

The struggle to belong
Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.
Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

“Everything comes only for *them*” Differentiation as a result of transnational Romani migrations in a Central European example.

Barbara Tiefenbacher, Stefan Benedik
University of Graz, Austria

with research-contributions of Edit Szenáßy,
Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011
Session: nr. 3 Local Responses to Transnationalism

Barbara Tiefenbacher, University of Graz
Department: Treffpunkt Sprachen, (DOC-team shifting romipen)
Heinrichstraße 26/II, 8010 Graz, Austria,
+4366473602048, barbara.tiefenbacher@uni-graz.at
Stefan Benedik, University of Graz,
Department of History: Contemporary History (DOC-team shifting romipen),
Attemsgasse 8/II, 8010 Graz, Austria
+4369911350138, stefan.benedik@uni-graz.at

Abstract

This paper presents a case study on transnational Romani migrations from Southern Slovakia to the Austrian city of Graz. We understand these movements, which are ongoing since 1995, as an example of relatively common phenomena. In “western” European cities, these practices are often framed under the pejorative term “Roma-Problem”. We discuss the transnational character of the migration and how it opens up the space between media narratives on beggars/their migration and also the personal stories as told by the migrants themselves. Those two types of narratives are often strikingly different, though they refer to the same issue.

This presentation is based on material from research Southern Slovakia and Graz, deriving first from media coverage, and second from interviews with migrants, NGO-activists, officials and non-migrating people in Slovakia. We set these sources in dialogue with one other and thus map a space across the borders between written and spoken discourse as well as borders of nations/regions. In doing so, the paper will argue that this transnational migration is resulting in significant developments on various levels: First, (ethnic) homogenisation is a common outcome, e.g. in the way in which “western” media defines the migrant “other” automatically as Romani and as inhabitant of a certain village in the “East”. Second, the paper stresses the impact of transnational migration on the villages in Slovakia. Movements are visibly shifting development not only in terms of economics but also in daily life and cultural memory. There, the differentiation of the local community between a group of “staying” and one which is “going” shall be analysed. Third, the influence of NGOs in dividing village-communities along ethnic criteria will be discussed. In transnational networks of economic support, NGOs enforce the idea of Romani people having a special position in local and transnational surroundings.