



## **Informal Economic Behaviour and Interhousehold Exchange of Services in a Transylvanian Village<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** The present study gives an overview of the results of a research carried out in Magyarhermány as one of the projects in a 2010 field workshop. The aim of the research was to investigate the issue of Székely-Gypsy co-existence but the topic was not approached through an analysis of opinions and attitudes but by revealing the practices of informal economic and social solidarity. The results show that interhousehold exchange processes of labour, goods and services are still very intensive in the village and strengthen cohesion in the local society. The Gypsy population, however, does not participate in this system and does not enjoy its benefits. The range of economic contact between the two communities is quite limited and the traces of cooperation still existing are based on traditional activities only.

**Keywords:** local community, reciprocity, informal economic behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> The questionnaire survey that the present study is based on was administered by the authors in September 2010 at a field workshop in Magyarhermány (*Herculian*), Romania. The survey used the methods of an earlier American-Hungarian co-operative research (Brown–Kulcsár 2001) and it was an analysis involving various situations of economic behaviour and interhousehold exchange of services. The 158 families responding in Magyarhermány were all of 'Székely' (Szekler) origin.

## **1. Introduction**

The co-existence and relationship of ethnic groups representing different cultures is an issue that has been addressed by many and in various ways. Researchers of anthropology, sociology and political studies have produced a good number of volumes on this topic. The central research questions have usually been the following: what difficulties or problems arise in co-operation due to cultural differences and what is the attitude of the population representing the dominant culture to assimilation, integration, or to the lack thereof. The theory of the 'melting pot', which was born in North-America in the 1700s, or the European theory of 'plural integration' originating in the 1910s both arose out of conflicts often present in the relationship of ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds. The 'melting pot' theory refers to processes of assimilation and integration that, on the one hand, include the likely abandonment or loss of the original cultural identity; and, on the other hand, require pressurising behaviour and support of assimilation on the part of the majority society. This supportive attitude towards assimilation can appear in economic institutions and their practices; therefore, the study of informal economic networks can serve as a good starting point. The theory of plural integration envisages less the loss of identity than the threat of segregation. Both of these theories, however, are based on underlying strategies that do not seem to operate with regard to the Gypsy population in present-day societies of Eastern Europe. One of the reasons is that in spite of the historical presence of Gypsies in the region, their level of organisation and ability to lobby for themselves is minimal, except for a few local initiatives. The melting pot theory fails to describe the situation as well: the heterogeneous Gypsy culture, lifestyle and value system are putting up resistance, there are no significant efforts to assimilate and the majority society is not exercising pressure in that direction either but upholds processes of separation and exclusion instead. Thus, no adequate solution has been found to the problems manifest in the social and economic status of the Gypsy population so far. As a matter, a group of researchers (Bíró–Oláh 2002) involved with such social issues as the relationship between the Roma and the majority society give less attention to ethnical dimensions than to social aspects. In their view the ethnic definition basically serves the purpose of identifying a kind of economic and social exclusion. Others, however, make a somewhat contrary observation when they point to the fact that an asymmetric, patron-client relationship is maintained even if a Gypsy achieves better economic status (Szabó 2009). This statement is partly refined by Eparu's (2008) view about the Gábor group of Gypsies when, using the first category in the typology set up in Bíró–Oláh, he describes them as characterised by total separation.

The issue of the relationship between ethnic groups representing different cultures has been approached applying a variety of sociological methods; the Magyarhermány study used the concept of economic behaviour. In our understanding the relationship and co-existence of different cultures is adequately illustrated by the form and intensity of contact in everyday economic activities. In this respect we have been able to observe a significant change or transformation. The earlier patterns of economic integration have all disappeared as the activities traditionally providing jobs for Gypsies (such as agriculture) have gone through transformation or lost ground, and the lifestyle supporting production and services involving Gypsies has changed. Nowadays very little reference is made to tasks such as repairing or gathering and employment opportunities connected to agriculture or stock-breeding have also vanished. Some romantic efforts have been made to reanimate the so-called traditional Gypsy professions or activities through programmes financed by the European Union or launched by ruling governments but, with the exception of one or two projects, all these attempts failed and could not offer any solution (not even at a local level) to the economic difficulties of the Gypsy population (Anăstăsoaie–Tarnovski 2001; Ladányi–Szelényi 2004).

In the face of these changes, examining Gypsy participation in a local economy should turn out to be very important. It is interesting to investigate whether new kinds of co-operation have been formed considering the fact that the economic base of old forms has disappeared or is disappearing. The Magyarhermány study attempted to map the relationship between different ethnic groups by using a relatively rare method, namely, the examination of informal economic behaviour and practices of interhousehold exchange of services. As we see it, the relationship and co-existence of different cultures can be described well by the platforms and intensity of contact between representatives of various cultures in everyday economic and non-economic activities and by the degree of reciprocity involved in such contacts.

The analysis of informal economic and social networks is an important aspect in the sociological study of local communities. These studies usually follow two approaches. The one that is probably known better (Plickert 2007) focuses on the concepts of *trust*, *cooperation* and *reciprocity* and describes the qualitative features of a community. The degree of solidarity deepens trust, and practices of economic or non-economic exchange of services indicate the relationship between different groups in the community. It is not a coincidence that the category of social capital is also closely linked to communal manifestations of cooperation and reciprocity in relevant literature.

The other approach is primarily *economic* and *social* in nature since it considers informal economic behaviour and interhousehold exchange of services as corrective factors in the community, that is, as efforts made to counterbalance poverty, deprivation and exclusion and alleviate the deficiencies in the social

welfare system. In their evaluation of several aspects of informal economy Williams and Windebank (2000) point out that social and economic elements often mix as well as support and strengthen each other. In economic contact situations compensation for the service or labour received is offered either ‘in-kind’ or in the form of goods (e.g. presents) or ‘cash-in-hand’. Reciprocity is highly relevant – ‘I do the shopping for you and you babysit for me’, etc. Whatever the payment, there is a wide agreement among researchers that these activities or forms of behaviour do not function according to the principles of strictly understood economic utility but are dominated by social and welfare aspects. Informal economic and noneconomic behaviour is primarily organised within networks including relatives, friends or neighbours (Brown–Kulcsár 2001) and this is why the presence of a person with a different cultural background in this system bears high significance. The frequency of such a presence or the lack thereof indicates to what extent the relationship previously existing in economic contacts could be rebuilt under the transformed circumstances. Naturally, this relationship is not to be understood as economic partnership between equal parties but as asymmetric ‘co-existence’ (Bíró–Oláh 2002; Szabó 2009).

## Geographical and socio-historical background

The description of the wider context is essential in the analysis of any aspect of local social relations. The demographic indicators of both towns and villages in Székely Land are quite unfavourable and reflect a special situation: whereas birth rate is declining among Hungarians and Romanians, the tendency is just the opposite in the case of the Gypsy population.

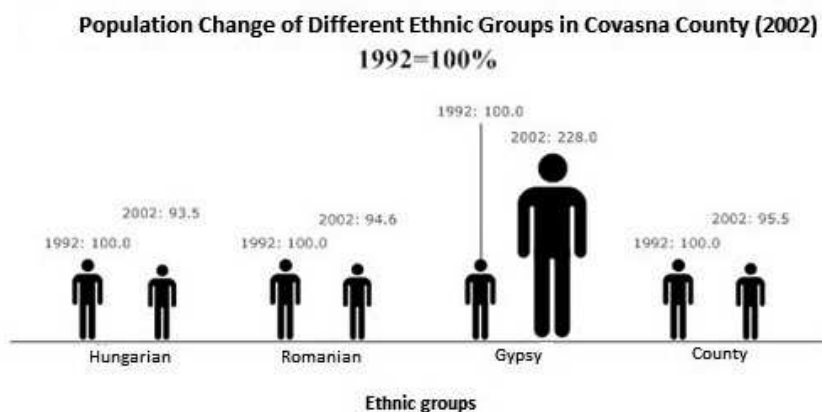


Figure 1.

Source: Horváth 2003, edited by the authors.

The results of the 1992 census show that the total number of population in the three counties of Székely Land is 1 191 644, out of which the number of Hungarians is 723 257, that of Romanians is 468 387 and that of Gypsies is 41 266 (Horváth 2003: 123). Concerning the present study the most relevant figures are the ones pertaining to Covasna County: in 2002 out of the total population of 222 274 (1992: 232 600) in Covasna County 164 055 were Hungarians (1992: 175 502), 51 664 were Romanians (1992: 54 586) and 6022 were Gypsies (1992: 2641), (Horváth 2003). As the data indicate, the natural decline in population is the strongest among Hungarians, which is a national tendency, although, as Tamás Kiss (2004) points out, Covasna County is a region where the birth rate of Hungarians is one of the highest. At the same time Valér Veres (2004) stresses the importance of taking emigration into consideration in order to grasp the exact nature of population decline. As far as religious distribution (in the 1992 census) is concerned, about half of the Hungarians identified themselves as Reformed (78 929; total number 79 802) and the other half as Catholics (81 345; total number 85 648); Unitarians were almost exclusively all Hungarians (10 701), while the majority of the Orthodox were Romanians (50 467, out of which 48 884 Romanians), (Horváth 2003).

Unofficial estimates report that there are more than 2 million Gypsies living in Romania (Horváth 2003; Ladányi–Szelényi 2004; Barany 2003). The Roma population is not characterised by weakening childbearing intentions: on average, they have four children per family (Horváth 2003). Based on the results of the 1992 and the 2002 censuses, the average decline in birth rate in Romania is 19,1%. Tamás Kiss (2004), however, calls attention to the fact that the only ethnic group in which this tendency is not to be observed are Gypsies; in their case birth rate actually increased by 111,7%. Experience shows that many Roma identify themselves as Hungarians or Romanians in the censuses; or an alternative option is that census officers make arbitrary decisions. It is Szilágyi (2004), who directs attention to the fact that a linguistic community does not always totally overlap with a corresponding ethnic community although the two correlate in the case of Hungarians and Romanians. As we have seen, the size of the Roma population was reported to be 2641 in the 2002 census. This result was found to be distorted by Sepsiszkéi (1998), who gave the number 22 000 as the number of the population with 71% speaking Hungarian and 29% Romanian as their mother tongue. Obtaining exact figures is impeded by the fact that even municipalities have approximated data. This also implies that Gypsy-Hungarian relations can only be studied on the local level (Bíró–Oláh 2002).

Concerning employment, current processes in Romania run counter to the tendencies observed in Western Europe in the sense that the number of people working in the agricultural sector has been growing since the end of the Communist-Socialist era. This has been true of Székely Land as well in spite of the fact that its natural resources, terrain features (gradient above 10%) and soil structure are less favourable than the national average.<sup>2</sup> The municipality centre of Magyarhermány is Nagybacon (Băţanii Mari), which is famous for breeding cattle, processing milk and making ewe's curd and has a tile plant that provides seasonal employment. The northern part of the region is covered by valuable

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the unemployed were recorded in the category of agricultural workers in order to decrease unemployment rates.

deciduous forests (oak and birch). Geographical diversity and cultural sites in the area offer opportunities for touristic utilisation.

## Actors in interethnic relations

### *The Székely population*

One of the actors in interethnic relations is the Székely population. This ethnic group and the frameworks of its organisation are presented briefly from an aspect that is relevant to the topic. The origin of the Székelys has not yet been fully and convincingly cleared. Their groups, vested with guarding duties, first appeared in Transylvania around Nagyvárad (*Oradea*) in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and in Southern Transylvania in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They settled in the territory of present-day Székely Land in the 13<sup>th</sup> century on royal order to guard the frontier. After signing the Union of Kápolna (*Căpâlna*), their special legal status was no longer a question of debate and this forged the seven Székely seats into a unified nation<sup>3</sup> (Horváth 2003). In the Middle Ages and in modern times the history of this ethnic group was dominated by fights for their shrinking scope of privileges. Their rights to tax exemption and self-governance, granted as a compensation for voluntary military service, were also curtailed. The village communities of the Székelys were characterised by their yeoman members and were heterogeneous in composition. The ‘possessorata’ (priors or county noblemen) wanted to exert their influence over the ‘communitas’ (village community: *primipilus*, *pixidarius*) that also included the lowest strata of the society, that is, villeins and cottagers. The village was a closed community and formal admittance into this community was regarded as a ceremony. István Imreh (1973) points out the proprietary aspects of the situation since members owning a residential plot inside the village also participated in undivided communal property. Unfavourable environmental conditions strengthened the need for solidarity in the *communitas*. This solidarity has survived to our present days in the form of ‘working bees’ (voluntary gathering of people to accomplish a major task) and in the wide range of economic and social co-operation.

A significant proportion of the Székely population was occupied in agriculture. Besides farming, stock-breeding and forestry also played a dominant role. Urbanisation and industrialisation in Székely Land only started during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to railway construction and the increasingly active presence of government and civil actors. The tariff war fought with Romania, however, caused the smaller industries of the Székelys to erode more and more, which process was completed by the forced and unnatural propagation of factory

<sup>3</sup> Seats were the traditional territorial self-governing units of the Székely: Csík-Gyergyó-Kászon, Udvarhely, Maros, Torda-Aranyos, Sepsi, Kézdi, Orbai; in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the last three merged to form Háromszék (Three Seats).

production in the Socialist era. Agriculture was restructured from the 1950s onwards through collectivisation. The new era following the political transition of 1989 called forth a democratic structural change and was the time of self-supporting and survival strategies. Agriculture during this stage was described by some (among others Mária Vince 1994) as diffuse and lacking efficiency from a national economic perspective. Romania followed the policy of re-privatising lands and returning them to their original owners (or their heirs) based on the status quo in 1945/1962.<sup>4</sup> The statute No. 1/2000 created favourable conditions for the re-establishment of joint tenancy which used to be the traditional form of ownership among the Székelys.

### *The Roma population*

The Gypsies settled in Transylvania and in the two Romanian principalities during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. There was, nevertheless, a significant distinction: whereas in the Hungarian territories their status was that of royal serfs, in the principalities they lived in slavery. In Hungary the Gypsy population was one of the groups that were granted ethnic autonomy. According to Viorel Achim (2001) this difference in social status resulted in the permanent, centuries-long infiltration of Gypsies into Transylvania. They exploited the opportunities for horizontal mobility which remained intact despite their inferior status; at the same time chances for vertical mobility did not arise until their liberation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> As for measures regarding the Gypsy population, Ferenc Pozsony (2009) considers them to be consistent both under the princes of Transylvania and the Habsburg rulers in Vienna from the point of view that the concentration of larger groups of Gypsies around settlements was forbidden. Romania has had the largest Roma population in Europe since the times following World War I. In the Socialist era there were unsuccessful attempts to lift them out of their peripheral status using the concept of full employment. Higher social status and assimilation could be achieved through party membership. After the political transition the Roma population, which had already been heterogeneous, experienced not only polarisation but also deep ruptures between micro-social groups (Oláh 2002). Their conflict-ridden relationship to the majority society became apparent in anti-Roma pogroms.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the results of the 1992 census, the religious distribution in Covasna County reflects the general tendency for the Roma to follow the religion of the dominant group. Accordingly, the majority of them were Roman Catholics (1235),

<sup>4</sup> Act 18/1991, Act 169/1997

<sup>5</sup> The case of Ștefan Răzvan, Prince of Moldavia, who was of Gypsy origin, can be treated as 'sui generis'.

<sup>6</sup> Bucharest, Hadrév (*Hădăreni*), Dánpataka (*Vălenii Lăpușului*).

Reformed (551) or Orthodox (440). As reported in Horváth (2003), the next denominational group with several hundred members, however, were the Pentecostals (280), which indicates an interesting tendency and proves the success of the small Pentecostal church in evangelising primarily Romanian-speaking Orthodox Roma especially in Árapatak (*Araci*), Előpatak (*Vâlcele*), Székelyszáldobos (*Doboşeni*) and Magyarhermány. According to Ferenc Pozsony (1998), the Romanian authorities were not the least disturbed by these processes, on the contrary, they encouraged them even prior to the political transition because, being Romanian-speaking, Pentecostal congregations reinforced acculturation. József Gagy (2002) and László Fosztó (1998) claim that the ethical expectations held in Neoprotestant churches (prohibitions on the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and drugs, arguments and dancing) laid the foundations of a new system of Roma conventions and customs.

In Ladányi-Szelényi (2004) Romania is described as a country with neo-patrimonial systems, meaning that the relationship between the employer and the employee can be interpreted with reference to patron-client relations. Spatially the village Roma usually live on the outskirts in marginalised contexts; if, however, they gain majority in a community, they take the central positions in the village. In Covasna County the majority of Romanian-speaking Roma do not live in the predominantly Romanian Bodza Region but in areas that are primarily Hungarian-speaking (Magyarhermány, Székelyszáldobos, Zágon [*Zagon*]). Today they are still pursuing some of their traditional craftsmanship such as basket weaving, broom making and trough making.

### **Magyarhermány, an interethnic micro-world**

Magyarhermány lies at the upper reaches of the River Barót and at the foot of the Harghita Mountains at an elevation of 581 metres. In earlier times it belonged to the filial seat of Bardóc (Brăduţ). It was first mentioned in official documents in 1566 in a deed of gift by John Sigismund. Imre Boér (2005) claims, however, that the community had been established a long time before, since its German name (Hermansdorf) appears in documents as early as 1401. In 1550 its originally Roman Catholic inhabitants converted to the Reformed religion. According to László Vofkori (1998), the village was mainly inhabited by free Székelys. His claim is supported by the reports: in 1764 the Reformed congregation had 443 members and at the same year 58 persons were sworn in to perform border guarding duties; and in 1819 the community counted 810 members, out of which 365 men belonged to the military order and 48 were serfs (Máthé 2004: 62). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Magyarhermány was part of the Kingdom of Romania until it was briefly annexed back to Hungary as an effect of the Second Vienna Award. Due to



its geographical features, the village escaped the wave of aggressive collectivisation of the 1950s after having gone through several years of harassment.

The village is a remote community with a no-through road and lies far from the main road crossing the region of Erdővidék but it has satisfactory coach connections to both Barót (Baraolt) and Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe). An overview of the ethnic, linguistic and religious composition of the community is given in Tables 1 and 2. Contrary to national and countywide tendencies, the number of inhabitants has not declined significantly but this can be attributed to the high birth rate in Roma families whereas the Hungarian population struggles with demographical problems. There are no Romanians living in the village only Romanian speaking Roma. Oral tradition has it that the first Roma settled there in the 1880s when the magistrate, Sándor Zsigmond, called in a dogcatcher from Vargyas (Vârghiș) (Boér 2005). As opposed to the other communities belonging to Nagybacon centre, the original Gypsy inhabitants of Magyarhermány were a Romanian-speaking Orthodox group of 'Beas', who joined other denominations mainly in the '90s (Sepsiszéki Nagy 1998). There is also a small Hungarian-speaking Gypsy minority who belong to the Reformed Church but pay no church contribution.

Table 1. Denominational Distribution in Magyarhermány

Year	Total	Orthodox	Roman Catholic	Reformed	Other total*	Pentecostal
1850	867	18	1	848	-	-
1857	1013	22	56	926	9	-
1869	1198	56	56	1083	3	-
1880	1113	29	46	1036	2	-
1900	1183	56	22	1101	4	-
1910	1185	48	19	1106	12	-
1930	1159	66	33	1042	18	-
1941	1222	6	35	1169	12	-
1992	1047	14	19	800	5	209
2002	1169	[.]	29	777	[.]	358
2010	1173	3	31	776	11	352

Source: Árpád Varga E. <http://www.kia.hu/konyvtar/erdely/erd2002.htm>, 19.03.2011 – *the present version was edited by the authors.*

**Note:** In the column 'Other total' the asterisk (\*) marks all denominations bearing no relevance to the study because of their low percentage: Synodal-Presbyterian, Evangelical-Lutheran, Greek Catholic, Israelite, Unitarian, minor Neoprotestant churches.

The 2002 settlement-specific data submitted by the Statistical Office in Bucharest do not contain entities under 5 people for reasons of data protection. These figures could mostly be deduced by comparing municipality totals and community-specific items; in the remaining cases the missing values are marked by [.]

*The figures of 2010 indicated in this table are based on the information received from the Mayor's Office in Nagybacon.*

Table 2. Ethnic (Language / Ethnicity) Distribution in Magyarhermány

Year	Total	Romanian	Hungarian	German	Gypsy
1850e	867	18	847	-	2
1900l	1183	33	1149	1	-
1910l	1185	2	1183	-	-
1920l	1012	39	973	-	-
1930e	1159	8	1095	-	56
1941e	1222	-	1149	1	72
1966e	1214	12	1084	-	118
1977e	1071	103	910	-	58
1992e	1047	70	877	-	100
2002e	1169	5	756	1	407
2010e	1173	3	759	-	411

Source: Árpád Varga E. <http://www.kia.hu/konyvtar/erdely/erd2002.htm>, March 19, 2011 – *the present version was edited by the authors.*

The table is a revised and updated electronic version of the relevant part of the volume “*Erdély etnikai és felekezeti statisztikája. I. Kovászna, Hargita és Maros megye. Népszámlálási adatok 1850–1992 között*” [Statistics on Ethnicity and Religion I. Covasna, Harghita and Maros Counties. Census Data from 1850 to 1992] published by Pro-Print in Csíkszereda (1998). Last modified on November 2, 2008.

**Note:** No data. (In the census in question no enquiries were made as to the ethnicity with the missing data or the data were not reported).

Abbreviations following dates: l = language, e = ethnicity.

The 2002 settlement-specific data submitted by the Statistical Office in Bucharest do not contain entities under 4 and 5 people (0-4 for mother tongue; 1-5 for ethnicity) for reasons of data protection. These figures could mostly be deduced by comparing municipality totals and community-specific items; in the remaining cases the missing values are marked by [.]. When using these deduced data for further purposes the possibility of miscalculation or typos should be taken into consideration.

*The figures of 2010 indicated in this table are based on the information received from the Mayor's Office in Nagybacon.*

The spatial structure of Magyarhermány is such that the Roma population lives on the outskirts of the village in the so-called ‘Ponk’ (Gypsy colony), which is separated from the Elizabeth Hill by a ditch functioning as a symbolic barrier. As János Máthé (2008) describes, the co-existence of Székelys and Roma was characterised by an asymmetric patron-client relationship even in the Socialist era in spite of the fact that the Roma participated in local governing bodies (an example being György Lingurar<sup>7</sup> in 1963).

The village primary school bears the name of the self-educated local historian, János Máthé and has eight grades. Education is bilingual: Hungarian classes are

<sup>7</sup> “Nomen est omen”: in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Mihail Kogălniceanu set up a typology of royal slaves and listed the group of ‘lingurarii’ (spoon-makers or woodworkers) who belonged to the ‘rudari’ tribe. An alternative designation for the same group was ‘kalányos’ (Albert 1998).

mainly visited by children of Székely families, whereas Romanian classes are composed of Roma pupils. In the 1990s, 104 pupils out of a total of 174 attended the Romanian classes and at the beginning of the new millennium this imbalance intensified even further (Sepsiszéki Nagy 1998). In the nursery school the Hungarian group had 34 children and the Romanian 43 according to the March 13, 2003 issue of the newspaper 'Háromszék' (Frigyes Udvardy).

Because of the hilly landscape surrounding Magyarhermány, industrial farming is impossible and the small patches of land are cultivated using partly animal power. Local ownership relations are adequately illustrated by János Máthé's example (2008): Máthé was blacklisted as 'kulák' (earlier landowners and therefore class enemies in Communism) in the 1950s and owned 4,69 acres of ploughland and 13,10 acres of meadows. Climate conditions are favourable for growing oat, barley, maize and potato profitably. The farmers, however, are forced to leave more and more areas uncultivated, which makes it difficult to protect the land against damage caused by wild animals. The majority of area surrounding the village was declared a wild reserve in the Socialism.

The main source of income is cattle-breeding and forest farming. Handicraft is pursued as a supplementary activity: according to Iván Balassa (1989) one of the typical products in Magyarhermány was the joined chest but pottery, stonemasonry and cooperage also used to be significant. These have all disappeared, and the nine sawmills taking their place are thought to threaten the future prospects of the forest (Boér 2005). The Roma population earns its livelihood by gathering forest fruits (e.g. cranberries) and selling traditional handicraft products. The area of the community is rich in acidulous mineral water,<sup>8</sup> but this natural resource has not yet been commercially utilised.

### **Interethnic relations and informal economy**

In a community or smaller region the relations between different groups of the population can be described well by analysing the extent, and also nature, of the various kinds of co-operation, mutual service and economic transaction. These activities mainly occur in the framework of so-called informal economy and they are distinctly local in nature. In relevant literature, increasing interest in informal economic action is primarily linked to a deterioration of economic conditions and research is directed at disadvantaged regions and social groups (Lyson & Falk 1993; Jensen 1995; Nelson 1999; Tickamyer–Wood 1998; Czakó et al 2010; Williams–Windebank 2000). In reality, a wide range of informal economic practices have been deeply rooted in village communities all over the world

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<sup>8</sup> The four springs are called 'Alszegi', 'Szénakerti', 'Szikra', 'Ágostonhídi'. According to József Hermány Dienes they are also reflected in the name of the village, which originates in the word 'érmány' meaning rill or spring (Vofkori 1998).

similarly to interhousehold exchange of services, which is an expression of solidarity and a cohesive power in local societies (Sík 1988; Brown–Kulcsár 2001; Szabó 2009). In this well-established system the Transylvanian Gypsies used to have their own place and their own functions. The process of modernisation, however, has made it more difficult, or in many cases impossible, to maintain the ‘old order’; former rules and traditions have lost their power to regulate.

In the present study we only examined those elements of the Székely-Gypsy interethnic relations that are connected to economic transactions and primarily noneconomic services. Distinguishing between the two has proven to be difficult in many instances especially since they tend to have strong social dimensions, that is, the considerations taking a role in the activities are not only strictly economic in nature. Each community constructs its system of reciprocal services and establishes economic relationships primarily within the borders of the community but eventually also across these borders. The Székely-Gypsy interethnic relations were analysed with regard to the activities listed in Table 3.

The data indicate that relationships regarding all the activities above are quite common in Magyarhermány, which also shows the scale of integration in the local society. Reciprocity, in its turn, apparently serves the function of strengthening local social networks and community cohesion (Plickert et al. 2007; Szabó 2009; Caliendo et al. 2011). Some activities are more suitable for practicing reciprocity than others. The degree of reciprocity, however, is not only dependent on the nature of the activity but also the conditions given in social structure and the structure of the given community.

Table 3. Frequency of participating in economic and noneconomic co-operation and exchange of services in Magyarhermány (%)

Activities	Given	Received
Tasks in the garden, backyard or the fields	67	83
Trading self-manufactured goods	60	70
Trading handicrafts	13	76
Personal services	53	66
Trading gathered produce	15	66
Repair, maintenance	35	70

Source: own research.

It is apparent from the table that the degree of reciprocity is especially high in the categories of exchange of personal services and barter transactions and within these categories exchange of labour and exchange of self-manufactured goods have the most prominent values.

Table 4. Nature of compensation and reciprocity in Magyarhermány (%)

Activities	Degree of reciprocity if compensation is (%)		
	Money	Product	Service
Tasks in the garden, backyard or the fields	22	54	65
Trading self-manufactured goods	10	50	60
Trading handicrafts	5	6	12
Personal services	9	8	55
Trading gathered produce	4	0	24
Repair, maintenance	5	19	37

Source: own research.

In these categories exchange does not necessarily involve the same product or service on both sides and it is even possible to exchange goods for services. There is no standard interpretation of the concept of reciprocity in literature either (Falk–Fischbacher 2006). In the present study mutual exchange involving the same people was not a condition for reciprocity because such an approach would have resulted in a rigid and unrealistic methodology. Since the basic units in our study were households, reciprocity was interpreted on the higher level of households as well. As implied above, some other studies work with even wider, sometimes community-level interpretations.

After this overview of the main features characterising informal economic and noneconomic exchange of services in Magyarhermány, let us turn to examining the role and place of the Gypsy population in this social network. The results will provide some insight into the nature and extent of Gypsy participation in the system or, in other words, they will enable us to discover to what extent participation in informal economy has interethnic qualities in the community.

Table 5. Gypsies in the system of informal economic and noneconomic exchange (%)

Activities	Proportion of Gypsies		Exchange reciprocity percentage
	Given to Gypsies	Received from Gypsies	
Tasks in the garden, backyard or the fields	9	19	65
Self-manufactured goods	16	8	60
Personal services	8	7	55
Repair, maintenance	6	2	37
Gathering	4	67	24
Handicrafts	1	30	12

Source: own research.

The figures above imply that there is some contact between the Székely culture and the Gypsy culture but the contact area is quite narrow and depends primarily on the acceptance and utilisation of traditional Gypsy trades and services by the Székelys. As mentioned before, traces of these traditional means of livelihood can be found but they are not strong and competitive enough to significantly influence interethnic relations in a positive way; on the contrary, they tend to exert a negative influence. The Gypsy population has still not been admitted into the 'inner circles' of the society; on the contrary, they are moving further to the periphery, which is well illustrated by our finding that the ethnic group in question does not participate in personal services and networks of noneconomic exchange. Economic relationships with Gypsies still follow the line of traditional activities (handicraft, gathering, in some instances contributing to agricultural work) and communal solidarity is not extended to them. At the same time, traditional economic relations (services and labour) have been losing ground and the tendency is expected to continue, therefore, it seems likely that segregation will intensify. Even though the question of Gypsy solidarity was outside the scope of our study, we presume that the Gypsy population has also established a parallel system among themselves and that this system is a function of their relationship to the population representing the majority culture.

### **Social distance between Székelys and Gypsies in Magyarhermány**

We have attempted to analyse interethnic relations between Székelys and Gypsies by describing informal economic and social networks. Although these networks turned out to be very strong, we found that Gypsies generally do not participate in them and do not benefit from reciprocity either. It was not clear, however, whether the ditch physically separating the two cultures in the village is also paralleled by a mental 'firewall' in Székely consciousness and whether it can be connected to the existing economic and social networks. In order to answer this question, we investigated the relations between the quality of Székely-Gypsy relationships and prejudices concerning the Gypsy population. Our hypothesis was that these prejudices are too strong to be disrupted by economic and social contact.

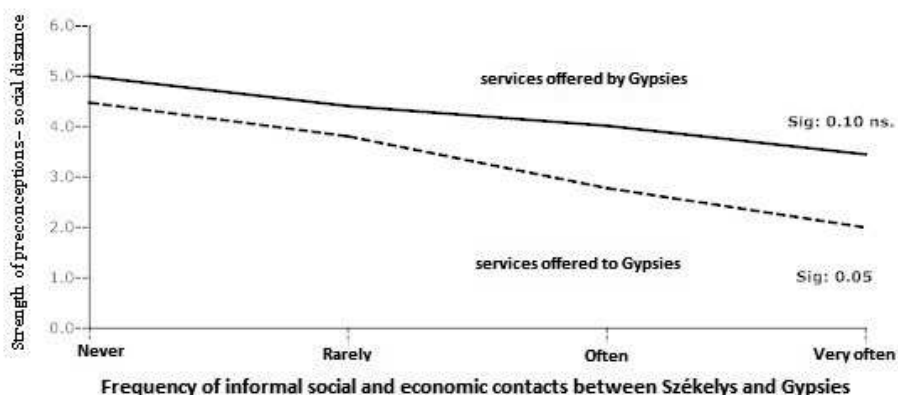
We measured prejudices against Gypsies using the Bogardus scale of social distance (Bogardus 1926; Karakayali 2009; Babbie 1995), which was only slightly modified to adapt to local conditions<sup>9</sup>. The average score of Székelys on this

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<sup>9</sup> The items of the social distance scale consisted of the opinions given to the following: (1) What would you say if the majority of the population in this village were Gypsies; (2) What would you say if the majority of the children at the school were Gypsies; (3) What would you say if a Gypsy family moved next door; (4) What would you say if your child or grandchild was made to sit next to a Gypsy child at school; (5) What would you say if your child or grandchild had Gypsy friends; (6) What would you say if your child or grandchild invited Gypsy guests to your home; (7) What would you say if your child or grandchild wanted to marry a Gypsy.

seven-degree scale was 4,17, which indicates quite a high degree of rejection and simultaneously large social distance. The highest degree of rejection characterised 29.7% of the inhabitants in Magyarhermány, whereas total acceptance of Gypsies was found in 15% of the cases. Deviation was also relatively high (2.64 points), which indicates that there is no unified opinion regarding this issue in Magyarhermány. The next figure shows whether contact with Gypsies and frequency of contact has an effect on social distance; in other words, it answers the question whether co-operation in informal economy has any influence on prejudices.

Figure 2. Prejudices against Roma and informal economic and social relationships in Magyarhermány



Source: own research.

The results show that informal labour and service exchange does have an influence on the formation of prejudices against Gypsies. It is not clear, however, whether contact reduces prejudices or contact is more intense among those who are less prejudiced anyway. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the shortening of social distance between Székelys and Gypsies is stronger if the relationship is directed towards Gypsies. In opposite cases, that is, in cases of Gypsies offering services to Székelys, deepening of contact does not entail a significant reduction of prejudices.

## Conclusion

The present study gives an overview of the results of a research carried out in Magyarhermány as one of the projects in a 2010 field workshop. The aim of the research was to investigate the issue of Székely-Gypsy co-existence but the topic was not approached through an analysis of opinions and attitudes but by revealing

the practices of informal economic and social solidarity. The results show that interhousehold exchange processes of labour, goods and services are still very intensive in the village and strengthen cohesion in the local society. The Gypsy population, however, does not participate in this system and does not enjoy its benefits. The range of economic contact between the two communities is quite limited and the traces of cooperation still existing are based on traditional activities only. The Székelys and the Gypsies co-habiting the space of informal economic and social networks exert some influence on prejudices; however, these contacts are not capable of significantly reducing the traditional social distance between the two ethnic groups. The unfavourable consequences of the present situation might become more intense as the number of the Gypsy population is increasing.

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