

Mária Csomma Lakatos: Of the Roma neighbourhood in a new street. My memories of moving away.

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The author of this text is one of the long-term local contributors of our participatory research projects in Tiszavasvári. She lives in a street on the edge of the Roma neighbourhood, often referred to as the “Hungarian row”, but it has both Roma and non-Roma households. She has two teenaged children. She has participated television interviews, in writing a Romani storybook, translating and authoring texts in local Romani, and in writing the volume summarising the outcome of our translanguaging project (Heltani, J. and Tarsoly, E. (eds.). 2023. Translanguaging for Equal Opportunities. Speaking Romani at School. Berlin: De Gruyter.)

First, I lived in an adobe house. That’s where I grew up. I loved living there; I have such fond memories of it. Even though it was small, the house was clean and full of love and happiness. Years later my mother and father were given the opportunity to move to a house built by the state. It was a state-subsidised living scheme called *szocpol* in Hungarian. A contractor carried out the construction and all my parents had to do was to sign the papers. Then a three-bedroom house with a small alcove was built for them, complete with a bathroom, which made my siblings and me very happy.

As the years went by, I got married and lived with my parents for six years. After that we started to build a house next to my mother-in-law’s. It made me so happy – but also sad, as I have never lived anywhere else but with my parents.

We lived in that small house for five years, then, we started searching for a bigger one not in the Roma area, so that our children could live in better conditions and in a larger house. We managed to find a new house, which had a Hungarian owner, but he did not mind that we were Roma. The neighbours did not mind either, in fact they were friendly – except for one, who said “there’s yet another settler Gypsy in the street.” There were some Roma living in that street before we moved there. When we moved away from the Roma neighbourhood, I felt very good, but it was also a bit sad to leave my little house. I really liked living there, even though it was in the segregated neighbourhood. The neighbourhood itself, though, did not look the way it does today. It was much cleaner and tidier.

Nothing that Roma people do is good enough for some Hungarians. It’s bad if they want to move out of the settlement, but it’s also bad if they actually do move out. If a Roma family moves into a Hungarian street, they immediately hang a sign on their house saying “For Sale!” Sometimes, people don’t even agree to Roma families moving into their street. Of course, there are exceptions. Why was I sad when I moved out of the Roma neighbourhood? Because wherever we move, to a nicer house, or to a better environment, we grew up on the settlement, which I will never forget, strange as this might seem to some Hungarians.