Juggling with Scarcity:
Local governance, housing strategies and the role of "informal private landlords" in 'Gypsy villages' in Hungary

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INTRODUCTION

- The spatial characteristics of the Roma/Gypsy population in Hungary:

Concentrated regional segregation, affecting mostly districts in the economically underdeveloped regions of the country, among others in North-East Hungary (Pénzes et al. 2018, Virág 2015, Teller 2017)

- Segregated neighbourhoods (Wacquant 2007):

1. families come to/or stay not by their own free will but under some economic and social pressure

2. the given part of the settlement is even physically separated from the rest of the settlement

3. the area is stigmatised

4. there are differences in the access to the institutions compared to other parts of the settlement

- Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, and a mixed-method research in 2 segregated settlements in rural Hungary

INTRODUCTION 2

- I shed light on the role of 'informal landlords' (oftentimes local mayors and their kinship) in the acceleration of the process of spatial segregation
- I argue that informal landlords fill the gap, the economic niche, left empty by the lack of a social housing regime in these rural settlements

- Through this process, however, local dependency structures are reconfigured, "political clientelism" is strengthened, and the poorest of the poor are trapped in deep poverty

- Also, how a significant strata of 'mobile' poor households or labourers try to practice their "right to escape" (Mezzadra 2004) by "existential mobility" (Hage 2009)

Spatial segregation pattern of Roma in CEE countries

- 2 major patterns:

1. Ghettoised rural villages; the so called "Gypsy village"
2. Segregated neighbourhood of urban districts

My 2 case studies:

1. Lapos:

- A small, kinship-related village in Borsod
- It's called "shanty-village" by its dwellers – a "ghetto of the (long term) unemployed" (Wilson 1999)
- For many, the only regular income is public work and childcare allowance

2. Bánya:

- A former mining town with better infrastructure and labour market opportunities

Income generating opportunities of the poor in North Hungary ("Field of Opportunities", L'Estoile 2014)

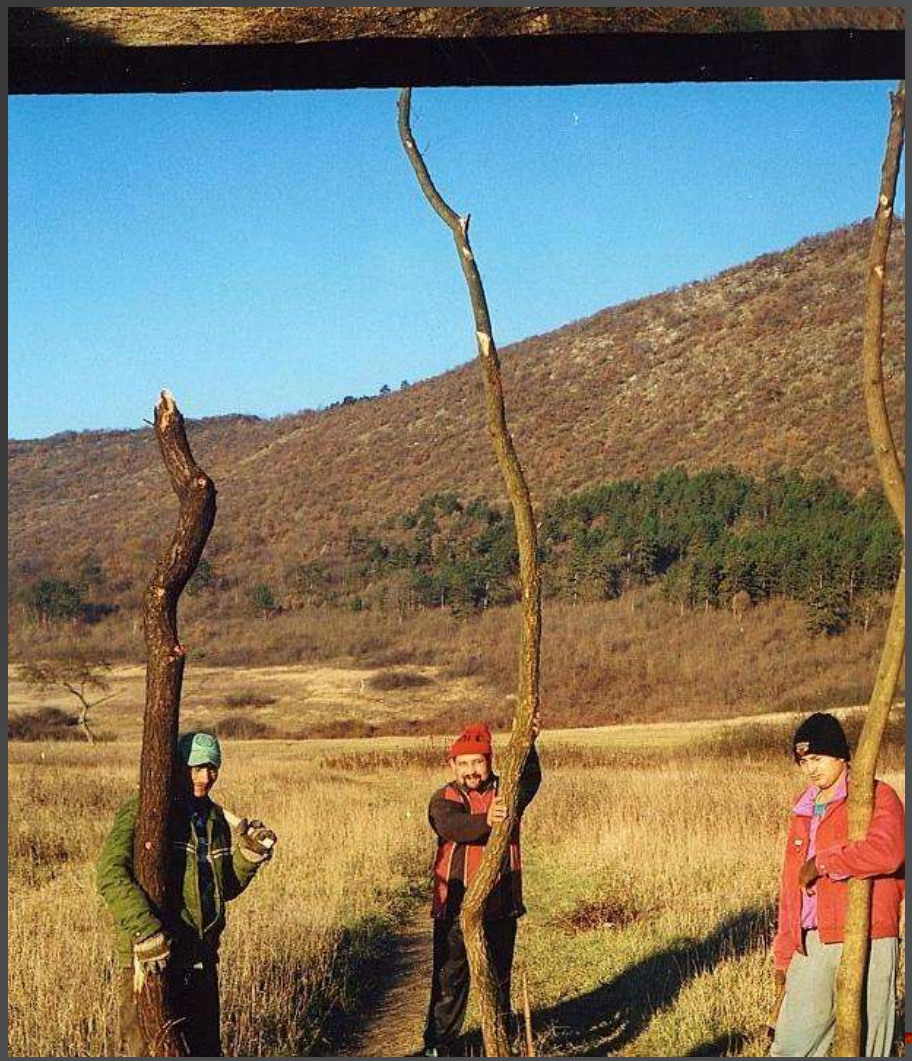
Field of Opportunities: to refer to the set of possibilities and constraints that define at a given moment the 'conditions for life'

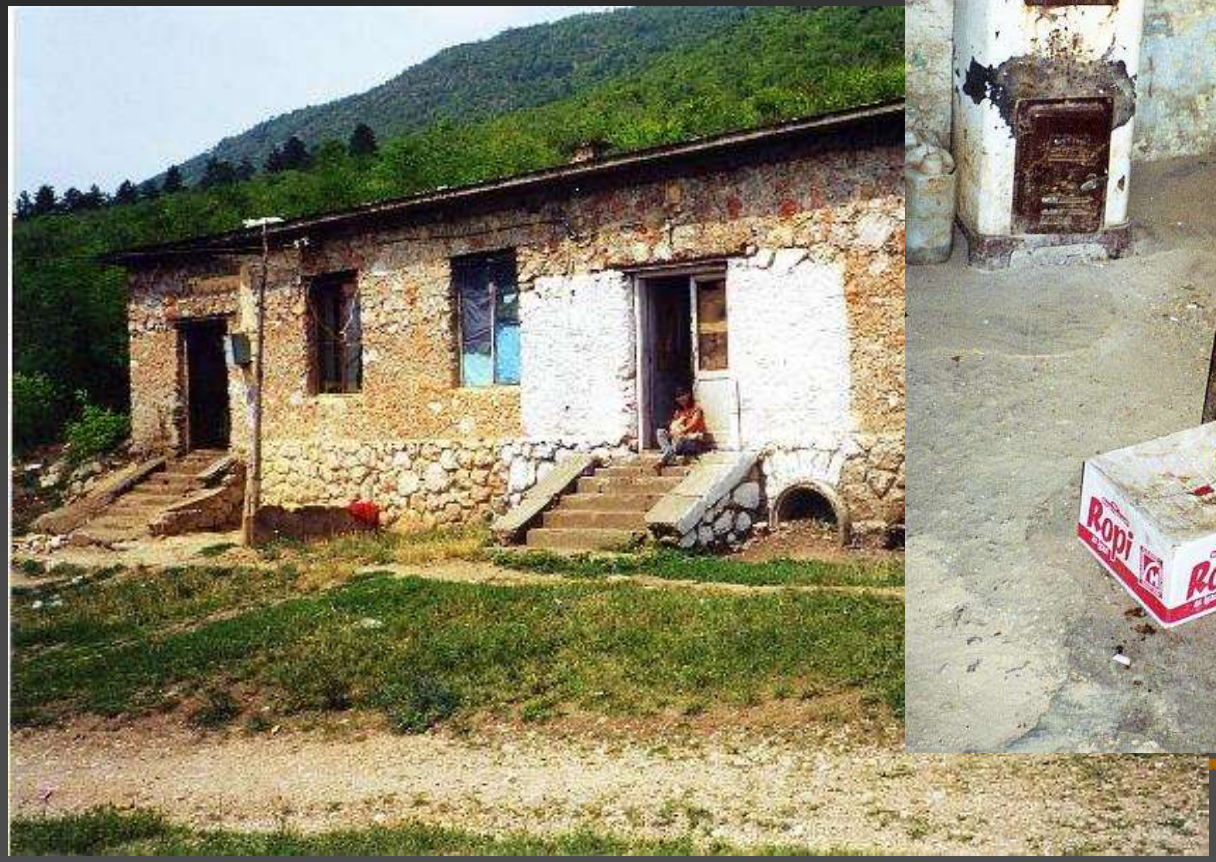
- Livelihood strategies should be analysed as a system
- Potential elements of this system in North Hungary:
- 1. informalized segments of the formal labour market" (eg. Bosch, assembly work through agencies)
- 2. Public work (recreating old dependency ties in the form of patron-client relations – however, alleviating absolute poverty („since we have this mayor, life is better, at least we do not go hungry, everybody works for the local office")
- 3. Diverse informal and illegal strategies (eg. trading with debentures of pawnshops, informal lending, sex work, etc.)
- 4. foreign labour (due to the opening up of the EU "informalised, low-wage labour market, on assembly lines in UK cities (Scott 2017), or in the construction industry in other EU countries, facilitated by stuffing agencies, or informal recruiters

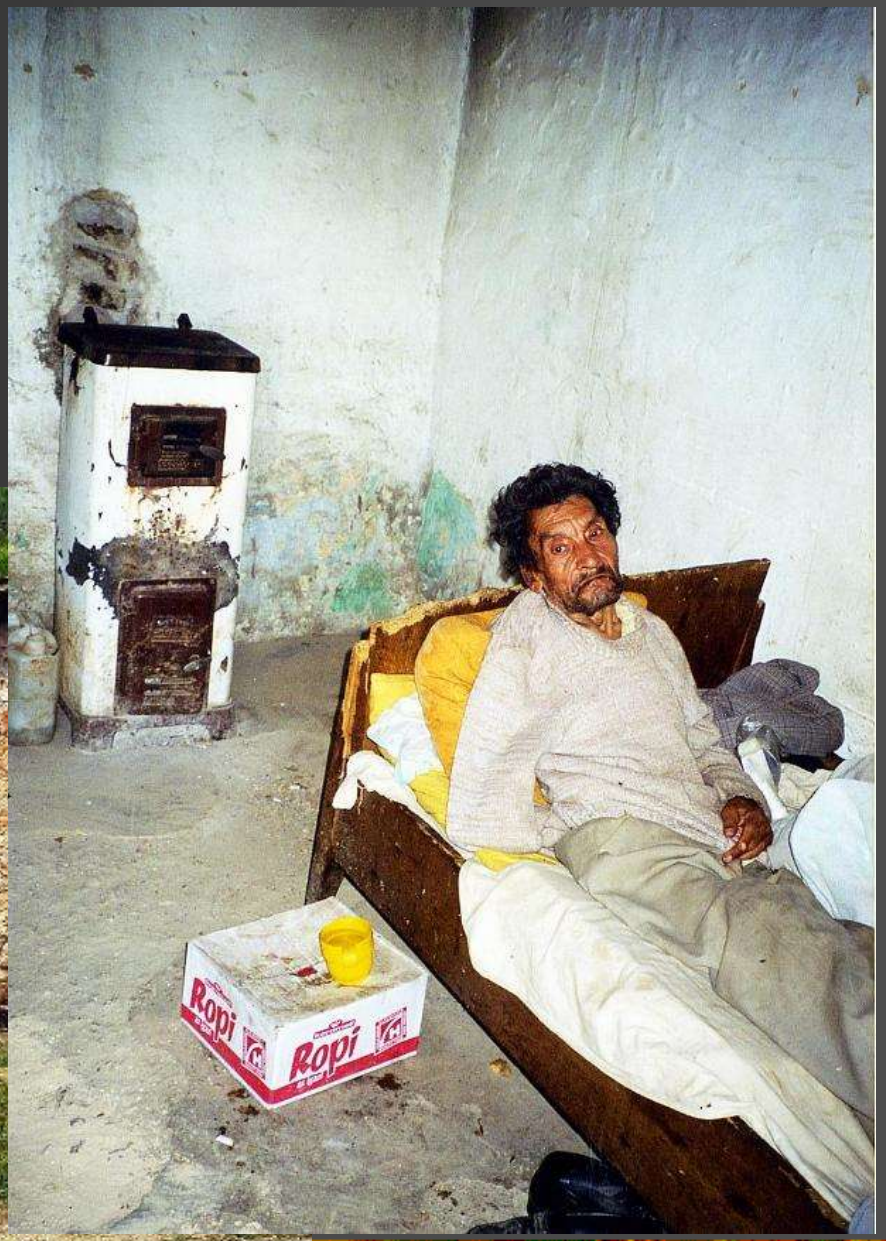
On the grassroot level, contrary to common wisdom...

- Instead off passive victims, the role of active agents:
- Some of the poor imagine economic betterment through geographical mobility (Pine 2014, Durst 2013, Vidra- Virág 2013), a form of "existential mobility" (Hage 2009) and a practise of "the right to escape" (
- Others inventing a survival strategy in the informal/illegal economy in a social context with vast ethnic discrimination on the labour market (Kertesi 2005) and a "war on the poor" (Jeppesen 2009) or in circumstances of a "punitive state" (Ferge 2014, Szikra 2014) – contributing factors that drive them into informality
- Lesson learnt from the 2 case studies:

  even those poor whose "decision-making capacities are restricted by their limited assets, be it in terms of wealth or power, are capable of developing sometimes complex individual strategies to enhance their own and families' well-being" (Narotzky- Besnier 2014).



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Local governance of space and poverty:

Gypsy villages/segregated neighbourhood detached from the majority society

The historical embeddedness of 'clientelism' in rural Hungary –

From the 'patron-client' relations among Hungarian peasants and "their Gypsies" (day-labourers) to the 'political clientalism' between Gypsy local mayors and their local subjugated income poor families, their potential voters

2. The decentralisation of welfare governance and social and housing policy gave rise to the disproportionate increase of power of local government leaders (mayors and their kin)

-public work scheme and the strategy of private house renting with the help of CSOK, a special Hungarian social policy programme, aimed to help the access to housing for the low income working poor households to establish and strengthen political clientelism (Lemarchand 1972)

- The surveillance of the local space by the local mayors to govern and regulate the settlements and their poor, vulnerable inhabitants

Some concluding remarks

- 'What comes after post-socialism' in these rural segregated Gypsy settlements and 'Gypsy villages'?

"There will be a Kurutz World" (*kurucvilág*), according to local poor Roma

Meaning: bands of outlaws will govern their world

- The poor can be a good asset (a profitable enterprise) for those in local power

- The emergence of a new local new capitalists groupings, accrued with financial (new money), social (personal ties and network) and political (being municipal mayors) capitals

They manage the surveillance of the space under their control, by organising and regulating the settlement

One of their tool of governance and building up 'political clientelism' is their housing strategy and private renting for the poor in the lack of a local social housing regime