after the delivery because their babies touch the lower part of their mothers with their upper parts. Until the baptism, the babies are open to every harm and sickness. The mothers try to keep their children safe by separating them and by putting red ribbons on their wrist against harm. In some places, Roma do not call their babies by their name before they have been baptized. Men become pure again after they have a few grandchildren, women regain their purity after they have lost their fertility. This is the main reason for the Roma's respect for the old and the rights of the children.

Another strong belief as Dani observes (Dani, 2000) that the dead continue the same life in the other world. The fear of the spirit of the dead, the *mulo*, is strong in every Roma group. This fear is the guiding force of the funeral habits and has a great influence over the whole Roma life. In order to feed the spirits in the other world they put food, cigars, and wine into the casket and later they also bring it to the grave. The personal articles of the deceased Roma are sold or burnt. They do not want to keep the belongings of their loved ones. In many places *Panama* is held, when the family and friends gather first in six weeks and than again one year after the death. The purpose of this is to please the spirit that may come back to threaten people. Since they fear this possible return, they may only call on the deceased when they are in really big danger. However, they believe that the dead live in the same shape in the other world as they lived on earth and they are

13 "A cigányoknak nincs és nem volt önálló vallásuk, vallásosságuk azonban egyedi, összetéveszthetetlenül cigány, függetlenül attól, hogy milyen többségi környezetben élnek, vagyis milyen valláshoz tartoznak. Vallásgyakorlatuk gyakorlati életükből értelmezhető, melynek legfőbb ereje a változékonyság és alkalmazkodási készség. Önálló történelem és történelem- tudat, egységes nyelv, hagyományrendszer, különálló állam és szervezeti struktúra nélkül identitásuk legfőbb eleme a gádzsóktól való különbözőség."

not allowed any interference with this world, so they try to avoid it at all costs. The only difference between the two forms of life is that in the other world there is no childbirth. The role of the priest or the pastor during the funeral is to keep the spirit of the deceased peaceful, so he or she will not come back to this world.

We see, that the practice is from the Christian tradition, but the meaning behind it is different for the Roma.

Dani observes (Dani, 2022), that they do not speak about these beliefs openly with non-Roma probably because it is an important aspect that differentiates them from the non-Roma. Even after they became engaged Christians these beliefs stay present in their lives (for example fear of the spirit of a deceased). They open up about it only when a strong trust-relationship is established with a non-Roma. By growing in the Christian faith these fears and beliefs deconstruct and they can experience liberation by the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of God.

It's important to note that often (without generalisation) these events are characterised by extreme consumption of alcohol, extreme spending of money for the feast (often from loan), and physical fights. These celebrations are not necessarily rooted in Christian ethical values even if the practice itself is Christian. Many researchers observe as well (Barnóczy, 2013), that the Roma belief system does not automatically imply Christian ethical or moral values. They have their own moral code however—one they abide by to avoid to transgressions.

As I mentioned above, despite of their own beliefs, Roma are often receptive and thankful if they are invited to a Christian gathering.

Dani (Dani, 2022) remarks that denominational affiliation seems to be unimportant to Roma. They join to the pastor, preacher, missionary who invites them and if that person leaves and another representative of another denomination arrives, they gather around them. In my opinion it can be possibly explained by the above detailed characteristic of the Roma: on one hand the extended family is the community where their identity is formed. Beyond that they adapt easily to various leaders and communities if they are invited and welcomed. On the other hand, their belief system doesn't depend on a particular denomination because for them it is more important to be together and praise the Lord in community.

A devotion to the Virgin Mary is also part of their beliefs system. Even if they were baptised protestant or are a member in a pentecostal / evangelical church, a picture of a Virgin Mary with baby Jesus is often to be found in their households. Probably these are linked with the fact that Mary is someone more approachable, a motherly, caring, protecting figure, for whom family is important (Dani, 2022). Another image that they often have is the crucified Jesus with whom's suffering the Roma can easily identify.

According to Havasi (Havasi, 2018) this attitude often changes after Roma become an engaged Christian in a particular denomination. They become more conscious about their denominational

affiliation and the ethical aspects of their lives. In a study, where Havasi researched the different historical church ministries among the Roma, a local Roma Christian community (from the settlement of Balajt) reports the following (Havasi, 2018): What else changes as a result of conversion and growing in faith? The Balajtians reported that they try to be more understanding with each other, less impulsive, they start to study, get a profession, they no longer want to go to the forest to steal wood, etc...They turn more towards their families, some of them stop drinking, their way of partying changes (which now evolves to more singing and talking to each other).

These tendencies I also observed in the Roma ministry of the RCH.

We see that different beliefs and practices linked to the world of spirits determine the everyday life of the Roma. These can be linked with Christian practices but are filled with a different meaning. Even if they frequent a Christian church these beliefs stay present and mixed with the elements of Christianity (a form of syncretism). After experiencing the love of God their lifestyle and belief system can start to change and become more rooted in the Gospel (concrete fears can disappear for example).

Conclusion

The Hungarian context shows that the *Roma issue* is an intersection between ethnical, social, economic, and spiritual questions. This context, through the lens of poverty, disempowers the Roma on a personal, biophysical, social, cultural, and spiritual level. Simultaneously there are local as well as system-level efforts and programs to narrow the gap between the Roma and the non-Roma.

But how is it look like in the RCH? In the next section I will detail their presence in different denominations and within the RCH. I will also highlight the RCH's ministry toward the Roma because beyond the general societal circumstances the RCH's narrower context is what Roma Christians are navigating.

2.4. Roma and Roma ministry in the Reformed Church in Hungary

2.4.1. The Roma in Christian denominations and in the RCH

For Roma it is problematic to belong the RCH as well as to other historic Churches. The root causes will be explained in the following paragraphs.

There are more Roma who are not members of any church than among non-Roma. I will present some statistics about the Church membership of the Roma compared to the general population and interpret the tendencies in the light of the research.

Christian denominational affiliations of the Roma and the general population according to the 2001, 2011 and 2022 censuses in Hungary (in % of respondents)

	2022 general population	2022 Roma	2011 general population	2011 Roma	2001 general population	2001 Roma
Roman catholic	27.9%	34.4%	37.3%	46.7%	52.0%	56.4%
Greek catholic	1.7%	3.0%	1.8%	2.8%	2.6%	3.4%
Reformed	9.9%	9.5%	11.7%	12.2%	16%	14.2%
Lutheran	1.9%	0.4%	2.2%	0.3%	3.0%	0.2%
Orthodox	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Other Christian denominations	1.5%	5.4%	1.3%	4.6%	0.8%	1.9%
Not member of a church or denomination	16.3%	22.0%	18.3%	22.1%	14.6%	16.0%
Didn't answer	40.6%	25.4%	27.3%	11.3%	10.9%	7.6%

Table 1. Census 2001, 2011, 2022 (The data in % is own calculation)

It is important to note that these results reflect the answers of the Roma who declared themselves as such (around 2.2% of the population in 2022), which is not a realistic number, as explained earlier (the realistic estimation is around 9-10% of the population in 2022).

It is also visible that Roma are more willing to declare their religious affiliation than non-Roma (once they declared themselves as Roma).

As we can see in in the table, next to the catholic church (Roman and Greek) the RCH is the largest denomination in Hungary. However, in the last 20 years the membership in both denominations sank both among Roma and non-Roma. This is in contrast to the results of the Pentecostal, evangelical churches, and the Jehovah witnesses where memberships almost doubled in the last 20 years (other Christian denominations). This ratio is even more striking in the case of Roma whose number increased by 250% in these churches.

Havasi (Havasi, 2018, 165) explains this tendency as follows:

"Charismatic small churches are also closer to the Roma because of their temperament, and are generally warmer, more welcoming and loving towards the Roma than the historic churches. Fraser sees in the Pentecostal movement, that the Roma who have been appointed to the priesthood in a short period of time as an attractive role model for the others."¹⁴

¹⁴ „A karizmatikus jellegű kisegyházak temperamentumuk miatt is közelebb állnak a cigánysághoz, általánosságban véve melegebbek, befogadóbbak, szeretetteljesebbek a cigányság irányába, mint a történelmi egyházak Fraeser a

Possible Roma leadership—in my opinion—is a great reason why Roma tend to join small, charismatic churches. In historic churches (Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran) the formal and acknowledged leaders are pastors who require higher education (7 years of training) and that is difficult or impossible to reach for many Roma Christians due to their lack of educational background. However, in my opinion and according to my observations short-term (few months) trainings by these charismatic churches lessen the biblical and theological knowledge of the preacher.

Dani adds (Dani, 2022) that while we should avoid generalising, Roma can relate more easily to a freer and simpler liturgy with lots of worship songs (with multiple instruments) and more interactive preaching. A very strictly structured liturgy with traditional hymns accompanied by the organ and a long, intellectual sermon are less appealing. (This latter is something she believes should be avoided in any other congregation as well).

These observations were confirmed by one of the Roma practitioners, Simon, who opens up his house in the middle of the Roma slum for a house church service:

“Well, for example, I don't know if we do it right, but we always dance before and after the house church service. But there's a cultural part to it... So we need the freedom to dance...We need to make the community experience something that we feel good about. Let's not make it so that they don't come back. They need to feel comfortable. The kids and the adults.”

This raises a question of more liturgical diversity and flexibility in historical churches, in our case in the RCH, but this aspect will be not developed in this study as it is not the focus of my research.

The other major reason why Roma are not comfortable in historical church services is because they are often not well seen by the non-Roma, if they are not behaving as they should. This comes up regularly in the empirical research as well. Yet, it's not a matter of ethnicity alone. Historical churches (Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran) are typically middle-class churches, where poor people don't feel that they fit in, as they don't know how to behave in the church. Again: poverty and Roma issues are confusing.

How the RCH is concretely present among the Roma and how the RCH is understanding its mission in the above-presented complex context? This is what the next section of this chapter will answer.

pünkösdi mozgalom kapcsán úgy látja, hogy a rövid idő alatt kinevezett, papi funkciót betöltő romák vonzóak, követendő példák a közösségük számára.”

2.4.2. Roma and Roma ministry in the Reformed Church in Hungary

“Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) as a sign and agent of God’s Kingdom will be a church of personal and social transformation, a community where irrespectively of origin or race, people can experience the welcoming, reconciling and healing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” (Strategy of the ministry among, 2013, 1)

This is the mission statement of the Ministry among the Roma of the RCH, written in 2013. Nevertheless, the Roma were always part of the RCH’s missional and diaconal fields of view. There are documents from the Synod of Debrecen already in 1567 that mentions the importance to pay attention to Roma (Landauer, 2016). The first central strategy of the Ministry among Roma from 2013 (asked and accepted by the National Synod) considers the accumulated experiences from different fields of service. Until the 20th century the RCH’s ministry among the Roma has not been separated from other services of the church.

To strengthen Roma people’s faith and their welcome in the RCH, the nationwide Roma ministry in the RCH organises yearly prayer-gatherings and conferences for congregations where there is a Roma ministry. These gatherings are primarily (but not exclusively) focused on Roma. There are trainings for pastors and also for Roma and non-Roma Christians who are active or want to join to the local congregation’s Roma ministry (for example the *Together for one another* training). Regionally and locally, there are also similar propositions.

The RCH serves toward the Roma people also in many ways through diaconia (Safe start houses for mothers and children, material aid) and in the education system (after-school programs, HEKS inclusive school-programs, Roma collage for advanced studies¹⁵), this strategy was designed first and foremost for local congregations and for the different levels of the RCH structure in order to strengthen their missional identity among the Roma. Social transformation is an integral part and a consequence of the holistic mission of the Church and the local congregation—in which the proclamation of the Gospel and the *koinonia* is central.

15 “The colleges for advanced studies (szakkollégiumok) play an important role in the life of universities, supporting students in their community and academics, and developing talent. This is particularly true for students who have no family members with higher education qualifications, so it is vital for them to be given special attention as they progress in higher education. In Hungary, the Roma/Gypsy population, according to the 2011 census, has social conditions and educational attainment indicators that are far below those of the general population. While only 5% of the age-matched population of Roma origin had completed secondary school and 1.2% had a university degree, 31% of the non-Roma population had completed secondary school and 17% had a university degree (Híves 2014). This huge gap is being addressed by various support programmes - from birth to higher education... The establishment of a ‘network of Roma colleges for advanced studies’ is an important educational policy decision to support the Roma community in Hungary in order to increase opportunities (Forray 2015). The 11 Roma colleges for advanced studies - run by higher education institutions or churches - cover a large part of the country and provide a wide range of support for nearly 300 disadvantaged, mostly Roma, young people studying in higher education... The main aim of the Roma colleges is to support the talents of young people, to ensure the next generation of Roma intellectuals, and to help them succeed in higher education.”
Tamás Híves, 2019

The RCH runs two of the 11 colleges and they are part of the network of Christian Roma colleges for advanced studies.

“As a result of this, the social solidarity will be strengthened and tensions will be decreased in the majority and minority society. The RCH with its ministry contributes to the improvement of the people’s quality of life in areas with serious disadvantages from a social, ecological and infrastructural point of view. “ (Strategy of the Ministry among the Roma, 2013)

The three key words of the strategy are: reconciliation, hope, health (fullness).

This strategy is an action plan as well. A nationwide survey was filled out by 587 pastors (meaning approximately 700 congregations from the total of 1300) but can’t be considered as representative data because the answering congregations were not chosen according to the criteria of a representative research. It was sent to all pastors and they filed it on a voluntary basis.

The survey confirms that the majority of the responding pastors typically had little knowledge about the different Roma groups or about the Roma who live in their territory in general.

However, the awareness seemed significantly higher about specific Roma in their congregation. There is data of Roma elders in approximately 6% of the congregations (34 of the 700). 33 of these congregations have 1 to 5 Roma elders and in one congregation they have 5 to 10.

In 17% of the responding congregations (98 of the 700) we found Roma people who actively participate in the church service: in three congregations more than 10 people, in six congregations more than 5, and in the remaining congregations less than 5 people.

Almost 44% of the congregations (246 of the 700) have Roma church members who pay the church tax (in 17 congregations from the 246 have more than 20 Roma church members who pay). Among the congregations that sent back the questionnaire 27% (156 of the 700) answered that members of the local Roma communities appear among those who attend church on a weekly basis. An even greater number of Roma take part in church life occasionally, for example pre-marital counselling, marriage or funeral.

The importance of Roma ministry is even more needed among children because 22% of the respondents (131 of the 700) reported that no Roma children participate in religious education and 52% of the pastors (308 of the 587) stated that there are no Roma children in their confirmation courses or that they are not aware of them.

197 (of the 587 pastors) gave more reserved, dismissive responses about how they feel about the Roma ministry. 12% (73 pastors of the 587) said that it is very typical and 20% (120 pastors of the 587) said that it is rather typical for the pastor to feel personally responsible for the ministry among Roma. It’s an important finding that to start and/or further develop Roma ministry the pastors named financial aid as less important (only 23%, 133 of the pastors), and they rather need moral support (38%, 222 pastors), specialized knowledge (54%, 322 pastors) and trained staff (60%, 350 pastors). The *Together for one another* training was born out of this need to train pastors, Roma and non-Roma engaged Christians together with a CD focused holistic training. Not only to the

benefit of the local and regional Roma ministry, but more to promote social cohesion in the settlements.

As for the future, the RCH aims to develop further not only the Roma ministry (to make place for the Roma and thematise this issue in the RCH), but to strengthen the importance of brotherly relationships, the diversity in the RCH and to promote the *we* that includes all kind of marginalized groups. The strategy and the action plan for this is in the process of being developed.

2.5. Conclusion

In this second chapter I outlined the general social and economic context as well as the ecclesial context in which the Roma Christian leaders and volunteers are living and carrying out their mission. We see that Roma have their own authentic belief-system and cultural characteristics, such as adaptability to the circumstances, the network of extended families, and the separation between the different Roma groups. However, we also saw that Roma are identified with poverty, disturbance, and criminality. They are not considered as part of the *we*, they always stayed excluded from society, even if their assimilation was part of every era's political agenda. One consequence is that Roma have the tendency to hide their identity—this is clear from the censuses. Nevertheless, for the non-Roma they stay Roma and if they assimilate too much, they risk exclusion from their Roma community.

All these aspects resonate with the concept of poverty as a disempowering system and exclusion as not having the means to participate in decision making. Inclusion is on the political agenda, but are economic and social inclusion programs enough to transform Roma people's life and create a *we* that includes both Roma and non-Roma?

For the local congregation, as well as for the Church as a whole, there is an invitation and a question related to the understanding of what a church community as the body of Christ is. Would they be/stay automatically a *copy* of the societal structure or would it be possible to form a community that promotes the values of God's Kingdom? By proclaiming the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to the marginalised? By working towards peace and reconciliation through transformed relationships? This question is present in many pastor's ministry working in settlements with a significant Roma minority where they are often confronted with lack of specialized knowledge, resources, and trained staff.

In the next chapter we will detail the theoretical framework of CD as a transformative diaconia practice—one possible way of holistic, congregation-based ministry.

3. Theological understanding of Community Development as transformative diaconia practice

3.1. Introduction

In this study CD is understood as a practice and method of transformative diaconia.

Development is a general and multi-dimensional concept, often linked with context of poverty. There are several theories and schools about the aims and methods of development, but practitioners and scholars agree upon that the main focus is to bring social and economic change to deprived regions and communities (Kakwata, 2018).

As churches and faith-based organisations (FBOs) are often involved as agencies or partners in development programs, there was a need and necessity to reflect theologically on what development and transformation mean.

In this chapter we will explore different theological approaches linked with the changing paradigm in diaconal thinking from the 1960s mostly based on the documents of the ecumenical diaconia, the World Council of Churches (WCC in the following), the works on Carlos Ham, Nadine Bowers du Toit and liberation theologians. By doing so we will answer the second subquestion of this research.

3.2. Diaconia as agent of transformation

3.2.1. Introduction

Diaconia, as the social ministry/service of the Church in every social and historical context aims to be transformative, from early Christianity on. As Werner and Ross (Werner, Ross, 2021) outline the history of diaconia they point out the following:

“The diaconal nature of early local congregations was probably the most convincing proof of the actual relevance and transformative character of Christian faith over the values, standards and social hierarchies of ancient Hellenistic and Roma social context.”

We could list many examples of this transformative character throughout the history and different contexts, but it is beyond the scope of this study. Our main focus in this chapter is to grasp, what different theologians understand under transformation in this recent period in ecumenical diaconia¹⁶ named transformative and why transformation is its main characteristic?

¹⁶ Under ecumenical diaconia we understand here the vision and the work by the World Council of Churches

In the following section I will highlight in bold terminology that I believe to be critical to understand the pillars of transformative diaconia.

3.2.2. Transformative diaconia

In the Church history as well as in the ecumenical movement *diaconia* (the social ministry/service of the Church) has many shapes and forms and gone through multiple developments throughout the centuries.

Nevertheless, every Christian denomination agrees, that *diaconia* is one of the essential dimensions of the identity of the Church, which is interrelated with *martyria* (missional witness), *leiturgia* (worship) and *koinonia* (communion, community). Ham (Ham, 2014) who first conceptualised transformative diaconia in 2012 adds *didache* (teaching) and *kerygma* (proclamation of the Word) as important elements of God's and therefore the Church's holistic mission in the world. He stresses that the interconnection between the other elements lead to *koinonia*. In this sense, diaconia is not an end in itself or one part of the Church's identity, but the ultimate goal of all the dimensions together: to build a just and inclusive community, a household (*oikos*) to mark the presence of the Church in the world. I think that the four dimensions of the Church already contain *didache* and *kerygma*, in consequence it's not necessary to name them specifically. However, Ham's approach to define *koinonia* as the goal of God's holistic mission resonates more with the changing paradigm in ecumenical diaconal work from the 1970s, than seeing *koinonia* as one dimension of the four.

As the WCC started to redefine diaconia's call, goals, and methods, liberation and transformation became the theological hallmarks of this new period. Besides the caring and serving nature of diaconia, the work for just and inclusive communities became more accentuated and the development approach became increasingly widespread. One of the milestones of this process was the Colombo conference in 2012, where a new diaconal approach was adopted. It redefined diaconia from the viewpoint of those who are traditionally considered as target groups of diaconal action, the vulnerable communities and to develop new practices based on their experiences (and not on those in power positions).

"The aim was not only to harvest the insight from what often is considered the *margins*—vulnerable and marginalized communities—but to acknowledge their faith and diaconal engagement, and thereby their strategic importance in the pursuit of transforming ecumenical *diaconia* from patronizing interventions to catalytic accompaniment."¹⁷

In order to become transformative and empowering, diaconia itself needs to be transformed and empowered first.

This was also a critical reflection on institutionalised diaconia, where loyalty to the government as contracting partner is required and in consequence social criticism is barely possible. Next to

17 Called to transformation – Ecumenical Diaconia, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022)

institutionalised diaconia, grassroots, community-based diaconal organisations, which are born in a specific context and is built on the potential of the participants were less frequent. The WCC's understanding of diaconia emphasises that according to the universal *holy priesthood*, every Christian is called to promote the values of God's Kingdom right where one lives: to serve one's neighbour, work for justice and peace, participate in God's healing and reconciliation mission. This new interpretation of diaconia emphasizes that its primary place is in everyday life and the local congregation and that it is based on the foundation of all believers.

Swart argues (Swart, 2021) that the ability to carry out a transformative service, the believers need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. He shows throughout the Old and the New Testament how God the Creator, the ultimate source of all power pours out His Spirit and by this shares His divine power. He created by His Spirit every living being and empowered humans to be the care-takers, the Holy Spirit empowered the prophets to advocate for social justice and empowered Jesus to carry out His ministry:

"It is a ministry that manifest the *servant nature of power* in its fullest sense, where power is exercised 'to lift up, include and dignify'. As such it is a ministry which priorities society's marginalised, lowest and excluded." (Swart, 2021, 64)

Empowerment in this sense is using the power of God, not to dominate and oppress but to serve in a way which helps people to recognise their own God given ability to create, take-care and fight for their dignity and freedom. Transformative diaconia aims to serve in this way.

Transformative diaconia is also rooted in the liberation movements in South-America and in the liberation theology that grow out of these movements. Liberation theology is the Catholic Church's reaction (from the 1960s) on the social injustice and the oppression of the poor in Latin America that became a political movement. Theologians as Gustavo Gutierrez and Jon Sobrino (among others) emphasise that there is no real Christian spirituality without radical engagement for the liberation of the oppressed, because liberation from the sin is God's plan for all of humanity. As the suffering of the poor and marginalised is the result of a sinful world (manifested in unjust political systems) participating in their political liberation is also part of God's (and therefore the Church's) mission. This theological approach brought a radical change in how the marginalised are viewed. Liberation theologians popularised the expression "God's preferential option for the poor", which means, that God's salvation plan and love is universal, but for Him, those who are dismissed, despised and oppressed come first. It supposes a completely transformed power and community structure where the marginalised are in the centre, not the powerful and successful. Their experiences and voices should dominate and not those of the powerful as traditionally in European theology. This is what we can see also in the ministry of Jesus: he walked with the poor, healed and liberated them, shared His power with them.

Liberation theology urges the Churches to fill in their prophetic role in the word, by denouncing oppressing and unjust political systems, as the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament did.

Gutierrez (Gutierrez, 2003) underlines that this is not only a few people's or only the poor's call, but a common journey of all Christians in the footsteps of Jesus, adapted to every historical and geographical context:

“This struggle for their [the poor's] rights is located within a quest for the Kingdom of God and its justice—in other words, the struggle is part of the journey to a meeting with God of the Kingdom. It is a collective undertaking of liberation in which the classic spiritual combat is making more searching demands because it has taken on social and historical dimension.” (Gutierrez, 2003,46)

One of the central thoughts of liberation theology is, as we can also understand it from this quotation, that God's redemptive work always unfolds in a particular context. Therefore, every theology is contextual from the start and one is not more objective or universal than the other. Contextuality is also a core aspect of transformative diaconia as an approach that values the particularity of every culture, social environment, and local history in order to be able to proclaim the Gospel in a way that is respectful and adapted in the context and to develop diaconal practices based on the needs and the assets of the context.

In the sense of liberation theology—serving the poor (diaconia) means fighting hand in hand with them for their righteous place in the community, for their God-given dignity and a more just economic, political and social system. By this the community will be based on transformed relationships with God, with one another, and with the creation (and goods).

Transformative diaconia also emphasises the prophetic and empowering aspects of God's holistic mission, without denying the legitimacy of humble and caring service. It is not to replace or concur with other forms of diaconia, rather it is a different vision about the place and role of the needy in our communities, which questions the status quo of the powerful (even in an interpersonal helper-helped relationship).

This theological approach is also a result of the re-reading of the Gospel in the light of our recent historical context (decolonisation, globalisation, rising of nationalism, ecological crisis, deepening socio-economical inequalities, etc.).

Because transformed relationships are in the focus, transformative diaconia is therefore deeply relational and stresses the social responsibility of every human being. Werner and Ross (Werner and Ross, 2021) point out that this characteristic is rooted in the ancient Jewish belief of *imago Dei* (Gen. 1:27)—every human being bears the presence and the likeness of God in oneself. And as God is essentially a relational being—who throughout the entire Old Testament seeks to be in relation with his people—infers therefore that every human being were created for relationships, so they are all called to care about each other, the creation, and to share their goods.

“Thus, the social responsibility of human beings is already laid down in the creation narrative; it is common of all cultures, tongues, and religious backgrounds. Human beings in principle are endowed with the capacity to listen to others, to the needs of their neighbours. All can be called: ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ (Gen. 4:9)” (Called to Transformation, 2022, 9)

The Constitution of the WCC, by defining *koinonia* as the goal of the Church's mission accentuates the unity among the different dimension of the Church (Called to Transformation, 2022,16):

“In seeking *koinonia* in faith and life, witness and service, the churches through the Council will: [. . .] express their commitment to *diaconia* in serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, promoting one human family in justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation, so that all may experience the fullness of life.”

This highlights the holistic approach in transformative diaconia, that works toward the fullness of life on every level and dimension.

To summarise, transformative diaconia accentuates the importance of the local context as the place where God's redemptive work enfolds. This is where every Christian is called to contribute, by serving one's neighbour. Diaconia in this sense reaches back to the early life of the Church, where congregations were showing their faith by transformed relationships with each other and with the most vulnerable members of the society. Transformative diaconia urges Churches to participate in God's holistic mission of liberation and reconciliation by radical solidarity with the poor and by rethinking they ministry from the perspective of the marginalised communities. The goal of transformative diaconia is to create *koinonia*, a just and inclusive community empowered by the Holy Spirit, to empower others.

This process asks for concrete, methodological changes in diaconia practices as well. In the next part of this chapter, we will deepen our theological understanding of transformative diaconia by outlining how CD as a method is an adapted transformative practice.

3.2.3. Community Development as transformative diaconia practice

After the general theological notions behind transformative diaconia, in this part we will outline the method of CD as one of the transformative diaconia practices, based mainly on the works of Todd Addy (Addy, 2022), Ephraim Yoms, and Nadine Bowers du Toit (Yoms, Bowers du Toit, 2017).

CD or as we use it in this study ABCD promotes the participation and self-determination of the local people. By that they will be able to analyse their own situation and problems, express their own needs, map and mobilize their own assets, and work and carry out an action plan in order to better their situation. The outcome of the process is determined by the local actors and not by the CD worker or the sponsoring organisation. (Addy, 2022).

ABCD is categorised as a form of participatory and inductive CD, as it has no specific aim or view related to the existing local or wider power relationships even if these have an impact on the issues of the local context. Other CD approaches are more explicit and aiming directly to change the existing imbalance of power. It is only the ABCD's approach if this is the local issue determined by the local actors. Nevertheless, these grassroots and community-based movement automatically changes the power dynamic within the community, while the participants experience self-worth, self-determination, self-organisation, and carry out actions together successfully. These experiences have an empowering impact and help the members of the community to address issues related to systematic and structural injustice. In the ABCD process the role of the gatekeepers in the community is crucial, people who are the informal leaders, who can open or keep the door closed to the members of the community. In Roma ministry these are often the heads or the respected members of the extended families.

Even if the content and the outcome of an ABCD process depend on the context and the local actors—the applied methodology is the same.

Working with local communities in order to promote social transformation can be constructed in 10+1 steps (Henderson, 2008):

1. Learn about the community (people, history, institutions, geography, etc.)
2. Listen to the community (conduct formal or informal interviews focused on the local residents' opinion of the neighbourhood, their desired changes, and on what the person is ready to invest personally in order to realize these changes)
3. Analyse and systematise the findings
4. Gather the community for a meeting, especially the people who participated in the interviews to share the results and to develop a shared vision (it can happen during more regular meetings)
5. Assess community assets, resources, needs and issues
6. Form a core-team and distribute the tasks and the roles to promote the steps of change: active members of the community, members of local organizations, churches
7. Develop an action plan and create a timeline with different steps in order to achieve the set goals (short-term, mid-term, long-term, with an official start of the process after the planning phase)
8. Implement action plan
9. Evaluate the results of action
10. Reflect and readapt
- + 1. Restart the process with a new action plan (addressing more complex issues) from the adapted steps and broaden the circle of participants and collaborators, if necessary, by redistributing tasks and roles.

As we see, ABCD as a method is in line with the vision of diaconia, which meant to lead toward transformed relationships in the local community. It is built on the local context and the resources

of the local people. The role of the CD professional is not to work out an action plan, but to listen to the community, facilitate meetings, and support the local actors to organise themselves around their own goals. Therefore, ABCD is also deeply relational, because the main focus is not to achieve a certain objective goal, but to strengthen the interaction and the solidarity among the people. ABCD creates space for dialog.

Ephraim Yoms and Nadine Bowers du Toit (Yoms, Bowers du Toit, 2017) point out, that although the methods used by churches and FBOs are much the same as in the CD processes led by secular organisations, the Christian approach differs from the secular one. They propose Transformative Diaconia as a holistic Christian framework for addressing human and social needs. Their purpose is not to offer an alternative to ABCD, but to identify the distinctive elements between the secular and Christian vision on development and transformation. They name 3 aspects where the Christian approach to development differs from the secular one—in the motivation, the goal, and the process. For the sake of clarity, I will further imply ABCD when it's about this particular transformative diaconia practice, but as it is used in a Christian framework, I understand it as Transformative Development.

Motivation:

While secular development agencies are often centered on economic growth, technological progress, efficient production and services—the Christian's idea of development is coming from the Old Testaments concept of shalom and the reality of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, which bring justice, peace, harmony, and material well-being. For Christians being involved in social transformation arises from the commandment of *love thy neighbour* which emphasises relationship and community life, as we have already discussed it. Furthermore, Christians have not only the perspective of life on this earth (which is the focus of secular agencies) but the eternal life. In this sense social transformation also shows God's enfolding redemption in the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit. In consequence Christians are not counting only in their own abilities, resources and professionalism, but they follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Kakwata (Kakwata, 2018) further stresses that development processes are incomplete and therefore not sustainable without a spiritual aspect. In his pneumatical approach to ABCD he names the Holy Spirit as the main actor in personal and social transformation, who empowers, purifies/sanctifies, reveals, and unifies. In Kakwata's (Kakwata, 2018) approach what is new compared to the pneumatical aspects of transformative diaconia already discussed above (for example empowerment), is that for him the spiritual aspects of ABCD is the consequence of living in the Spirit.

The Spirit sanctifies and delivers the spiritual fruits that endows believers with divine attributes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The Spirit can reveal knowledge and understanding that one could not acquire on their own; via visions or

prophecy. The Spirit gives compassion and unity, as we see it, in the life of the first Christian communities, as it is manifested in their lifestyle of sharing and the mutual love among each other. If ABCD participants are open to the work of the Holy Spirit he can renew the relationships among them as well.

This pneumatological approach emphasises the guidance of the Spirit that makes an ABCD process lively and sustainable, because the transformation starts on the inside and it's a gift from God. Structural, economical, and social transformation is a result of the transformed people who want to live according to the values of the Kingdom of God.

This approach will be especially meaningful, as we will analyse the results of the interviews.

Goal:

I will not develop further this aspect as the goal of ABCD corresponds with that of transformative diaconia: restore broken relationships—*koinonia*.

Process:

Christian and secular development agencies share most parts of CD's methodology, practices and strategies. However, what is unique in Christian development approach is that:

"It understands and promotes the spiritual side of human development to balance the socio-economic side." (Yoms, Bowers du Toit, 2017, 49)

Christians involved in development introduce the Good news of God in the process and they are working towards the restoration of relationships broken by sin between human to human, God to human, and creation to human.

Besides these aspects Yoms and Bowers du Toit (Yoms, Bowers du Toit, 2017) stress the importance of dignity and self-worth. People who suffer from exclusion and poverty see themselves as the society sees them: worthless, valueless, hopeless, unproductive and helpless—same as the definition of poverty by Christian and Myers (Myers, 2021). God however created all human beings from His image with potentials and abilities therefore ABCD has to aim to increase people's level of self-confidence, pride, initiative, co-operation, responsibility, and creativity. This is what makes it possible for people whose identity was distorted by multi-generational poverty and exclusion to find a sense of belonging, regain the purpose of their creation, and break the circle poverty.

Development in this sense needs to be holistic that considers not only the social and economic dimension, but also the personal and spiritual dimension of people's lives.

For an ABCD process to be sustainable, spirituality is the key, the core, where transformation starts. That's why personal and spiritual development are important parts of ABCD led by Christians.

As Jerry Pillay (Pillay, 2021, 552) summarizes:

"Perhaps the most significant contribution that the ecumenical movement made to the debate on development was its emphasis on *people* rather than on *production*. It pointed out that any

development must involve the participation of the people concerned and a strong view of justice. It maintained that people are not passive spectators and recipients of the transformation of society. People are active participants, who have roles to play and tasks to perform in bringing about the vision and hope of the reign of God. Thus, the focus on a human-centered and social transformation idea of development became the dominant discourse.”

We see, that ABCD as a secular method already aims social change and the empowerment of the participants. By its nature ABCD is contextual. In order to become transformational and holistic diaconia, scholars underline the importance to include spiritual and human developmental aspects in the process.

3.3 Conclusion

How is Community Development as transformative diaconia practice interpreted from a theological perspective?

This was our main focus in this chapter. We approached diaconia as a service that participates in God’s redemptive mission in the world to create communion, through transformed relationships.

An inclusive household where justice and peace reign. However, it is not possible, until the work of the Evil in this world is unveiled. Diaconia as service of the poor is called to fight against Evil in the world, who also manifests himself through oppressive and exploitative political systems. According to liberation theologians, God’s liberating mission enfolds in every historical context differently but the call to every Christian to participate in it is universal and is part of the spiritual journey.

Transformative diaconia as a theological approach was also born in this certain historical context, where justice work and questioning of the status quo of the powerful (and the excluded) became central in the mind of our communities.

ABCD as a transformative diaconia practice therefore is the local congregations active engagement to create an inclusive community and empower the marginalized communities to take part in the process of transformation.

But how does it look like in the Hungarian context concretely? How do Roma Christian practitioners participate in God’s healing, reconciling and liberating mission? In the next chapter we arrive at the backbone of this study, as we listen to their experiences and discover how their faith is related with their ABCD practice.

4. Presentation of results of the empirical research

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will answer the third sub question which is focused on the interconnection between the faith and the CD practices of the interviewees. I was interested in how these practitioners see and live the connection between their faith and their practices and if there are specific elements of their Christian faith that nourish and drive their longing and engagement for social transformation. I wanted to understand more the chosen methods of their ministry and I intended to explore if there are specific characteristics of their faith that are linked with the context of poverty and exclusion or with other life-events and experiences.

The source of this chapter is a combination of the interviews conducted with Roma Christian practitioners, my observations (a form of field observation), the content of the conversations outside of the official interviews (with their permission), and the results of the census in Hungary in 2022.

The interviews were conducted in five different places (see Figure 2. in Chapter 2) with seven Roma practitioners, among them two were couples. Four locations were in the Eastern part of Hungary where the Roma population is high, though it changes from village to village. One was conducted in a small town the others were in villages. The fifth location was also a town (capital town of the county) but located in central Hungary where the Roma population is not so concentrated and the region is economically stronger than Eastern-Hungary. I either visited the Roma practitioners in their homes or in their workplaces to conduct the interviews.

To present the results, first I will present the locality and the local RCH congregation where they live and work and I will introduce each of them personally. I will use false names (biblical names) for personal data protection and privacy reasons. If they mentioned a person in the interview, I will do the same and I will put XX to replace the name of the village/city in the quotations. After that I will detail how their CD practices and their faith are interconnected, by quoting their own words and insights as much as possible. The main themes of the interviews were determined by the research question; however, the interviewees brought their own understanding, interpretation, and meaning to these aspects of faith and life (such as the nature of their ministry, the elements of their faith related to their ministry, the source of their motivation, etc.). When it's about their practices, I will use the word ministry because this is how they all understand their work according to the interviews. They used the expressions my mission and my ministry as an interchangeable term, but I will apply the term ministry.

The subsequent results will be analysed in the next chapter in the light of the contextual part (Chapter 2.) and the theoretical part (Chapter 3.).

4.2. The local context of the interviewees ministry and the result of the empirical research

The ministry of Peter and Martha

In this little village in the Eastern part of Hungary (close to the Romanian border) with 1300 habitants in 2022, 94,6% of the population declared themselves as Hungarian and 10,2 % Roma (due to dual identities, the total is higher than 100%). By Christian denomination: Reformed 52,6%, Greek catholic 2,4%, Roman catholic 1,9%, 8,6 % non-denominational (33,6% did not respond). No other religion is present.¹⁸

The RCH membership is the dominant, however only 30 people frequent the church regularly, and among the Roma—only Peter and Martha. The opinion of Peter, Martha, and the local RCH pastor is that the tension between Roma and non-Roma is lower here than in the villages around. The RCH took over the institutional diaconia (elderly home, elderly club, home-care service, social catering service). In the local RCH congregation, there are two Roma ministries, one is led by the interviewees, the other by the Roma referent¹⁹ (a non-Roma pastor) of the church district, who lives in a big city nearby and comes regularly to hold Bible study class and organises programs for the Roma. According to Peter and Martha they parted ways, because the Roma referent didn't give them space and responsibility, even though Peter and Martha completed a Bible school of the RCH and they wanted to serve and not only participate.

Peter and Martha are in their mid-forties, they started a family when they were 16-17 years old. Neither of them has completed middle school. Since they have become engaged Christians, they completed several Bible study schools and trainings (though not in a formal education system). Peter remembers how difficult his childhood and the beginning of their life together with Martha was:

“As we began life and as my childhood was: it was very bad and I don't really wish it on anybody but something good came out of it. True, we met with Martha very young, very early, I was 17 and she was 16. We talk to young people about not starting too early, but that's what happened to us and as soon as we started, with all the difficulties, with all the bumps in the road, for example, our children almost being taken away to an institution, having to sleep in a barn with the children. And then we thought how lucky we were because everything turned around...”

They now have grandchildren. One of their children is living in Germany the others in the village. From an early age, doing something for others, for the community was important for both of them, even if they have very few resources and goods themselves. Martha recounts their first Christmas together, where they first experienced, how much they receive when they give:

“I got to know my partner Peter and in him I felt this good spirit, I felt complete security, I felt that fatherly security. So the Lord brought us together in such a way, I can only say this in such a

¹⁸ Magyarország Helységnevtára, <https://www.ksh.hu/apps/hntr.main>

¹⁹ In Hungary every Church district has a Roma referent. It has to be a pastor and doesn't have to be Roma. Their task is to follow and support the local Roma ministries, encourage the pastors to start Roma ministry and they offer trainings

strange way, but the Lord created us for each other. Because we both had in mind what we were going to do for the community, for the neighbourhood. Where do we start? Those thoughts were in both of our minds. We were very poor; we were very very poor. Really, many times there was not even bread on the table. And then the holiday came, our first Christmas with Peter. We made a little Christmas tree, we had five or six pieces of candy, I'm telling you, we cried by the tree. And then we remembered that our neighbour across the street also had children and they didn't have a tree. And so we took 4 out of our 6 candy canes from the tree and took them over there. And then the wonderful experience that we had there, and then we felt that God embraced us with his love."

In different ways they were always involved in the life of the village. However, when they became engaged Christians (7-8 years ago) their desire to contribute to the common good found an even deeper meaning and godly perspective. Peter shares an event that happened during a nationwide Roma ministry conference of the RCH:

"But at this conference, this three-day conference, God has beautifully revealed, I always say, like a flower petal. You know when they speed up in nature films how a flower opens? And God opened those petals very beautifully at that conference, He said, 'I was there when your child wasn't taken away', or 'I was there when your foster father couldn't drown you in the river' and seeing these things, I know I can't repay Him, but I want to somehow pass it on to people—the love, the protective love that He has for me. So that they can feel it, because every person has painful wounds in their life and every person needs the healing that I need, even to this day. And that is where the verse came from: 'Treat others the same way as you want them to treat you.'"

This verse from the Bible is an inner compass for Peter who tries to embody it in his life and ministry.

After this conference they started to look for ways to share the love of God with people in their village. They started to care for old people in the village, help in the gardens, and work on small handyman projects. After they launched a Community Garden project with Roma families they said: "If someone is faithful in their care for plants, you can trust them with more responsibility after." During COVID they saw the need to help the Roma and poor children in their neighbourhood with tutoring so they set up an after-school program⁵ in an annex next to their house, asked for material help to buy computers (the children didn't have the necessary technical equipment for online education). The after-school program grew out of their barn, into the old parish house next to the church and they are now supported by HEKS (Swiss protestant aid organisation).

One of the main goal of their ministry is, as Peter puts it is:

"First of all, if I have to use modern words, I would like to see more Roma intellectuals. And more young Roma people to have a profession to support their families. I would also like to see that when we go to church, we don't only see Hungarians."

Peter compares their ministry to a tree and see it as a prophetic sign for non-Roma:

“The roots are Jesus himself; the trunk is the church; the canopy is HEKS (after-school program) and the branches are the programs we are doing. It branches out in many directions and I feel more and more as a Baptist pastor said that the Hungarians will be converted by the Roma. So we want to show people that I can be a minority, people may despise us, but as Christians they see what we can grow into and how we can transform and that can give them a push to say they want to come into this community and they want to belong, too. First and foremost, we want to bring people to Christ and whether we do it this way or that way is a different question. I believe that God has given us the creativity how to do it and how to invite people into it. We do sports, we do culture, we do programs where we have adult people and the truth is that because we are in a Roma mission we should be ministering to the Roma, but I notice that it is not the Roma who are opening up, but the Hungarians.”

So they understand their ministry rooted deeply in their relationship with Jesus and everything grow out from it in different shapes and forms and reaches out also to the non-Roma. Their ministry is categorised under the Roma ministry of the congregation, but they understand it more widely. They feel a call to build bridges and open their programs for the non-Roma as well. And their experience is that actually it resonates more with the non-Roma as with the Roma. A good example is the home fellowship for adults. It started with COVID, but also out of the experience of how little the churchgoers (non-Roma) share about their faith and connect with each other on a human and spiritual level. First it was addressed more to the Roma adults, then to the churchgoers, and now 70% of the group is non-Roma. This home fellowship is interactive, people share their own thoughts on biblical stories and they share about their own life (difficulties, joys, illnesses, loss, family life) and everyone can pray out loud. This participative way is intentional, as Martha said:

“And when we went to a church service (local RCH congregation) we saw that yes, these brothers and sisters (non-Roma) are living their faith alone. And the Lord told us that ‘you have to go and do the task, that seed, you have to sow, so that it gives the word, that it gives the word to the people’. And we gathered the fellow brothers and sisters and then we said that ‘we have brought you the word of God. And we not only brought it to you, but that we would like to talk about it. The love that we receive from the Lord we want to pour into you because that’s what the Lord expects from us and that’s what He expects from you: that you live your faith in community and not alone.’”⁶

This participative way of doing home fellowship²⁰ was also taught in the *Together for one another* training (in the spirituality module).

They also wanted to bring healing to others through the love of God and through a supportive community. Martha has an especially deep compassion for people who suffer. Her joy in life is when people can be freed from loneliness and their inner pain. She tells a story about a woman

²⁰ Bible study group in most of the RCH congregations means that the pastor explains the Bible story and prays in the end. The participants are mostly only listeners. Peter and Martha wanted to do it differently, to create communion among the group members, they all share their thoughts and feelings and everyone prays.

who lost her husband but she kept her pain inside. Martha invited her for the home fellowship group and she came:

“And when she had listened to the Word (and I asked Peter to choose a Word with which he could heal the soul.) And Peter read the Word and this person cried her soul out and by the time the Word was over and we started talking about it together and by the time we were all praying in a circle, this person was born again, smiling, strong, recharged and said: ‘Thank you Lord for letting me come to this fellowship because I feel I’m healing. I am filled up’ And since then she has been here with us, she is in our home fellowship group and we are active together, we organize programs together, we are with the children, when we go to other villages for ministry she comes with us everywhere.”

This compassion and attentiveness characterise their work in the after-school program as well. Besides general difficulties in school, they recognise emotional neglect, hopelessness and negative self-image by the children, as well as lack of plans for the future. They work with those aspects, too.

As Martha recounts:

“It’s very difficult to say it like this, but every time a child comes we see immediately if something is wrong with them. It’s either pennilessness or lack of understanding or I could say even lack of love. These children suffer from a very, very great lack of love.”

Peter have seen the home situations and considers the after-school program as a place where the children can learn to cope, imagine a different future, and influence the family dynamic:

“Because they go home and either it’s nothing happening or there are problems, parents are fighting or there are arguments. But we can open their eyes to a wider world, that you can do this differently, you can solve different situations differently. We try to give different examples that I believe will make the child creative and start to think a little differently. And my hope is that the child can influence the parent at home. That’s what we really want to do now: to reach the parent through the child in such a way that a change is created in that family. And this is where I see the key role of the after-school program.”

One of their most important practices to make the children and adults feel loved and accepted is to welcome them with a hug. Peter shares a story about it with tears in his eyes:

“When we were making the Advent wreath there was a strange scene: the brothers and sisters came in (Roma and non-Roma) and we automatically went to them, we opened our arms and even those who never hugged each other, hugged us (in our village and in the church, it is usually a handshake). And the Pastor was looking at us and he was like, ‘Well, this has never happened

before, everybody hugging each other.’ And we said it with great joy that this is the custom in our after-school program, that we greet each other like this, that we hug each other, and then we say to each other ‘Blessing and Peace.’”²¹

This simple gesture created a change in how the people approach each other and how closely they let each other in.

To show a different way of life they organise summer camps, church and village events (Family Day, Advent wreath creation, Children’s Day event) and football cup for the after-school programs in the region (in cooperation with football academies and clubs, who are looking to discover new talent). They visit regularly one of the Roma Colleges of Advance Studies of the RCH, so the children can meet with young Roma adults who are in higher education. Above all what they really want to emphasize and teach the children is the importance of solidarity, relationships, and a supportive community. Peter continues:

“And the other part of the after-school program is to show the child how good it is to get together, to be in a community, to sing a good song, or if we have the opportunity, this was in autumn, it was drizzling rain, but we were outside grilling. Everybody had a good time. So we are not alone, we have someone to count on, someone to ask for help. Through networking we get to know children from other localities, we can build relationships. I always tell the children that relationships are very important because when they grow up they can benefit from it and they will know how to ask for help from a person or they will be able to help others.”

Martha points out how important is from early on that the children take responsibility and become owners of the programs:

“For example, we had the after-school football cup: we could get them involved. Who had what role: you’ll be the table manager; you’ll be the water manager and then they knew that they had a task that they had to do. There was no such thing as someone is leaving or not telling us if one had to go so that someone would take over the task. It made them aware of the responsibility that they have to do it...This way, by doing the tasks, they’ve made the program their own and once they’ve made the program their own—they feel important. And they can work together...The way it works is that we always organise things so that they can hear it so we don’t have to explain everything because they’ve absorbed it.”

Peter and Martha not only work with the children, but the people of the village, with the different businesses and the mayor of the community. They have a lot of regular and ad hoc volunteers supporting them. They have a good relationship with the local RCH pastor and the congregation (Peter was elected as elder this year). They maintain good contact with the nationwide Roma ministry of the RCH (but not with the local church district). They are all also financially supported by

²¹ „Blessing and peace” (Áldás, békesség) is the official greeting in the RCH. The answer is: „Glory be to God” (Istennek dicsőség)

the nationwide ministry. They also maintain good contact regionally with lot of congregations where the pastors are active in Roma ministry. They are asked to give testimonies and help to connect with the local Roma communities.

They connect and get adults involved with different programs as it is part of the Roma ministry. In the beginning the non-Roma were hesitant to join, but they are now part of the after-school programs and even volunteer at events. This is also true for non-Christians as well, because they feel that they are treated with respect. The regional football cup revitalised the life of the village and bonded the neighbours together in way that it has not been present in years, and this makes more people interested in joining. The mayor of the village now supports the idea to organise the football cup every year.

Peter further shares:

“Or another very good example was the summer camp where all ages were here and, in some way, contributed to the success of a common program at the end of which we could say that yes, everyone here put in what they could, what they can bring. And we were able to achieve the goal that we had set together. Not me, not the others, but we were able to achieve it together. And I would like the village to be receptive to this, but I feel that we still have to set an example so that the village can see that there is not only talk but also action behind it.”

However, Martha often feels that the task that was given from God is too big for them, that they are not well-educated, or that they don't have enough knowledge. Still, the Bible verse that called her and leads her life gives her comfort time and time again “do not be afraid for I am with you.” This communion with God, through the daily prayer and Bible reading helps her guide her ministry with faith, love and humanity (her most important elements of her faith), and even gives her the missing knowledge.

The ministry of Simon and Anna

Their village is also in Eastern-Hungary and it is the neighbouring village to Peter and Martha's. In 2022, 94% of the population declared themselves as Hungarian, 34.2% as Gypsy/Roma (due to dual identities, the total is higher than 100%). By Christian denomination, 44.6% were Reformed, 2.8% Roman Catholic, 14.5% Greek Catholic, 16.2% non-denominational (20.6% did not respond)⁸. No other religion is present.²²

Even with the tendency of the Roma not to declare themselves as such, more than third of the village is Roma. Here the Roma slum is notoriously marked by drug problems, violence, inner

22 Magyarország Helységnévtára, <https://www.ksh.hu/apps/hntr.main>

conflicts, and poverty. Simon and Anna live and carry out their ministry here. They wanted to move away several times because they fear to be harmed or robbed one day. But as they said: “God called us here, so we stay.” Both of them are originally from this village. They live in a house that is in bad condition has no bathroom and the toilet is in the garden. Both of them are currently employed in the PWS program by the local government, so their work is unrelated to their ministry, which is something they do on a voluntary basis. (PWS is detailed in Chapter 2.).

Simon and Anna are in their early fifties, have four children and several grandchildren. Both of them finished secondary school, but not middle school. Simon worked in factories and different jobs. Both of them are good at mud brick making, a traditional Roma craft. They became engaged Christians 17 years ago and been involved in the ministry among the Roma in their village and beyond since. Their main focus are also the children living in the Roma slum. As they said: “with the adults it is difficult, nobody is a prophet in one’s own place”. During their ministry they have experienced many setbacks, mistrust, judgement (from the local Roma but also from the non-Roma). They restarted their ministry more seriously about 2 years ago. They stopped for years due to family, health related issues, and their workload. They wanted to start an after-school program as well, but they lack financial support and the educational background and Anna’s health is also very precarious. So they opened up their own home and became the trustees of the local children. They sing and pray with them, teach them about God and the Bible, and talk to them about school and home life. They provide guidance, emotional support, they cook for them if they didn’t eat, and they correct the children’s behaviour if it’s needed. They act like as a second family. It varies, but we are talking about 30 children. Simon and Anna provide mediation between children and parents as well as parents and school if needed. If they receive financial support, they occasionally organise family days, children’s day events with volunteers from the RCH congregation and the Roma community. Anna appreciates all the support they get but for her the most important thing is that the Roma and non-Roma are together and through this they witness the love of God:

“We get help because we have help, when we go to the church they will help us in our mission. If we invite the pastors, they come, if there is a family day or a children's day, they (the RCH congregation) help, they bring a little cake or a little coke. That is also helpful. Or somebody will wash a glass or a dish or be with the children and teach them, but I think the most important thing is to stick together because God is not discriminating.”

They focus first and foremost on leading people to God, because they see it as the possibility to make changes in the life of the Roma. Anna is convinced based on her own experiences, that:

“Whatever bad things, troubles, hardships come or whatever war or sickness, we must not forget that God exists. He is here among us and He wants what is good. Love, peace and understanding our inner anxieties, we can lay them down before someone, and we pray every day that God may hear our prayer. To protect our families, our grandchildren, our loved ones, our good friends. And to take away these bad lives, these wars. This is the healing people need. It’s the healing, that’s the

reason I converted. And then I can calm down. Whatever problems I have, I feel that there is a voice in me that says: 'stop, there is someone here to help you, there is someone to listen' and then I pray and I feel that fire, that flame that 'yes there is.'"

From this quotation an important part of their ministry becomes apparent: prayer. To know what is going on with the people in their neighbourhood, they start conversations on the streets, at the marketplace, at their workplace, and ask people how they are doing. They then assure them that they will pray for their issues and people. Both of them stressed that humility as an attitude is very important. Simon formulates it as following:

"And I've never considered myself a superior person when I talk about that God's son Jesus Christ died for your sins, he took you up on the cross: 'Come to fellowship and you'll hear the Word, you'll hear how good it is to be able to walk with Jesus on a daily basis.' And I'm not placing myself above anyone by saying that, I'm very careful not to. We have to do our work with humility, we can't let people see us as superior because we are Christian people. Because if they think that there would be a distance. We have already experienced this."

Anna completes:

"Wherever I go, without faith, without love, without peace, without humility, I cannot live."

They also started a house church service in their living room that is more like a Sunday service with songs and a sermon. The local RCH pastor comes every week to preach, but they also explain the story to the children because as they say "you have to get down to the level of the five-year-old children, otherwise they won't understand." The participants are mostly children and some adults (3-4). Their kitchen table serves as the altar. There is always dance in the beginning and the end of the service. As Simon plays multiple instruments and Anna loves to sing—they are the worship band. Here, as in other places as well, Roma go more easily to a house to worship than to the church, because they are afraid to enter in the church (I heard this statement from several Roma practitioners²³). Their great source of pride is that the children are also going with them to church occasionally and that they can behave well.

The same is true about school. Simon said they have gotten feedback from the school that the children who frequent their house behave better in the school. Their goal is to show another way of life for these children and adults through faith and for the Roma to start going to church.

"It is also a good feeling for me when there is a celebration and people start heading towards church. I get a sense of pride spiritually and I thank the Lord because I see that something is about to start."

23 The reasons of this fear is unclear, David (an other practitioner) said that they are afraid that they don't know how to behave, how they will be welcomed, how the celebration looks like etc...so an all-around uncomfortable feeling what they don't have during a house fellowship group, held by them at home. Havasi (Havasi 2018) states that according some non-Roma they are afraid to come to the church, because they know that they are sinners, but this statement is not founded by researches.

The Roma slum is big and quite disruptive in their village. They feel that there is little they can do, with limited resources except work with the children and to spread the word of God—which they do faithfully. Simon explains the different elements of his faith that keep him going: the work of the Holy Spirit, regular Bible readings, and to keep the Word of God alive:

“Well, first of all, I noticed that the Holy Spirit of God was working on my heart, in my soul because when the problems came there was always some inner suggestion that told me that I had to continue on this path. My devotion to God helped me in this. If challenges arise I always turn to God so I can make good decisions, so I don't hurt other people even if they have hurt me.”

“To be in the Word of God and to keep it is first and foremost. I'm thankful that I have accepted it, kept it, believe it, and confess to it in whatever situation. Whatever difficulties I face, I believe the Word and confess it. When the message comes through and I accept it with my heart and soul I am open and I would describe it as having a conversion. And then there comes a time through the word of God when one's heart and soul is healed and God gives meaning to it so that we see the importance of the message for our lives. This is how our faith begins to take shape.”

“For example, for me, the greatest guiding verse in the New Testament is the one from Revelation, where we read that ‘those who endure until the end will be saved.’ And if we can resist the influences and the problems that may come in our lives, if we can resist with these words that Jesus Christ provides for all people—including me—then we can stay on this path.”

Simon and Anna would like to do more, but due to their jobs and the lack of financial support and health problems they can't. Nevertheless, they are networking well in the region and nationwide with the RCH's different Roma ministries.

The ministry of David

He lives in a small-town (with 15.000 habitants), in the very Eastern corner of Hungary, where generally the Roma population is highly concentrated, especially in the smaller villages.

In 2022, 91,8% of the population declared themselves as Hungarian and 2,5% Roma, 8,1% not answered. There are other nationalities too (as it is more characteristic for a city than a village), but this is not relevant for this study, so I will not list them. By Christian denomination: 41,1% Reformed, 10,4% Roman catholic, 9,7% Greek catholic, 1,4% other Christian denominations, 6,5% non-denominational, 30,3% did not answered.²⁴

According to David, the figure of the Roma is much higher in reality—more than 10%—because just the Roma slum that he visits there are 1500 people living there. David is in his late thirties, he

24 Magyarország Helységnévtára, <https://www.ksh.hu/apps/hntr.main>

is half Roma and half non-Roma but he identifies himself more as Roma, even though he grew up among non-Roma and he lives in a part of the town where only few Roma live. He has a non-Roma wife. He was a policeman, an insurance agent, and was a gardener. He became an engaged Christian 5 years ago and now works in the Roma ministry with the after-school program. Before that he was an atheist. The local RCH congregation prayed for years to be able to start the ministry among Roma, but they didn't have Roma members. The pastor took the arrival of David as a sign from God that they can start the ministry. David was assigned very soon as a volunteer with another churchgoer (who later became his wife) to build something from the ground up. They started to visit the largest Roma slum, which is separated from the rest of the city by a railroad. They distributed materials and aid (packages, firewood²⁵, clothes and shoes, gifts for Saint Nicholas and Christmas, etc.) Besides that 2 years ago they also started an after-school program for the children, where he is now employed. The local RCH congregation supports it by providing the place and volunteers, the HEKS with financial support (employment, maintenance and program costs). Additionally, they also started a home fellowship group in the Roma slum for adults but the children are also included. When I asked David why he thinks that they need Christ first and not something else, he replied:

“Well, because all people need Christ [he laughs]. You could have asked a different question! Without Christ there will be no change. I see this all the time. The best example of this is my father who, being Hungarian, was the president of the (Roma) minority self-government for 16 years. He is a kind-hearted little man with good intentions and he did a lot for the Roma community. And yet he could not make a difference... If they have faith, if they have hope, if they have Christ, if they have Redemption, if they have eternal life, what more can you give them? That's why I say we need Christ, but of course, in order to feed the soul, we also need to feed them physically. I say that they need both the physical and the spiritual.”

When it's about Christian values he speaks about love and authenticity:

“One thing that is most important is what Christ says: if we don't have love, we don't have Christ. We must have one thing: love. If we have this love for all our fellow human beings, and not only for those who love us, then I believe we can serve in a way that shows Christ. Because it will be reflected.”

This love has to be lived and shared with credibility, because as David sees, Roma people never receive anything for free, not even from Christians. They are preyed upon every 4 years for their votes and charity organisations always want to take photos with the donations to benefit themselves by appearing to help the poor. David doesn't like to take photos at these events, he

²⁵ Often in Roma slums the houses have no gas or electric heating, so the people are heating with wood. This is also the case with running water. Often they use the common well to have water and they don't have bathrooms. But I don't have precise statistics about the magnitude of these circumstances.

says he only wants to take them to have them as memories, to capture a good moment together, but not to show their misery or his good deeds. Roma are used to people helping them with hidden agendas and David wants to show them that he comes with pure intentions.

“I have been in the Roma slum more in the last six months or year than in my whole life. So I've been going down there for two years now and I see that these people need authentic people. If you want to minister the word of God to them, to speak about Christ, you have to remain authentic. Because they get a lot of disappointment precisely by others talking to them about Christ and then expecting something in return. Most people never give for free and always ask for something in return.”

“I am trying to build relationships with the parents of the children in the after-school program and those around them. And I try to show them Christ through my life. Basically, I treat them as a person. When we are in a Roma ministry, we usually notice if someone from a Hungarian or upper society goes to a Roma person because they talk to the Roma a little bit from above. And I talk to them directly, equally, like a regular person, and as soon as I have the opportunity I testify about God in some way.”

This is his goal among the children as well. In the after-school program, the way he wants the children to experience the love of God is through friendship and the attention that he pays to them, recognizing whatever little success they have in their lives. He sees the emotional neglect in the families and the consequences that it can have in the children's/teenager's life by growing up:

“I see this especially now with young girls, girls in the seventh or eighth grade (13-14 years old²⁶), who are loved at home but don't get that hug anymore and they think they're not fully loved anymore. And that's where the problem comes from, they start looking at boys. In one way they feel like a big girl but in another way, sorry, they're the biggest little girl. And they can't find their place yet. And if the parents don't notice this, we have to deal with it in the after-school program.”

One of their practices to show love and acceptance is by giving each other a hug. The other is to show the children a different relationship dynamic and doing activities with them that they can't experience at home. This is a main motivation to renovate their house right now, to be able to plan and do activities there in the future:

“For us it's also a learning process because when you haven't built a community and you start a community that Christ has entrusted to you, you don't know how to do it at first. Then you'll have a little routine, a little practice with it, you'll be able to pass on and to show them more and more things. That's why this house will be good for us, because we will involve the children here and we

26 It's also the age when Roma girls often drop out from school and start family life (by getting pregnant and moving in with one of their families), often Roma says that they are married at this point, because moving in together and having a child signifies for them being married, even without an official celebration.

will build community. And we will show what it is like when we work as equals, as a family, and we can talk about Christ at any time. And we show them things they don't always see at home, like doing something together with a parent."

In order to help them imagine a different future it is important to David that they help the children study, to set and achieve goals, and to develop their talents:

"Another miracle is that last year we had two children in the Golden Bridge poetry competition²⁷ and now we have five and we got a gold medal. And these are all such good things that I can see within the after-school program that the children strive for something."

Working with the adults the ministry is more difficult and challenging, as they are struggling with the cycle of poverty, lack of education, and facing discrimination:

"There is a problem here: people are not valued. And they go to work and they are considered stupid and slaves and they are exploited. Because they say (the non-Roma) that they (the Roma) don't like to work. But that's not true. They're all in the construction industry, they go up to Budapest (3 hours by car), they go left and right just to support their families."

To earn the trust of the people in the Roma slum, David is also looking for a gate-keeper in the Roma community, as he and his wife are outsiders, and they have difficulties to go beyond the role of a donor. One man in the home fellowship group is related with half of the Roma slum, but he is not willing to join to the ministry. The long-term goal of David is that the Roma slum becomes a real part of the city, not only on an infrastructural level but that the Roma are included in society. However, for him it brings a lot of inner struggles because he sees that this ministry is very difficult with a lot of setbacks and he sees his lack of ability to love as well:

"Sometimes I disappoint myself that I can't even give to my own dog as much love as he deserves. I think about that especially when I'm at a low point and it always pulls me back to focus on Christ."

One of the Bible stories that keeps him hoping and going is the story of Job:

"But lately the Lord keeps bringing the story of Job to me, every time I pick up a Bible, it always opens up there. And for me it was a confirmation to stay on my path because if you know the story of Job, you go through trials and tribulations but you get back more."

In order to develop the ministry, he wants more support from the RCH pastor and congregation, because he wants the Roma ministry not only to be considered as one of the congregations

²⁷ "Golden bridge" is a nationwide poetry competitions for after-school programs run by the RCH, organised by the nationwide Roma ministry of the RCH once a year to promote Roma culture and support the talent of the children.

independently involving some volunteers, but that it all becomes an integral part of the life of the congregation. He started to study to become pastoral assistant (higher education) to gain more knowledge and skills.

The ministry of Elisabeth

She lives and works in a big city (capital town of the county) with 110.000 habitants, in Central-Hungary where the Roma population is lower than in Eastern-Hungary and the region is well economically developed. However, there are some parts of the city with high Roma population (one in the inner city, one outside of the city) where the habitants who live there call it ghetto. According to Elisabeth the city council refuses to acknowledge the existing problems in these areas of the city. The after-school program, where Elisabeth works, is in the middle of this so-called ghetto, where the crime and the drug dealing and usage are high. The RCH congregation where the after-school program belongs is in the city centrum which is physically not far (10 minutes by bike), but as Elisabeth said:

“it is as if there is a wall between the city centrum and this district—the Roma people don’t go to the centrum and lot of the RCH congregation members would never come to this part of the city (was it not for the after-school program).”

In contrast to the other interview locations, here the denominational majority is Roman catholic (it’s the tendency when we go to the direction of the west) and there is a Lutheran community as well (this is related to the German population in the town):

In 2022, 85,9 % of the population declared themselves as Hungarian, 0.8 % German and 0,7% Roma, 13,7 % did not answer. There are other nationalities too (as it is more characteristic for a city than a village), but this is not relevant for this study, so I will not list them. By Christian denomination: Roman catholic, 8,4 % Reformed, 1,5 % other Christian denominations, 1,1 %, Lutheran, 0,5 % Greek catholic, 13, 7 % non-denominational, 43,5 % did not answer.²⁸

Elisabeth is in her early sixties and works as the housekeeper of the above mentioned after-school program (she is an employee). She graduated from high school and was married (she lost her husband due to illness years ago) with three children, and she has several grandchildren as well. From early on, Elisabeth was a caring and community-oriented person, who helped raise her own siblings, was involved in all kind of school activities and was an enthusiastic Pioneer²⁹ and always gave a helping hand to those in need. When she became a mother, she had a strong experience of God that gave a new meaning to her life and activities:

28 Magyarország Helységnévtára, <https://www.ksh.hu/apps/hntr.main>

29 The children/teenager movement of the Hungarian Communist Party.

“And when I became a mother, my upbringing turned around, I was a Marxist-materialist, socialist, communist, evolutionist, etc. And when I became a mother, I said ‘this is all nonsense, how could I believe this?’ By the way, I had faith then, but I was not converted.

Because God leads us, He gives us faith, He has a power upon us. It’s not research, minerals, rocks and cross-sections that tell us what the truth is. But there’s a higher power, to whom we owe our existence. So God has led me to this and enlightened my mind because He is the truth. And once you understand that and you’re converted, there’s no question.”

She explains the difference between being a believer and a convert, through her personal story of calling, and the moment when God first talked to her personally:

“Well, Isaiah is my verse, ‘Fear not for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by name, thou are mine’ and I was literally called by the Lord at that time. We were living in a one-story house at the time, and I went downstairs to see who was calling me because there was no one home. But I felt that warmth and that there really is a power of God, a power of the Holy Spirit that you can physically feel. I feel Him a lot. And when I am called, I am a happy person. And being a believer or being a convert are two different things. Because I believed before, and I was seeking, and I wanted to be very close to God. But when He spoke to me, that conversion is beyond words. That’s a close relationship.”

For her (as well as for the other interviewees) conversion means the beginning of an intimate and personal relationship with God: when she hears a call, experiences a healing, or God reveals Himself throughout the story of her life.

What is important for her in her ministry to live by the brotherly love, be humble, diligent and follow the vision that God gives. For her, mission or ministry goes far beyond her work in the after-school program. She stops to speak with homeless people on the street, listens to people’s suffering at the bus stops, prays for the neighbours who are constantly fighting and lets herself be called “Mommy” by a young man, who struggles with drug addiction, etc. As she says:

“Oh and I also want to say that my service to the community is to represent that we are all one. No matter if you’re from an other country, if you’re not Hungarian, if you’re from an other nationality. God is showing me that they are my brothers and sisters. They may have different principles, but they should not be left alone. Not even a non-believer.”

“Truly the Lord can give such joy and put His Word into our lives. So it’s very important for me. Brotherly love, humility. That ‘the one who humbles oneself is exalted, the one who exalts oneself is humbled.’ I always feel this in my life, for example, when there is a situation, like here we have a weekly after-school program team meeting. We talk about what we’re going to do, where we’re

going, this and that, it lasts for an hour on Tuesdays. And everybody gives their opinion or comments. And then we have a question and they say this and that, and I say no. But I don't justify it, because maybe I don't even think it through, but God says it's not the right way. No one doubts it because somehow the Lord gives you a vision that you already know the answer right away. You don't have to think it through, you don't have to discuss it, you don't have to ask the six of us around, but the Lord says go that way. And that's it. And my colleagues don't say anything. All I say is no, we don't have to do it that way, we have to do it this way. And now! [she laughs] So it's that vision of the Lord. He's giving me a compass: So brotherly love, vision, humility, diligence."

She also experiences that God can give knowledge one that doesn't come from her, one that is beyond her understanding. This is what she partly explained with the vision coming from God, but it can also be a concrete insight in a situation, or a word of encouragement, or a message from God to someone that she transmits.

Her faith is characterized by joy, happiness, and delight:

"But as I go on with my life, as I get my tasks, it still gives me happiness. Complete happiness, which I don't know if you can get in life. Because I was married for 32 years and it was true love, it was a happy marriage, but there were many problems and many difficulties.

So I was not as happy as I am with God. That feeling that man can't give you that God can. That liberating, happy feeling. And that peace of mind. Because we have such and such days, such and such tasks, and one feels restless. And no matter how you're comforted or caressed, you're still restless. But when you talk to God and He puts it in your heart, in your soul, it's such an infinite calm I get from Him. And then I just dwell in it. So I thank Him very very humbly that I am chosen like that. I didn't know that for a long time. But one finds that out somehow."

She incorporates the elements of her faith through different ways in her daily work with the children:

"Yes, they are definitely incorporated because as soon as a child comes in here, I embrace them. And in the same way the others embrace him/her too. Hugging is one way of expressing love. And by hugging, we also take him/her a little bit out of the place where he/she came from. But the child is very clever, there is no hypocritical hugging, there is only hugging from the heart, there is only love from the heart. Because as I said I see a creation of God has entered, a miracle of God has entered, a beautiful child of God has entered. And it's always very very joyful."

Besides hugging, respecting the children is also important for her to help them learn to discern and make good decisions in everyday life:

“And God can also put that in us in a clever way, how to act by faith. How to be their companion by faith. How to look at a child with respect. Because I respect the child. I respect the child because they're a human being, a divine creature who is wonderful and deserves respect. Only because they are children, we should not belittle them, hurt them, scold them, feel superior to them. We are equal partners, there should be the same brotherly love between us, even though I am older and they are children. And they feel it and know it. Because through faith it also leads to their personal development. To feel what is good. God puts good in us, but in the old man there is also evil. And I tell them to discern. Now is it the good feeling when you're being hugged and loved, or is it the good feeling when you've just had a fight with someone, you've hurt each other, you've talked bad to each other and you've gone to bed restless? Which is good? God is good. He is always the one to choose and He will tell you inside, within.”

The mission statement of this after-school program is that it's a social, spiritual and neighbourhood centrum. At the moment the after-school program is so popular (with around 40 children, 8 employees, and around 20 volunteers) that they don't have the capacity to expand the activities. Even though more and more social issues are brought up by the parents of the children (drug problems, there is no garbage collection in one street, etc.). They would like to provide a place for different initiatives and would like to start a work group for the neighbourhood issues but they have to wait for more support and cooperation from the RCH congregation (for example to have volunteers focused on these neighbourhood questions and work with the habitants). They also want to have regular Bible study group for adults and Sunday service, because the habitants of this district (and the parents of the children from the after-school program) will not join the central RCH Church of the city. They feel more at home in this place.

As for the after-school program, the vision is that it's first of all a social space and not an educational institute. They focus on developing the emotional intelligence of the children and creating a safe place where they can go through personal and social development, discover and grow their talents. One of the biggest difficulties is how low the children's self-esteem is:

“And our after-school program is five years old, in the first period they (the children) could not say anything positive about themselves. It was so painful. They were wringing their hands, thinking and nothing came to them. They couldn't think of anything good to say about themselves. Because their self-esteem is so low, they think that they can't be good, that there is no good quality in them, that they are not able to do good.”

Their first concern is working on this aspect with workshops and simply by the encouraging and loving attitude of the team members, but of course they provide lot of educational support, as well as summer camps, talent development, excursions, and an all-around predictable afternoon structure with a positive and joyful atmosphere.

Elisabeth sees the key of their success in the unity among the team workers:

“And only God can give us that. This strength, this energy, this happiness we have in the ministry. And thank God we can support and help each other in our team of co-workers. Because it wouldn't work if we didn't have that between us. So we are united in our goals, in our faith.”

The ministry of John

It is difficult to calculate the population of the little settlement of John, because administratively it is a district of the nearby town, but in reality it is a separate settlement. It includes vineyards where many Roma families live in the associated agricultural buildings, although these are not buildings for housing. There is no running water in most of them.

In this small village (district) the approximate population is 1300, in the vineyards it is 850.³⁰ According to John most of them are Roma families, so half or more than a half of the population are Roma, and even if they are not Roma, they are living in poverty. The stereotypical statistics hold true here as well, the presiding denomination is the RCH in this area.

John is in his mid-thirties and is vice president of the OPRE Roma Association which is a cultural and social association to support the local Roma communities. This is a non-paying position.

He moved in to one of the vineyard's building with his extended family 20 years ago, when the Roma slum, where he grew up, was abolished in a nearby big city. He completed a teacher assistant training after his high school graduation and he worked as such for years. He came to Christian faith at 12, thanks to a pastor who came down to the Roma slum regularly:

“And then the pastor started to read the Bible and I realized what I was missing in my life: care, love, attention, and that I had it there (in the Bible study group). Whenever she read the Word, she always told me how much God loves us and I started to believe it. That there really is a man who died for me and how much he loves me. And I said I want this man, I want this man, because I wanted to hold on to something in the beginning.”

After that however, he also experienced that God doesn't protect him in the school from violence and mockery and he felt so desperate that he tried to commit suicide at the age of 14. He can remember that he started to hum a worship song during the attempt: “you give me strength in every situation”³¹

And at that moment, the wood beam he tied himself to snapped in half and he realised that he survived the suicide attempt. This was the moment when he understood and accepted that his life has a purpose and formulates in this way:

30 Magyarország Helységnévtára, <https://www.ksh.hu/apps/hntr.main>

31 The song in Hungarian with English sub-titles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNw3aZT1Huw>

"And so I decided that when I grow up, I'm going to have an association of gypsies working for gypsies or people who want to work with gypsies. And I really succeeded in everything that I dreamed and I learned a lot, I came and went a lot and I tried to be everywhere I was called to volunteer and I really tried to serve even people who are not gypsies, because it's really important that gypsies are in the church, in the congregation, so I went everywhere. Because many times I feel that the Roma have nothing to hold on to. Or your children are your anchor and that's why you get up every day, but you still slip because you are not spiritually built. And you need a safe place where you can build yourself up spiritually. And it is the [OPRE Roma] association and the church where we work that gives that protection, that security to those families who need it. It's like a refuge where you can really live your joy and cry if you need to."

What drives his ministry in his settlement is the experience of a refuge that he found in his faith and in the faith community. The OPRE Roma association was created 20 years ago (by social scientists and activists from the city from where many Roma families were resettled in the vineyards of this village) with the goal to support them further after the relocation (because being poor in the city or in a small village are not the same reality). Today the association rents the old kindergarten building, they have a lot of volunteers (around 20-30), three employees through the PWS and very diverse activities: it functions like a neighbourhood house, with social care, clubs for mums and women, material aids (clothes, food, books, healthcare products, etc.) after-school program, summer activities for children and a lot of events that brings the whole village together (Roma and non-Roma, old and young).

"Usually when there is an event, like a carnival, which is not specifically a Christian thing, but we sneak in something Christian, for example a Christian pantomime performance played by the children, and then you give something to their souls through that. Or we ask them to start with a prayer at the beginning or pray for somebody, or when the war was on, we stopped in the middle of the carnival and everybody prayed for the war. And those are the moments that you sneak into everything. Small crumbs, a feeling, an experience."

As there is no church in this village because administratively, they belong to an RCH congregation of the town. In the OPRE building they have also started a bi-weekly bible study group with the help of the town pastor (who travels to them). Since January of 2024, a missionary couple also joined the village full-time to start a church planting via their town congregation. They have organized a work team to support John's ministry. The goal is dividing the tasks of the association and the new church planting project while they are still working in harmony.

What is important for John in this bible study group (which is more like a fellowship group) is that it is very interactive and connect the people together on different levels:

“We have bible study every other week and I love it when you can really talk to people, which you can't do in church: you sit down and 15 or 20 people talk about what happened this week or can I give thanks for something. We can cry together if we have to, laugh together if we have to and listen to each other. It is very important to have someone you can talk to about your feelings and dare to say them. A lot of times we sit there from 4:30 pm to 9:30 pm. Because there we speak about the Word together, but we can also talk about everyday life. And that is very good. To be able to say out loud what's inside of you. And you feel that you're not alone. Because there's that company, that group you're with, there's God and you're with Him.”

The way John sees his ministry is that he wants to give people respect and treat them as he wished to be treated as a child and by this show them that by God they are sheltered, loved, and through a listening and accepting community around the Word of God their life can be transformed. John sees the value and a talent in everybody and wants to honor it by giving space and opportunity to everyone to join their ministry:

“Or there's a lady called Agnes who's really a bit mentally ill and so visibly ill on the outside and she has such beautiful handwriting. Seriously. And a lot of people look down on her, won't talk to her because she's drooling and stuff. And she said she would really like to help us. And one time I said to her, because I saw that she writes very nicely, 'come and sit down and do the registration, just please we have the bathroom, we have clothes, come in and get dressed, the girls will help you', Roland braided her hair, and then she sat there and registered people all day. When she came out she said she had never felt so good in her life and she's 54 years old. So these moments are just when they feel like they're valued and it doesn't matter what they look like.”

He also cares about the children in an inclusive way, he does everything to avoid a child being shamed:

“Or if there is a child with lice you can anoint the head of each child, not only the one with lice, but also the adults, and then you don't have that one child who's ostracised... So it's important to look at the other person's feelings, look at the fact that if you say or do this in a way that you're going to break the child, from then on the child won't come. And then there are those moments when you get them back tenfold, a hundredfold. And I say, I really don't get paid for it, but I get a lot from elsewhere. Both spiritually and humanely. And it's really that if I need anything or anybody, they're there. And those are the best moments, that I don't get it back financially but humanly. And for me the human connection is very important.”

John became an informal leader of the Roma community but he is also well accepted by the non-Roma, mostly because they started the bible study group where more non-Roma joined who missed faith life in the village. The Roma wanted him to present himself as a Roma minority self-

government representative, because the Roma said that he does more for them than the actual representatives. But he doesn't feel ready for that.

For John reconciliation is also a very important part of his own life and ministry, he told several reconciliation stories during the interview. One of them:

“And once I met a man at the Tesco, whom I hadn't seen for years but who used to hurt me a lot and when I went up to him, he hugged me and I just looked at him and said: ‘Oh my God, I've never been hurt like that in my life, you hurt me and you hurt me a lot.’ And when I told him that he had hurt me a lot and ruined my life and I wanted to kill myself, he cried in the middle of Tesco and apologised. And these feelings of, well it was a long time ago, but a person who comes from upper society who looked down upon me and humiliated me, and to hear, to see him apologise... Because I have survived but still feel so many times that I struggle and I can't live up to others. I am a very self-doubting person even to this day. But still, when there are moments like this, when I feel like I can't do it, there's always some spiritual prompting or a moment when I can transcend that. Like in this case, for example, I meet a person who hurt me and I can say that I forgive and let it go. And that letting go, forgiveness, there's nothing greater than that.”

Testimonies also play an important role in John's life, as well as encouragements, that even from the deepest depth there is a way out with God. He also gives his testimony often.

To summarize his vision about their ministry:

“I would really like to see people in my village grow both in their faith and in their environment. That in the segregated settlements, because it's on the edge of the village—as is usually the case with the Roma—and the difference between the two parts of the settlement is like the difference between heaven and earth. You can really tell who is living where. And I would like to make it impossible to see that or to be able to distinguish. If you go to that area, you don't know that poor people live there. The Roma should be able to change their environment, be clean, have faith. They have to believe that they're valuable. And that's the biggest thing, that they're as valuable as anybody else and they can do anything. To believe that they can have goals, to know that they can learn. If they want to be anything they can be. They can do the same work as any other person in society.”

4.3. Conclusion

What was flagrantly obvious in every interview is the role of faith to face difficulties, suffering and illnesses: all of the interviewees stressed that they found inner healing and peace in God for the pain of the soul or the pain in their body and this is what they want to share with others—Roma and non-Roma. Another interesting observation is that for the question of their motivation, why they

are working for the community, they all told me the story of their conversion which became immediately the story of their calling. Being chosen is an integral part of their identity. At least three of them mentioned that they believe that the Roma have a prophetic calling for the nations, as the Jews, basically they understand themselves similar to the Jews (but only one of them mentioned it in the official interview, the others did it outside of it). They all work for inclusive and accepting communities, where a special feature is the hug, especially with children. Typically, they have a greater vision for the Roma ministry than just working with the children, but they build it around this concrete ministry (also because for after-school programs financial support is more available and a little congregation is more willing to start it than a bigger project).

We see also that practitioners are not strictly following the ABCD methods: they don't start to interview the habitants of their neighbourhood, don't involve them in the designing phase of the CD process (setting goals, finding assets, etc.). However, their long-term goals are those of a CD process: economic, social, and environmental change (housing, cleanness, etc.) they all start with a spiritual approach (toward the adults). Partly because aiming for social and economic change needs resources that these RCH congratulations and practitioners don't have. They focus more on the spiritual part of CD, to show people perspective and their own dignity through faith. They work on the quality of the Community life and to make people be able to see their own value and believe in the possibility of change (being changed first by the love of God).

All this evokes the question, how can we interpret these characteristics and methods from the perspective of transformative diaconia? This will be the subject of the next chapter.

5. The results of the empirical research in the light of the contextual and theoretical framework

5.1. Introduction

After outlining in Chapter 2. how the context of poverty and exclusion affects the Roma Christian practitioner's ministry in Hungary—the theoretical framework of ABCD as a transformative diaconia practice was detailed. In Chapter 4. the results of the empirical research were presented in which we listened to the voices of the Roma practitioners about their faith and work. In this chapter, all the elements come together to gain a better picture of the interviewees' understanding of the interrelation between their context of Christian faith and diaconal practices.

With the help of the contextual and theoretical framework, the results of the empirical research will be interpreted with regard to the ABCD methods and the aspects of transformative diaconia implied by the Roma Christian practitioners. By this, we will answer the main research question.

5.2. The results of the empirical research in the light of the contextual and theoretical framework

5.2.1. ABCD methodology

If we strictly follow the step-by-step methodology of ABCD we can observe that practitioners derive different aspects from it.

The steps, to formally listen to the communities and then to organise community meetings to define the common (goals of the ABCD process) are missing from their practices. There are a few different explanations for this. Firstly, some of them are living in small villages where the people know each other, sometimes too well.

Secondly, generally, in the Hungarian society, bottom-up initiatives are not common. Structures, methods, and the culture of democratic decision-making processes are lacking, people are not used to it. Even less so in the countryside within the RCH. A model of a strong leader who has a vision and distributes the tasks is more widespread. In Roma communities, an organisation structured by and around family leaders is also more common. ABCD could be the place for this to function differently but in the cases of the recent study, this is not the case.

Thirdly, because of financial reasons, it's easier to start a concrete activity (with the children for example). The practitioners use these activities as a door to open up to the local people, to involve the parents, and to invite volunteers to participate occasionally or regularly. They successfully motivate and organise people for a common goal, even if this goal is not determined together with the participants.

Informally, during the encounters and through a common goal (an event for example) or through the ministry, the practitioners however do speak with the people. They map the needs, the assets, and the ideas and use this information, even though it is a less structured way than in the ABCD methodology.

As for the gatekeepers, some of them are gatekeepers themselves in their own community, and some of them try to work with the informal leaders of the local Roma communities.

We can also observe in the interviews that almost in every case the community gradually implements more complicated actions. The first step was to collect the trash together and now they organise family days together. In some places a regional football tournament grew out of the after-school program, in another village a house church service took shape from a group of children. Often however a clear long-term action plan is missing, which is caused partly by the financial insecurity of the ministry. Another cause can be the lack of training in ABCD but this was not mentioned by the interviewees.

5.2.2. Transformative aspects

Holistic

Roma practitioners all understand their work as a ministry or mission. Often, the question about the relationship between their faith and their ministry was difficult to understand for them, because what they are doing for others is a call from God, a direct consequence of their experience of the love and healing of God. They want to share what they received and this incarnates in the service of their Roma and non-Roma neighbours in many different ways. The unity between spirituality and social engagement seems to be natural for them.

Spiritual and material aid is equally important for the Roma practitioners, however, they are often confronted that material aid is a double-edged sword, which is also needed but also often brings division, jealousy, and dependence into the community. To unify, generosity and peace could come from the inside, but they focus more on the spiritual development of the people first and on straightening the relationships among them.

Some of them would like to stop with material aid to invest more in development, but they know too well what it means to be poor, and would rather try to combine the two approaches, even if they see the negative effects of charity.

Their thinking and practice are also holistic in a way. They integrate the different levels in their ministry: personal, interpersonal, and community levels of development work. Due to the nature of their ministry (often after-school programs, social aid, and community events) and their possibilities, the accent is more on the personal and interpersonal level. They have less influence on structural injustice questions and on the economic development of the community, also because they themselves are often living in deprived circumstances (and regions) and they lack the tools to for it. Here is where the engagement for social transformation of the non-Roma, especially the local RCH congregation and their partnership could support the efforts of the Roma practitioners according to the vision of the liberation theology.

Pneumatical approach

The faith of the interviewees is characterized by the life in the Spirit. The most mentioned elements of their faith, what is important for them personally and in their practice, were the fruits and the gifts of the Spirit: love, peace, faith, understanding, humility, hope, joy, etc.

Partly it can be interpreted by the Romas' sensibility and connection to the spiritual word that is present in their belief system and everyday life, although more in the form of fears from the spirits.

Kakwata's (Kakwata, 2018) pneumatical approach to development work systematises precisely these areas, which the practitioners also underlined as important.

As they became engaged Christians, we see in the interviews, that the Holy Spirit has an important place in their faith and ministry, as also an antidote to their fears and inner pain. It is a way of sanctification for them, an inner transformation.

Another dimension of their faith, as Kakwata puts it, is the revelation by Spirit. On many occasions, the interviewees experienced that they received concrete knowledge about something they did not

know about (due in part to their lack of education), as well as visions, and an internal conviction for their ministry that they can't explain in any other way other than the work of the Holy Spirit working in them and through them.

They all mentioned without exception unity as a vision and the goal of their ministry. Even if they work in the so-called Roma ministry, they see far beyond that. They aim to transform relationships (among Roma and non-Roma) and for that, they see the only way to become brothers and sisters in Christ by sharing: prayers, meals, good times, feelings, the challenges of a common mission, etc. Still, they recount that they are met with mistrust, indifference, and even hostility from the part of the local congregation (and of the Roma community). They have to prove themselves first if they want support from the congregation for the Roma ministry. However, we see, that in John's and Peter and Martha's case, as they live in villages, where there is generally a lack of social life, their activities became the engine that brings the people together independently of their ethnical and social background. Achieving change in the perception of Roma remains problematic. The Roma who participate in these initiatives become the exception in the eyes of the non-Roma and they are classified now as good Roma, Roma but normal.

Non-Roma who are involved in the Roma ministry become adopted by the Roma community after a while. They often hear that you are (as) a Roma now, which is very difficult to achieve as a non-Roma. This is not based on certain habits or cultural characteristics, it is more the acknowledgment of the love and support that the Roma receive from a non-Roma in a constant and credible way. Part of it is the respect and partnership that non-Roma show toward the Roma.

Forming a we all together remains a challenge.

Some more has to be said about empowerment. In Chapter 2. to describe poverty and exclusion the disempowering system by Christian and Meyers was used (Meyers, 2021) and then the Roma's situation was presented in the Hungarian context. In Chapter 4. the interviewees all agreed that the biggest issue in their ministry is the negative self-image of the Roma. They described this phenomenon in different ways, some of them compared it to slavery, some of them as the inability to believe that they could live differently, and some of them mentioned the disappointment of the Roma in political regimes while they let themselves be used by politicians. Steve Biko (Biko, 1987) a South African activist observes a similar attitude by the black population in his country. While the context is very different, Biko's analysis sheds light on the Roma's difficulty when they are about to stand up for themselves and for social transformation. Biko (Biko, 1987) sees the root of black people's inability to act or create change as spiritual poverty. This is what Christian and Meyer (Meyers, 2021) refer to as the personal level of the disempowering system that holds them captive. Biko (Biko, 1987, 29) urges to take this aspect more seriously, when one wants to work for change:

"All in all, the black man has become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.

This is the first truth, bitter as it may seem, that we have to acknowledge, before we can start on any programme designed to change the status quo. It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is if you realise that the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their identity. The first step therefore is to make black man come to himself; pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth.”

Biko (Biko, 1987) calls it spiritual poverty and this is how the interviewees see it as well. According to their own experiences, only their personal encounter with the love of God could change this deeply rooted, unconscious belief that their lives are worthless. Therefore we can understand their primary spiritual approach to ABCD. In the practice of the interviewees, we didn't observe that they use radical methods to fight for social justice and to oppose to unjust political leadership, even if we understand that according to liberation theology, fighting against the evil in this world can also mean concrete steps for political liberation of the oppressed. The Roma practitioners see the first step of empowerment (even if they don't call it empowerment explicitly) as offering Roma people faith in God, because this is the way how they themselves experienced liberation, healing, hope, and regained their dignity as a child of God. They fight against the personal level of disempowerment (Meyers, 2021) or in Biko's words against spiritual poverty, with the power of the Holy Spirit, because they see this as the key to lasting and sustainable development, which is in line with the observations of Yoms and Bowers du Toit (Yoms, Bowers du Toit, 2017).

Prophetical

During the interviews and also off the record, the parallelism between the Jewish people and the Roma came up several times. The Roma practitioners understand their vocation as similar to that of the Jewish people. They are people with no land, strangers, and oppressed but they also see themselves as chosen by God to become a sign of God's alliance for others. Even if this parallelism raises questions theologically, it helps to understand the driving force behind the practices of the Roma practitioners. This is one of their ways to draw strength and find meaning in their situation.

They understand their poverty and exclusion as well as their faith and actions as God's plan, which can bring a spiritual and social transformation not only for the Roma but also for the non-Roma. In the sense of transformative diaconia, the interviewees' holistic ministry is in line with the idea of rethinking the church from the perspective of the margins, with the participation of the people from the margins as the main actors. Roma practitioners, by underlining their prophetic vocation toward the others claim their place in the Church.

The mission statement of the nationwide Roma ministry invites local congregations to rethink and redesign their missional and diaconal practices to become an inclusive and just community, as a mark of God's Kingdom in the world.

However, we see that the experiences of the Roma practitioners are often that they are a crying voice in the desert and the local congregations are deaf. Even if the RCH officially supports inclusivity and the engagement of the local congregations in peace and justice work, the concrete implication remains often problematic. A lot depends on the local pastor and his attitude toward the Roma and there is a lack of trained congregation members who carry out this ministry with the Roma practitioners.

An important result of the interviews is that every practitioner finds it important that more Roma become regular churchgoers and therefore the fear of Roma entering the Church decreases.

First I found this detail less relevant, as I interpreted it as the internalised expectation in the Roma practitioners from the part of pastors that this is the right way for someone to become a good Roma, a Roma but normal. However, after a deeper analysis it became clear that even if the Roma practitioners insist on this aspect partly because of this expectation, there is a more important dimension to it. For the interviewees, the Church is a place of inclusion, it's the house of God where everyone should be invited and welcomed. It's a symbolic place, where they can experience that they belong not only to God (which they also experience in their house church gatherings) but also to the community. The fact, that it's so difficult for Roma to belong to an RCH congregation in most places shows that often the Roma practitioners don't find partners in the local congregations to build an inclusive community.

Relational

The ministry of the Roma practitioners is deeply relational. A good illustration of this is that they all recounted a transformation of a person or a relationship when I asked them about the successes of their ministry. Often it was a story about inner healing, a reconciliation, a changing of attitude (toward the Roma or less gossiping among the people for example), more openness toward faith, willingness to share and give, etc.

The relational nature of transformative diaconia, as we saw in the third chapter also comes from the idea of the Imago Dei of every human being, which is the root of the social responsibility in the Jewish culture. This social responsibility is part of the practitioner's Christian identity. It becomes clear as they refer to treat one another as you want to be treated or that we all belong to the family of God or love one another as the drive of their ministry. This attitude also comes from their own experiences of exclusion and poverty as well as the experience of the love and healing of God.

The relational nature of the ministry of the Roma practitioners can also be interpreted by the fact, that most of them lack financial, educational, and infrastructural resources, so they rely on the

social capital of the community. Their poverty becomes one of the forces of their ministry because there is a place for everyone and every gift is needed and appreciated. Nevertheless, their limited possibilities and everyday financial struggles are often the source of hopelessness and frustration. In places where the RCH congregation is strong and the economic situation is better compared to the rural villages (in the two cities of the research) the source of frustration comes from the lack of understanding toward the Roma ministry. The practitioners do not feel integrated with the congregation's life and they often experience ignorance and a patronising attitude.

An other possible source that for the Roma practitioners, a relation-based ministry is, as we saw, the organising principle of Roma communities is the extended family, the mutual support among the members. This attitude they also bring into their ministry and invite the non-Roma as well to live their faith in community, open up to share and carry each other's burden.

5.3. Conclusion

Roma Christian practitioners in Hungary carry out their ministry among deprived Roma people often as one of them. Their faith in the goodness and love of God however gave these practitioners a vision and a conviction that despite their circumstances they are valuable members of God's family. This is the experience that they want to share with the Roma, as it enables them to believe in a different life which is the first and most important step of transformation. They all understand their ministry as a call from God, working for unity, reconciliation, and a better future for the children and the community. Their engagement in social transformation stems from two sources: one, from the experience of poverty, exclusion, and suffering, and two, from their knowledge of a God who loves, forgives, heals them, and gives them dignity and purpose.

Their transformative diaconia ministry originates with their faith. Their spirituality is rooted in living by the Spirit as that is the one who transforms and empowers. With their ministry, they aim to create *koinonia*, a *we*. In other words, inclusive and just communities among Roma and non-Roma.

6. Conclusion

In this study I approached the *Roma issue* in Hungary from a transformative diaconia point of view because as we saw this minority group is identified with poverty and disruption. Roma are often target groups of welfare programs in the RCH.

We also saw that despite regular government initiatives to better the economic, social, and educational circumstances of the Roma, the public opinion is more hostile towards them than during the socialist regime, and the gap between the Roma and the non-Roma have deepened over the years.

The RCH operates in different areas and levels of diaconia as a contracting partner of the state to carry out social services. Among other causes the professionalisation of diaconia resulted in that congregation-based diaconia—understood as a universal call of all Christians to serve one's neighbour—is not the widespread vision in the RCH.

Transformative diaconia as a theological approach and ABCD as diaconia practice both promote grassroots diaconia initiatives where the Roma people become the actors of social transformation. Transformation, as the goal of development, is a result of the reflections on the development practices. The experiences of the last 50 years show that if the focus is only on economic and social growth, there is no sustainable change in marginalised people's lives.

Roma Christian ABCD practitioners and diaconia scholars see the root of this problem in the spiritual poverty of the Roma, in a belief system that disempowers them and makes them unable to stand up for themselves and work for change. That's why in Roma Christian practitioner's ABCD practice spirituality and personal development are central focal points.

The experiences and ministries of the Roma Christian practitioners show that through their own transformation by faith they received the prophetic call to work for *koinonia* in their locality and in the RCH, and for the communion between Roma and non-Roma. This is still despite the fact that they come from the margins of the society and a despised or disadvantaged position.

However, the question remains—how are the RCH congregations prepared and ready to become partners to these practitioners? How far do they offer support and are open to rethink the place of the excluded and poor in their communities?

There are several aspects of this study that would be worthwhile to develop further.

Firstly, it would be useful to conduct follow-up research on the development processes in the congregations and ministries to see how they interpret and further develop practices based on transformative diaconia. It could be useful to help develop training curriculums that support grassroots CD initiatives.

Secondly, we would have a more complete picture of the ABCD practices among Roma if research would be conducted with non-Roma Christian practitioners and RCH pastors who are involved in the Roma ministries. The non-Roma perspective could shed more light on the local congregation's questions, struggles, and visions about this ministry. This perspective would help design more tailored support for the RCH congregations and promote transformational diaconia approach.

Thirdly, research about diaconia curriculums in the RCH's Theological Universities could highlight how is transformative diaconia available for future generation of pastors. It is a relevant question because the areas where the RCH is the primary denomination and where the economically deprived are, overlap. Many of these future pastors will find themselves in localities where Roma communities are present and as the current situation shows, often they have not adapted their theological approach and practical tools to work towards reconciliation, peace, and to build inclusive communities.

I would like to close this study, with the words of a Roma Christian practitioner, John as a vision and guideline towards communities, transformed by faith:

“We’re fighting for the same cause. And that is that everyone is one with God. If you are a Christian, that’s what everyone should do, no matter from what denomination you are, no matter what religion you are, no matter if you are a Roma or not a Roma, but to fight together in everyday life. And to be able to do something for each other.”

Bibliography

Tony Addy, "Approaches to Community Development", in *Developing just and inclusive communities: Challenges for diakonia / Christian social practice & social work*, ed. Hans Morten Haugen, Benedicte Tvetter Kivle, Tony Addy, Terese Bue Kessel, John Klaasen, (Oxford: Regnum Books International: 2022), 15-30

Anita Barnóczki, "Az átmenetiség kultúrája – A cigányságra jellemző vallásosság, normarendszer és látszólagos hiánykultúra", *Sárospataki Füzetek*, Vol. XVII. No. 1-2. (2013), 93-112,
<http://srta.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/sfuzetekmajus2013.pdf>

Anita Barnóczki, "The Culture of Temporariness – Religiosity, Systems of Norm and Apparent Culture of Deficiency Characteristic of the Gypsies", *Sárospataki Füzetek*, Vol. XVII. No. 1-2. (2013), 93-112)

Steve Biko 1946-1977, I write what I like, (Cambridge, ProQuest LLC, 2005)

Mátyás Binder, "Cigány-képek a folklórtól az etnopolitikáig: a romák és a rendszerváltás", *Múlt-kor*, Augusztus 18, 2009,
https://m.multkor.hu/20090818_ciganykepek_a_folklortol_az_etnopolitikaig_a_romak_es_a_rendszervaltas?pldx=3

(Mátyás Binder, "Gypsy Images from Folklore to Ethnopolitics: the Roma and the Change of Regime", *Past-Time*, 18 August, 2009)

Alan Bryman, *Social research methods*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.)

Called to transformation – Ecumenical Diaconia, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2022)

Ham Carlos, "Ecumenical Chronicle Colombo: Theological perspective on diakonia in the twenty-first century", *The Ecumenical Review*, 64:3 (2012), 383-392

Ham Carlos, "Empowering diakonia: A Perspective From the World Council of Churches", in *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, (Oxford: Regnum Studies in Mission, 2014), 107-120

Censuses 2001, 2011, 2022, www.ksh.hu

Eszter Dani, Tényleg minden cigány hisz Istenben?, *Református Cigánymisszió*, (July 1, 2022),
<https://ciganymisszio.reformatus.hu/hirek/aroma-podcast-s01e05-tenyleg-minden-cigany-hisz-istenben/>

(Eszter Dani, Do all Gypsies really believe in God? *Roma Ministry of the Reformed Church of Hungary*, (July 1, 2022))

Eszter Dani, Planting and developing Roma Reformed Churches in Sub-Carpatia Ukraine? *Master Thesis*, (Calvin Theological Seminary Th.M. in Missiology, 2000)

Wanda Deifelt, Beate Hofmann, "Towards a Comprehensive Concept of Diaconia: Care, Transformation, Empowerment, Advocacy and Conviviality", in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum books, 2021), 55-61

Stephanie Dietrich, "A diaconal approach to community development in the light of the sustainable development goals: 'Leaving no one behind' through exploring religious resources for creating just and inclusive communities", in *Developing just and inclusive communities: Challenges for diakonia / Christian social practice & social work*, ed. Hans Morten Haugen, Benedicte Tveter Kivle, Tony Addy, Terese Bue Kessel, John Klaasen, (Oxford: Regnum Books International: 2022), 95-109

Stephanie Dietrich and Evangelos Thiani, "Diaconia and the church – toward a diaconal ecclesiology – reflection from orthodox and protestant perspective", in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum books, 2021),

Tamás Eperjesi, Attila Dezső, "Református Cigánymisszió és Felzárkóztatási programok" *Glossa Iuridica*, Vol. X. No. 4., 2023, 283-290,

https://ajk.kre.hu/images/doc2023/glossa/2023X4/GI_2023_4_283-290.pdf

(Tamás Eperjesi, Attila Dezső, "Roma Ministry and Programmes for Roma Inclusion in the Reformed Church of Hungary" *Glossa Iuridica*, Vol. X. No. 4., 2023, 283-290)

Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We drink from our own wells*, (New York: Orbis books, Maryknoll, 2003)

Virág Havasi, "A cigányok vallásossága és a cigánypasztoráció", in *A történelmi egyházak - modern társadalom* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2018), 166-213

(Virág Havasi, "The Religiousness of Gypsies and the Pastoral Care of Gypsies", in *Historical Churches - Modern Society* (L'Harmattan, 2018), 166-213

Paul Henderson, "TWO Community development: historical overview", in *Making spaces for community development*, ed. Michael Pitchford, Paul Henderson, (Bristol University Press, Policy Press, 2008), 7-16

Tamás Hives, Roma Szakkollégiumok, *Új Köznevelés* Vol. 75, No.9-10, (Sept-Oct 2019), <https://folyoiratok.oh.gov.hu/uj-kozneveles/roma-szakkollegiumok>

(Tamás Hives, Roma Colleges of Advanced Studies, *New Public Education* Vol. 75, No.9-10, (Sept-Oct 2019))

Information on the current status of Public Work Scheme (PWS) in Hungary,

<https://kozfoglalkoztataskormany.hu/download/6/eb/02000/current%20status%20of%20Public%20Work%20Scheme.pdf>

Frederick Kakwata, "A pneumatological approach to transformational development: Implication for the church, *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, Vol 4., No 1., (2018), 199–214,

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2018.v4n1.a10>

Cecília Kovai, *A cigány–magyar különbségtétel és a rokonság*, (Budapest: L'Harmann, 2017)

(Cecília Kovai, *The Gypsy-Hungarian distinction and the kinship*, (Budapest: L'Harmann, 2017))

Attila Landauer, *A Kárpát-medencei cigányság és a keresztyén egyházak kapcsolatának forrásai (1567–1953)*, (Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L'Harmattan, 2016), https://www.academia.edu/42241019/Landauer_attila

(Attila Landauer, *The Sources of the Relationship between the Gypsies of the Carpathian Basin and the Christian Churches (1567-1953)*, (Budapest: Károli Gáspár Reformed University - L'Harmattan, 2016)

Magdolna Láczy, "A cigány/roma közösségek kutatásának hazai irányai és legismertebb eredményei", *Acta Medicinae et Sociologica*, Vol. 13., No. 34. (2022), 5-32, <https://dea.lib.unideb.hu/server/api/core/bitstreams/7fb8b0c3-2d9d-4f12-b2ff-2f256b97e072/content>

(Magdolna Láczy, "Trends and best-known results of research on Gypsy/Roma communities in Hungary", *Acta Medicinae et Sociologica*, Vol. 13., No. 34. (2022), 5-32)

Magyarország Helységnevtára, <https://www.ksh.hu/apps/hntr.main>

(Hungary City Names and Statistics)

Erica Meijers, Heather Roy, "Reformulating diaconia in western Europe: New approaches and theological challenges", in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum books, 2021), 259

Bryant L. Meyers, *Walking with the poor, Principles and practices of transformational development*, (New York: Orbis books, Maryknoll, 10545), Kindle edition

Johannes Nissen, "Towards a transformation of power: New Testament perspectives on diaconia and empowerment", *Diaconia, Journal for the study of Christian Social Practice*, Vol. 3, No.1., (2014), 26-43

Kjell Nordstokket, *Diaconia in a trinitarian perspective and as dimension of the Mission Dei*, in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum books, 2021), 37-42

János Péntes, István Zoltán Pásztor, Patrik Tátrai, Tibor Kóti, "Roma population in Hungary – spatial distribution and its temporal changes", *Deturope* 3/11, 2019, <https://www.deturope.eu/getpdf.php?mag=det&vol=2019&no=3&artid=8>

Pope John Paul II., Codependium of the social doctrine of the Church, *Vatican*, (June 29, 2004), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

Strategy of the ministry among Roma “Reconciliation-health-hope: Concept of the Reformed Church in Hungary’s ministry among Roma”, 2013, https://reformatus.hu/documents/974/Concept_of_Roma_Ministry_of_RCH_FIN.pdf

Ignatius Swart, “The Transformative power of diakonia – theological reflection from South Africa”, in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner (Oxford: Regnum books, 2021), 63-67

Dietrich Werner, Matthew Ross, “Terminologies, learning processes and recent developments in ecumenical diakonia in the ecumenical movement”, in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony, Martin Büscher, Beate Hofmann, Félicité Ngnintedem, Dennis Solon, Dietrich Werner, (Oxford: Regnum books, 2021), 9-25

Ephraim Yoms, Nadine Bowers Du Toit, “A Comparative Discourse on Christian and Secular Distinctive Features of Transformational Development”, *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Missiology*, Vol. 45, no. 1, (September 2017), 45 – 60
<https://doaj.org/article/62b5b2fa86464b638fa73a2cec3e2ee8>

Declaration Sheet Master's Thesis

Name student: KINGA LAKATOS
Title master's thesis: Transformation by faith

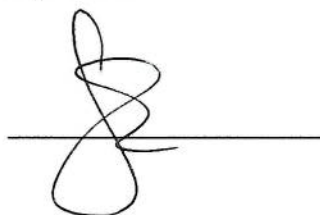
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that the aforementioned master's thesis consists of original work. The thesis is the result of my own research and is written only by myself, unless stated otherwise. Where information and ideas have been taken from other sources, this is stated explicitly, completely and appropriately in the text or in the notes. A bibliography has been included.

Place, date:

Oosterhout 16.08.2024

Signature:



DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I hereby agree that the aforementioned master's thesis will be made available for inclusion in the library collection after its approval and that the metadata will be made available to external organizations and/or published by the PThU.

Furthermore, I

do

do not

authorize (the library of) the PThU to include the full text in a database that is publicly accessible via the world wide web or otherwise. (This permission concerns only the publication of the master's thesis as described, without further transfer or limitation of the student's copyright.)

Place, date:

Oosterhout 16.08.2024

Signature:

