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Space as an ark and ghetto or as a field of action and social change?

Yiota Karagianni & Foteini Kougioumoutzaki

Abstract

Space was always considered as the prominent *topos* of classification of both the similar and the diverse (i.e. working houses, high class neighbourhoods, prisons, special schools, psychiatric clinics, asylums). Space has a formative power. Through space one can recognize the ways social relations are built and maintained. Space is closely related with knowledge and power. Space is analyzed through different approaches and sciences: representations of space (social constructions), spatial practices (perceptions) and the lived space (architecture, human geography). In this paper, we present data gathered through an ethnographic study which was carried through from January 2012 to December 2013. We drew our research tools from an array of tools used in the fields of geography, architecture, history and education and we utilised Soja's construct (1989) of socio-spatial dialectic. The study aimed at decoding Roma space in a multilateral way using several areas of space-interest (commonly used spaces, ways of housing construction, centres, home-school distance). We reflect upon ex parte categories which exist up to now and define Roma space as ghetto space, recognizing the role society plays in reproducing dominance and order. We attemptto view Roma space through their need to rupture the "normalised" space and create new meanings for space and social relations. We use image-based data so that Roma voices for space are heard.

Keywords: space, Roma, education

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Ο χώρος ως κιβωτός και γκέτο ή ως πεδίο δράσης και κοινωνικής αλλαγής;

Γιώτα Καραγιάννη & Φωτεινή Κουγιουμτζάκη

Περίληψη

Ο χώρος θεωρούνταν πάντα ως ο κατεξοχήν τόπος ταξινόμησης τόσο της ομοιότητας όσο και της ετερότητας (π.χ. εργατικές κατοικίες, γειτονιές ανώτερης τάξης, φυλακές, ειδικά σχολεία, ψυχιατρικές κλινικές, άσυλα). Ο χώρος έχει διαμορφωτική δύναμη. Μέσα σε αυτόν μπορεί κανείς να αναγνωρίσει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους χτίζονται και διατηρούνται οι κοινωνικές σχέσεις. Ο χώρος είναι στενά συνδεδεμένος με τη γνώση και τη δύναμη. Αναλύεται μέσα από διαφορετικές προσεγγίσεις και επιστήμες: αναπαραστάσεις του χώρου (κοινωνικές κατασκευές), χωρικές πρακτικές (αντιλήψεις) και του βιωμένου χώρου (αρχιτεκτονική, ανθρωπογεωγραφία). Σε αυτή την εργασία, παρουσιάζουμε δεδομένα που συλλέχθηκαν μέσω μιας εθνογραφικής μελέτης που διεξήχθη από τον Ιανουάριο του 2012 έως τον Δεκέμβριο του 2013. Αντλήσαμε τα ερευνητικά μας εργαλεία από μια σειρά εργαλείων που χρησιμοποιούνται στους τομείς της γεωγραφίας, της αρχιτεκτονικής, της ιστορίας και της εκπαίδευσης και χρησιμοποιήσαμε την κατασκευή της κοινωνικο-χωρικής διαλεκτικής του Soja (1989). Η μελέτη στόχευε στην αποκωδικοποίηση του χώρου των Ρομά με πολυμερή τρόπο χρησιμοποιώντας διάφορους τομείς χωροενδιαφέροντος (κοινώς χρησιμοποιούμενοι χώροι, τρόποι κατασκευής κατοικιών, κέντρα, απόσταση σπιτιού-σχολείου). Αναλογιζόμαστε τις ex parte κατηγορίες που υπάρχουν μέχρι σήμερα και ορίζουμε τον χώρο των Ρομά ως χώρο γκέτο, αναγνωρίζοντας τον ρόλο που διαδραματίζει η κοινωνία στην αναπαραγωγή της κυριαρχίας και της τάξης. Επιχειρούμε να δούμε τον χώρο των Ρομά μέσα από την ανάγκη τους να διαρρήξουν τον «κανονικοποιημένο» χώρο και να δημιουργήσουν νέα νοήματα για τον χώρο και τις κοινωνικές σχέσεις. Χρησιμοποιούμε δεδομένα που βασίζονται σε εικόνες, ώστε να ακούγονται οι φωνές των Ρομά για χώρο.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: χώρος, Ρομά, εκπαίδευση

Introduction

This study does not deal with space as a Euclidean concept in terms of siting, classifying and naming (types of residence, sewage system, water supply system, road network, distances, school premises). Neither does it treat space as a measurable and neutral geometric surface. This study rather treats space and Roma through the concept of a socio-spatial dialectic (Soja 1989).

Space, namely *oikos* (the Greek word for dwelling/house) and its mapping, are not conceived here as an independent condition/variable. Space determines and affects to a great extent the conception of social time, co-existence in common space, common understandings and social symbolisms.

As stated by Giannakopoulos & Giannitsiotis (2010: 15-16), "spatial thinking allows us to examine the materiality of social relations, namely, to examine the particular spatial locations where materially constituted, social relations are maintained and power becomes a means of imposition, negotiation and resistance."

During the last decades, various sociological and pedagogical studies have shown that societies often identify the different lifestyles (such as those of an insane, of a sick, of a crippled, of a criminal or of a gypsy) with forms of social behaviour attributed to these persons and the groups they belong to, thus erecting "walls" in a symbolic and literal manner by means of spatial dimensions. Groups like the above are thought to be at the margins of the society or even out of its boundaries. Using topographical metaphors to describe social exclusion, is indicative of the conceptually productive power of space and of the fact that space itself supplies evocative metaphors for crystallizing the nature of society and social experience (c.f. Bourdieu, 1999, in Gulson & Symes 2007).

Moreover, according to Foucault space plays a major role in the recognition and exploration of the schema *knowledge/power*. Space has always been the crucial field in which the relation between classificatory identification (social housing structures, middle/upper class districts) and classificatory heterogeneity is regulated (institutions, prisons, psychiatric clinics, poorhouses, asylums). In the past these "walls" were visible and they produced and reproduced fear by means of the "enchanting impact of exception and the impact of punished deviance" (Stavridis, 2010: 254). Therefore, the perception of space is closely associated with the location where the social condition interacts; it also suggests how social relations of production coexist in space and how they are inscribed and reproduced and finally dictate a system of discrimination and resistances. As Massey argues (1993), space is a product of social relations which are most likely conflicting and unequal. Those introductory remarks pose a political questioning about space.

Space and Roma

Within the above theoretical context, the analysis that follows in this paper was produced within the framework of a European Union Program entitled "Education of Roma children in the Regions of Central, Western and Eastern Macedonia, and Thrace"[1]. Our field of operation included approximately 4000 Roma and non-Roma children, 102 schools, as well as 26 settlements and 14 camps (Mitakidou et al., 2015). In Greece, Roma are not formally identified as a minority group: they are considered Greek citizens. However, there are no accurate demographic statistics on their numbers. They can only be identified on the basis of their concentration in certain areas and their lifestyle as a "Roma" community (Mitakidou et al., 2015).

The living conditions of Roma vary. The majority live in settlements composed of built houses or less steady prefabricated constructions, mostly in distinct areas within a city or town. A smaller number of them lives in camps with makeshift constructions or tents or even more wretched living conditions, usually at the edge of cities or towns. Further, some Roma families live in neighbourhoods and home comparable to typical mainstream standards (Mitakidou et al., 2015).

Pict. 1: Dendropotamos (western edge of Thessaloniki, in the urban area)

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[1] *Scientific Responsible:* Prof. Evangelia *Tressou,* Assistant Scientific Responsible: *Prof.* Soula *Mitakidou.*

From the beginning of our involvement with the coordination of the above-mentioned program which focused on the education of Roma children, we had to locate the educational process in its socio-political context. Its nature inevitably and directly links the program to the critical issues of poverty, inequality, social exclusion and human rights, at both local and national level. The educational scene is just a reflection of the larger picture of marginalization and exclusion that characterizes Roma life in Greece as well as in other European countries. We believe that space, boundaries and frontiers are powerful agents in defining social relations within and between different social groups.

Based on the above theoretical assumptions on space and our standpoint on education, we mapped living conditions, population and school space. Part of the mapping process is presented in this paper. Before proceeding to on-site mapping, we considered the institutionalised practices and the available published material in order to prepare this study.

We obtained the official urban typology classifying the types of settlements/camps and residences from the published data of the Public Corporation for Urban Development and Housing, DE.PO.S., (1999)[2] on confronting the immediate housing problems of Greek Gypsies[3]. This classification based on the official urban development plan, is regarded as an objectively existing "scene" which nevertheless is differentiated from the thought process and course of action for humans. So, eight types of housing are being outlined: the three first types as well as the eighth type describe the camps, the fourth and the fifth type include the households located within the urban fabric, the sixth type contains the prefabricated houses provided by the Ministry for the Environment, and the seventh, the organised housing units provided by the Workers' Housing Organisation (OEK).

We may cite below the related typology:

Type 1: Pure settlement in a permanent location mostly with impromptu sheds for permanent or seasonal use.

Type 2: Pure settlement in a location transferred in a wider area for use on a permanent or seasonal basis.

Type 3: Mixed settlement, with the mixture of houses with impromptu sheds, usually for permanent use.

Type 4: Neighbourhood mostly with houses, for permanent use, often in deprived areas located within the urban fabric.

Type 5: Conventional houses or flats dispersed within the urban fabric.

Type 6: Prefabricated houses. New settlements including solely or mostly prefabricated small houses provided by the Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works.

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[2] Public Corporation for Urban Development and Housing (1999). Study of a Program on confronting the immediate housing problems of the Greek Roma, Athens.
[3] Gypsies was the official term used to describe Roma population in Greece, during the '90s.

Type 7: Organised residential area. This type refers only to the new-built area in Sophades, constructed by the Workers' Housing Organisation to accommodate Gypsies who owned land in the old settlement.

Type 8: Mixed settlement of prefabricated houses. This type refers to a residual settlement where prefabricated houses are mixed with houses or impromptu structures (shacks, sheds, etc.). Prefabricated houses can also be found in mixed settlements (type 3), but in a small percentage of the total envelopes.

It is interesting to note that the institutional neutral language of the above typology objectifies the space situation for the Roma population and legalizes a specific professional discourse such as the one of engineers.

Despite the current discourse on communities open to the "other" and the academic "overproduction of otherness", the approach to otherness is strictly based on classifications that each country endorses and their behavioural consequences. The aforementioned official typology shows that otherness stands on the threshold and is found in ghettos, or, as stated by Stavridis (2010), in *heterotopias*. Stavridis specified this model of spatiality as "city of enclaves": "An enclave is just a space to seclude otherness, either in the form of a sentence (ghetto) or a privileged seclusion (protected areas) [...]" (Stavridis 2010: 258). Gated spaces, ghettos, are treated as threatening the order, as embankments weakening social identification, endangering social reproduction. For the collective unconscious these spaces represent the risk of dis-order and non-compliance.[4]
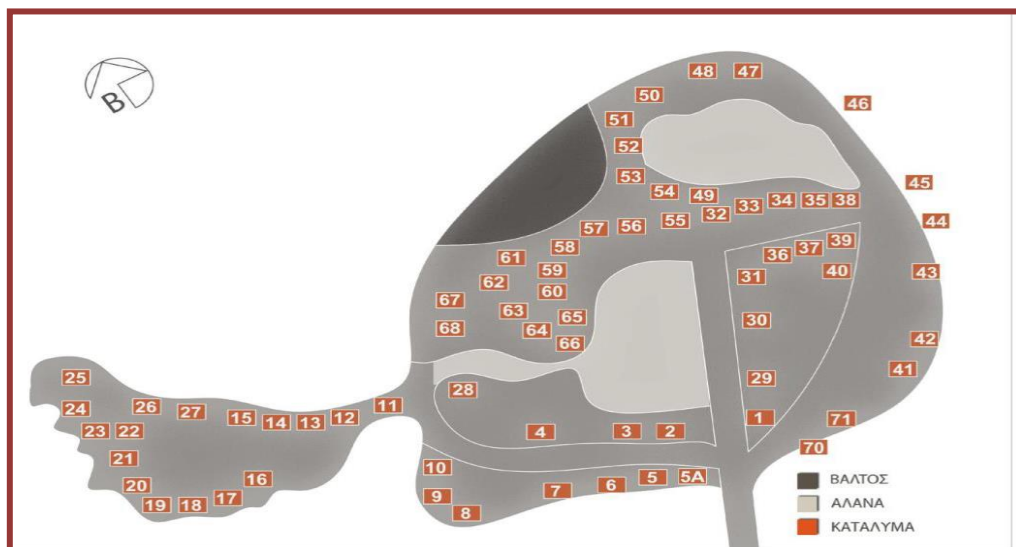
Pict. 2: Peraia. Map of the camp at the eastern edge of Thermaikos gulf, out of the urban tissue – an enclave example

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[4]   See related articles on the demolition of buildings and dwellings [in Greek]: Chalandri, http://www.tanea.gr/news/greece/article/5164416/antidraseis-gia-thn-katedafish-toy-kataylismoy-twn-roma-sto-xalandri/, Riganokampos and Makrigiannis in Patras Municipality, https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1498742/, Kladisos, Chania Municipality www.synigoros.gr/resources/docs/11_annual_diakriseis and Paliampela in Vasilika, Salamina http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/katedafiseis-aythaireton-mono-gia-roma-sti-salamina after complaints by the citizens that these areas have become a source of contamination and criminality.

In terms of the socio-dialectic approach, we propose two different ways of examining space and Roma. In our first attempt, we try to take into consideration a sociological approach concerning the positioning of "occasional" populations and in the second we attempt to examine the relation of space-poverty and habitation.

The systematic marginalisation of Roma groups and their spatial confinement have been common practices for many decades so far. Commenting on the socio-spatial correlation, Tsoukalas (2010: 67-68) refers to the case of "occasional" population hosted in the so far principally homogeneous spaces without being visible,

> […] even if they are "there", they don't "live" there and they may "be" nowhere. […] Visible but also invisible, *perioikoi*, *apoikoi* (emigrants), *metics* or even inappropriate homeless, wandering transients and *anoikoi* (roofless) without a status and a place in the sun. (Tsoukalas, 2010: 67-68).

Based on this sociological anthropological view, we attempt to position habitation of the Roma of Northern Greece as follows:

a) *PERI-OIKOI* (compound word, by the Greek prefix *peri-* meaning "around" and *oikos*denoting "dwelling"/residence): as being on the borderlines-thresholds of the cities, close to rivers, industrial areas or dumps,

b) *AN-OIKOI* (compound word, with the Greekprefix *a-*which denotes "absence of" as its first element): as dwelling in districts not recognised by the local authorities,

c) *AP-OIKOI* (compound word, having as a second element the Greek prefix *apo-*meaning "from" to suggest "moving from one site to another"): as being moved in designated settlements.

Secondly, in terms of space-poverty and habitation we may recognise three categories of Roma habitation that exist in Northern Greece (Regions of Central, Western and Eastern Macedonia, and Thrace): camps, impoverished settlements and designated neighbourhoods. Those are identified as follows:

1) deprived camps: those of Peraia, Katerini, Ypsomata, Ptolemaida, Ergochori and Trifylopazaro in Veroia,

2) impoverished settlements (ghettos),

    a) impoverished settlements (ghettos), where the inhabitants are Christians or other unspecified and not formally recognised religions: those of Kimmeria, Evlalo, Topeiro, Pontismeno and Irakleia in Serres, and

    b) impoverished Muslim settlements (ghettos): those of Aratos, Alan Kougiou and Drosero,

3) designated neighbourhoods: those of Dendropotamos, Alexandroupoli and Alexandreia.
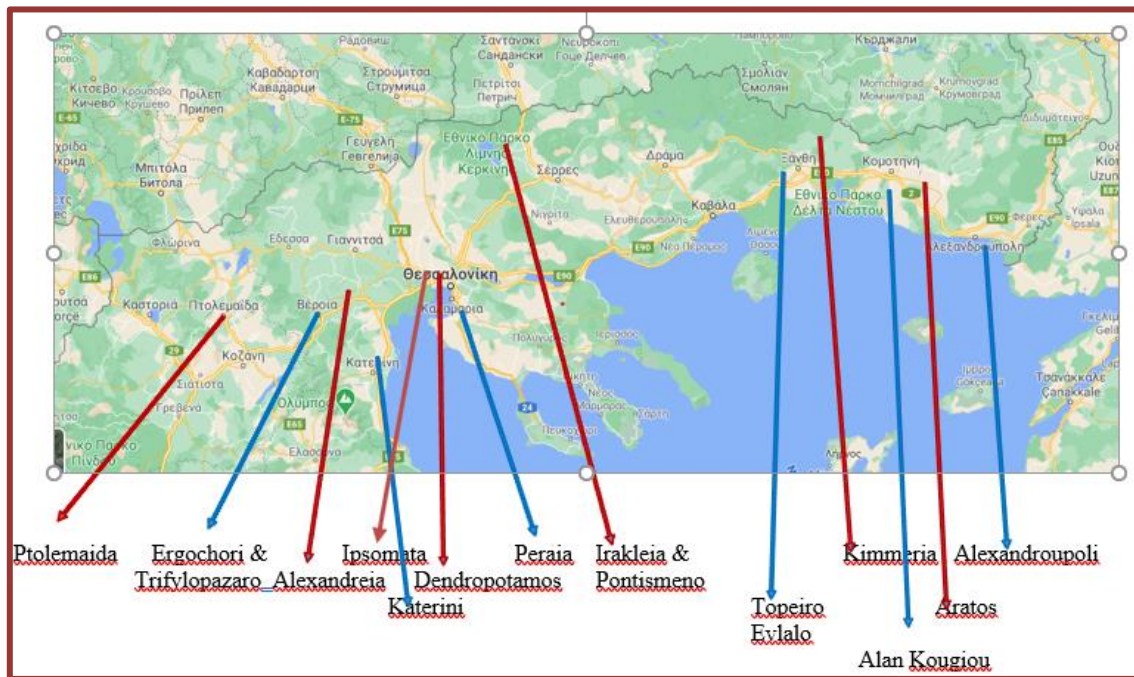
Pict. 3: Map of Northern Greece, with the camps, impoverished settlements and designated neighbourhoods

Both the above cited categorizations of Roma habitation in the Northern Greece regions of Western, Central and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, show the ways space is used to produce and reproduce particular power relationships between groups in society, sustaining and reproducing existing differences and inequalities.

We may formulate a hypothesis here: If space and otherness are related through statutory solidarity, then this relation is critical in social terms -by examining space we understand more about otherness.

As observed in our research data and, also, suggested by the bibliography, Roma residential areas are related to the lack of access to education, health services, employment and culture. Diseases and low life expectancy are closely interrelated with the spaces they live in (Mitakidou et al., 2009). Space hinders the development of common understandings and determines the development of social myths. Space cannot be examined separately from time, which is also a socially constructed concept differently conceptualised by the Roma.

More specifically, it could be maintained that Roma are not equipped with shared coordinates in common space and social time. This has a strong impact on their registration at school, school attendance and dropout. In particular, the time factor plays a different role in defining, for instance, their relation to school: What time do we go to school? How long do we stay at school? How many days per week do we go to school? How much do we need to learn at school?). Conceptualization of time also varies when defining their relation to work, as temporary job opportunities are almost the only options they have for

work, which in effect suggests that life circles follow work circles. Time is also shaping their relation to money/income: the instability of their economic situation does not allow for long term life plans. Money comes, covers immediate and pressing accumulated needs and leaves no margin for provision for future planning. Moreover, time is understood as consisting of important periods and transitions in their lifespan –i.e. adulthood-childhood and their relationship– which identifies with that of traditional, pre-modern societies, where children at a very early age used to merge into the world of adults (Aries, 1960). Finally, time differs in terms of life expectancy and length of lifespan, as it is observed that Roma live less than the average non-Roma population (Mitakidou et al., 2016: 44) .
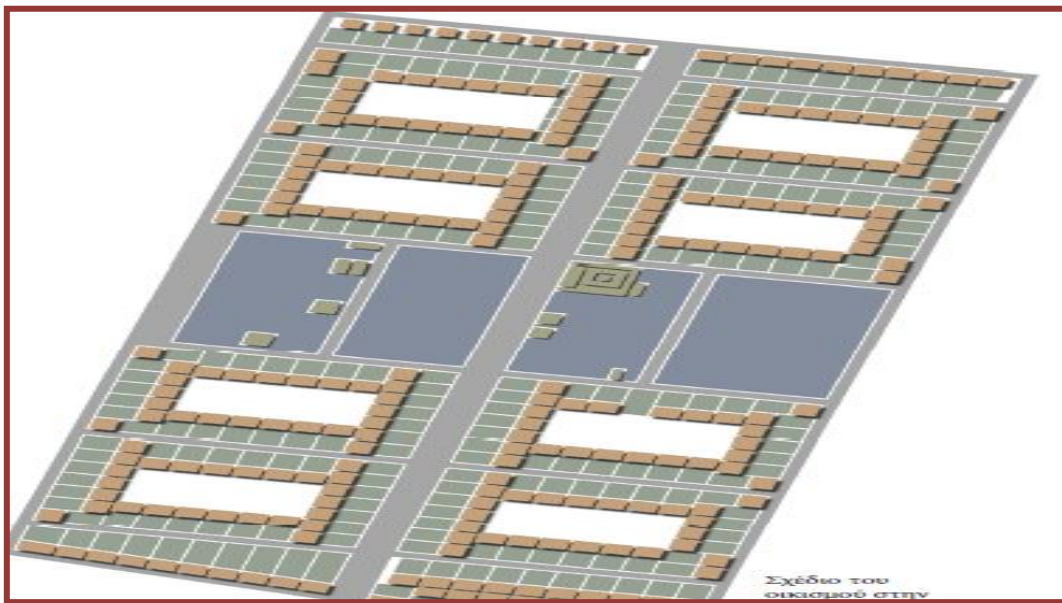
Pict. 4: Aghia Sophia: the initial sketch of the settlement, previously a military camp

The above-mentioned parameters, namely the connection between spatial living conditions, family environment and school performance, have been examined in detail in terms of the population groups being excluded[5] for decades. Several years ago, Tsiakalos (1995) urged the State to s*tart a housing programme for Roma as* their living conditions constituted a social and political scandal which could not be mitigated by "well-intentioned" attempts acting in their interests in other social fields, as education.

In fact, the spatial exclusion of Roma has been built up by the government's institutionalised practices, which are implemented dynamically. Nonetheless, individuals and groups have also contributed to these practices and, in this respect, the spatial development by the urban planning authorities hinges on the economic, political, social and cultural correlations; it does not rest on one factor only.

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[5]See the studies of G. Tsiakalos, D. Kogkidou& E. Tressou for this population group during the '90s.

Pict. 5: An image of a dwelling in the Peraia camp.

The way the aforementioned social and cultural correlations are presented in public discourse, reinforces the argument that Roma have chosen their localities and living conditions themselves. This may even seem reasonable to the majority (non-Roma population) since the facts are invariably distorted. For instance, the right to life, health services, education and culture have been disconnected by social justice and became an issue of personal choice, independent from the physical survival needs and the ideological and political contexts. Those mutations are not innocent at all. They are problems that cease to be matters pertaining to the society as a whole and become individualised issues.

From this point of view, the person is set responsible for his/her adjustment, relief, health and education. The most noticeable "retrogression" nowadays has been the integrity of the ideological individualization (Tsoukalas, 2010): the person with disability and his/her personal tragedy, the abused woman, the Roma, the single-parent family, the cancer patient, the drug addict, the unemployed, to name a few. This distinction between identities leads to overproduction of otherness. Thus, all problems pertaining to the person become moralistic, legal, medical issues and their solution requires experts from the related fields. These experts treat danger by means of individualized short interventions and logic of instrumentality.

As aptly stated by Tsoukalas (2010: 91),

> in post-solidarity ...societies... the individual does not socialise as part of a wider and specific integrated entity, within which he/she is supposed to understand the class, ideological and occupational position applying to him/her [...] This individual is produced and reproduced as a free, denuded and self-governing competitive person required to fulfil himself/herself through the recognition by the market of his/her own personal productive utility, resilience, employability and capability.

The reference to otherness is always made by illustrating specific personal problems and at the same time devaluing all organised collectivities. The argument for the individual choice, supposedly made by Roma, reflects the moto "Divide space – conquer the subjects". Classification as a means of control represents, above all, a spatial arrangement, distinct positions in space and society. Space and topology interpret and analyse society and human life as an instrument, while inscribing on agents their positions, attitudes and actions. Bourdieu (1999) states that space turns into a field of social education, giving social significance to agents and imposing behaviours depending on gender, culture or class. So, the living conditions of Roma are not a matter of individual choice or univocally political decisions, but also a matter of social and cultural formation.

We need tools, so that space ceases to be an ark, prison-ghetto of otherness and, instead, so that it can be transformed into a dynamic field of action.

The power of socio-space: an example.

In deprived camps and impoverished settlements, living conditions, extreme poverty and environmental deprivation create the myth of social threat in terms of causing diseases and criminality. In Northern Greece, Roma population has no or limited access to public social services because of spatial distance. This absence of access leads to lack of official documents, information, health and healthcare, school attendance and literacy. However, based on our experience from the program, the parents of Roma children are willing to transport their children into school locations (i.e. Peraia)[6]. On the contrary, in designated neighbourhoods (i.e. Alexandria), Roma have better accessand less distance from public social services, therefore, the level of documentation and information is higher. Nevertheless, they are less willing to transport their children to school and the dropout rate is higher.


Pict. 6: On the left a dwelling in the Peraia camp and on the right a Roma house in Alexandria.

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[6] See below, in the next subsection, the interpretation of this phenomenon.

One would expect that, in better living conditions, education would have been more valued and the proportion of dropouts would have been much lower. It seems that in this case, the two communities (Roma and non-Roma parents, students and teachers) sustain strong perceptions and attitudes on the value of education deepening separation. So, while there seems to be a crack on the "wall" between the two communities (Roma and non-Roma residents) as a result of accessibility and proximity, ultimately the "wall" becomes more concrete through the rejection of education. Space in terms of proximity, therefore, provides the possibility to overcome obstacles and boundaries, it is a necessary precondition however not enough; unless it is transformed into a social space which would cultivate social relationships and interactions based on equity, exchanges of values and traditions, and awareness of the other, through conscious human action, there will be always new forms of ghettos in common spaces.

Pict. 7: camp-schools distance in kms of Peraia camp

Indicative of the power of the socio-space and power relations in the Greek educational system in general, is the creation of separate classes within the same school for disabled children, Roma children, migrant and refugee children. In terms of social time, Roma and refugee children attend school only after regular school hours, so as not to be in touch with other students. So, while the common space of a school is regarded as a place of coexistence, interactions and cultivation of social relations, ultimately it transforms into a natural continuation of the enclosed social spaces of the previous decades regarding

specific student populations (school of Roma children, school of the repatriated, special education settings).

Not our place/space their place/space.

The power of socio space as well as of conscious human action is also obvious when it comes to the relationships between Roma population and researchers. As obvious from the above, we see education as an institution that influences and it is influenced by its context. Ignorance or negligence of context specifics may jeopardize the research as well as the results and may affect the factual representation of the Roma community. Meanings are embedded in contexts and, if attentive to them, contexts contribute to the understanding and interpretation of research field.

So far, previous Programs on the education of Roma children focused exclusively on school locations without paying any attention to the socio-dialectical dimension of space, while also researchers did not try to cultivate reciprocity which is a key point in this process. Reciprocity involves the needs, aspiration and expectations of both participants and researchers as much as it involves mutual respect for both parties' rights.

Reciprocity has been the crucial feature that the Program "Education of Roma children in the Regions of Central, Western and Eastern Macedonia, and Thrace" has been based upon. So, with this research we aim to reconsider the way we perceive otherness and its relation to space. This is why we show, through Google maps, the settlements/camps and localities, their urban designs, residence surveys and construction techniques building materials, distance in kilometres from the municipalities and schools, community or public buildings, free spaces between residences and their utilization, number of residents, age of the children, condition of the networks, years of existence of the communities in a specific locality. All these data have been collected by a multi-disciplinary team on-site stay in the field. Overall, they were drawn from thirteen areas in Northern Greece (see more details http://peroma.web.auth.gr/peroma/en/). The purpose of this mapping has been to reveal all the data regarding the living conditions of the Roma population, since the related data have been fragmented so far and without reference to the rest of the community. Moreover, we have tried to interpret and understand the way people's need for survival is not identified in this case with the perceived smooth identifiable system.

At the same time, the mapping created on open space for a continuing interaction with the Roma community, which involved not just issues on children's education but regarded the whole family system as well as the social relations inside and outside the community. Through this interaction -very difficult at times- social relationships have been established between the researchers and the community. This kind of experience proves that cultural differences are not actually problems. They are rather starting points for discussion and negotiation. As *Westernised* researchers, even alert and sensitized, we had to abandon seeing things in a monolithic way in favor of a pluralistic perspective.

We exercised our power and mediated between Roma and public or other authorities so as to provide solutions to some serious problems the community was facing (e.g. disinsectisation,, pestilence, waste bins, more school buses).In a sense, we tried to give voice to these silenced people, even in an indirect way. Arrangements like the aforementioned ones, regarding issues on emergent living conditions, redirected the initial form of the relationships towards a new understanding: researchers are not anymore those 'outsiders' who just impose schooling into their children and who are indifferent to their way of living, their life-style and their experiences as a community. This mutual understanding and consciousness made possible for the Roma parents of the camps to pay more value into their children's education and to provide researchers with all possible assistance towards this goal.

Real access to this sensitive research site was a slow and difficult process. There was a need for constant negotiation with Roma communities under study. We must also emphasize at this point that the process became even more complex as relationships created held a dual promise: a promise that the data would not be an end in itself but would be used for the improvement of the quality of life as well as a promise that after research, action would follow.

If the notions of equality and human emancipation are at all meaningful nowadays, it is necessary to interpret how the need to survive causes a major rupture in the alleged orderly identity system in space, its habitation, time and its understandings, or as stated by Wallerstein (1999: 148):

> Those who are strong –strong politically, economically, socially– have the option of aggressive hostility toward the weak or magnanimous comprehension of "difference". In either case, they remain privileged.

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