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Copyright Holder	The Author(s)	
Corresponding Author	Family Name	**Bigazzi**
	Particle	
	Given Name	**Sara**
	Suffix	
	Division	
	Organization/University	Institute of Psychology, University of Pécs
	Address	Pécs, Hungary
Author	Family Name	**Serdült**
	Particle	
	Given Name	**Sára**
	Suffix	
	Division	
	Organization/University	Institute of Psychology, University of Pécs
	Address	Pécs, Hungary
Author	Family Name	**Bokrétás**
	Particle	
	Given Name	**Ildikó**
	Suffix	
	Division	
	Organization/University	Institute of Psychology, University of Pécs
	Address	Pécs, Hungary

Abstract	The impact of empowerment interventions is often short-lived because they are not anchored in changes in the wider social and structural context. This chapter draws its inspiration from social representation theory and social identity theory. Several theoretical propositions are derived from these theories that bear on the effectiveness of empowerment interventions. Drawing on field experiences with Roma communities and young unemployed people in Hungary and Italy, we demonstrate how a focus on intergroup interactions, between minority and majority group members, is central to the empowerment process. In addition, we address the role of power and the means by which power can be dissembled and more equitably shared. Finally, we discuss the importance of placing contextual factors at the center of our analysis and enacting changes in context in order to arrive at empowerment interventions that produce sustainable changes in intergroup harmony and equity.
Keywords (separated by “ - ”)	Empowerment - Social representation theory - Social identity theory

Chapter 8
Empowerment of Intergroup Harmony and Equity

Sara Bigazzi, Sára Serdült, and Ildikó Bokrétás

Think it over my Brother,
they tell that you are dirty and leprous
but only few of them know
that my people scattered all over the world
has never made a war.
Poem by Romeo Cizmic, 5 yrs, a Roma child living in a camp in Rome (Documentary on the housing situation of Roma people in Rome. 2003. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx-k7E40JrI).

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8.1 Introduction

Actions aimed at empowering minority groups often focus on the specific target group without taking into consideration the broader social context within which these actions are implemented (Rappaport, 1981). While empowerment approaches can facilitate agency of minority group members and result in them fighting for rights and participating in governance (Batliwala, 1994; Deveaux, 1996; Kabeer, 1994; Parpart, 2004; Rowlands, 1997; Sen, 1990; Sen & Grown, 1988), these results are often short-lived because they are not anchored in the wider structural and social context (Marquand, 1997; Parpart, Rai, & Staudt, 2002). Social and psychological change involves diverse interests, negotiation, and struggles over meaning. These

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S. Bigazzi (✉) · S. Serdült · I. Bokrétás
Institute of Psychology, University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary

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processes are deeply influenced by existing power relations rooted in structural inequalities, histories of oppression, and intergroup conflicts. This chapter argues that it is more effective to work not only with target groups, but to use a systemic approach, extending interventions to majority group members with the aim of reframing intergroup relations (Christie & Louis, 2012; Gayer, Landman, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2009; Snow & Benford, 1988).

In particular, the aim of the following chapter is to emphasize psychological dynamics embedded in social context, which define minority and majority relations. To illustrate our theoretical arguments, we employ examples from our field experiences working with Roma communities and young unemployed people in Hungary and Italy. These examples will demonstrate how an identification of the dynamics behind psychological and social change enable the implementation of more context-specific tools of empowerment in which context defines the starting points for conceiving implementations.

The theoretical frame for our work is social representation theory and social identity theory, which together demonstrate how ideologies and representations in a context define group members' interpretation of reality and social identity (Breakwell, 2010; Duveen, 2001; Andreouli, 2010). From our perspective, social context can be viewed as shared psychological realities and normative frames, not only delimiting individuals and groups but also giving them possibilities of agency and change (Fraser, 1989; Hartsock, 1990; Jovchelovitch, 1996). Finally, we emphasize the role of power in representational and identity processes (Foucault, 1979, 1991; Howarth et al., 2013; Jovchelovitch, 1996, 2007).

Clearly, embeddedness in social context determines both the majority and minority identification and representational processes and how varying possessions of power define different possibilities to act on and change dominant realities and self-definitions. Therefore, social change is a question of power, meaning that powerful majorities have more possibilities to create change (Howarth, Andreouli, & Kessi, 2014; Jovchelovitch, 1996). Therefore, empowerment should not be considered one-sided, in line with Rappaport's (1981) criticisms of implementing one-sided solutions for societal problems; rather, there should be a twin-track approach involving both the majority and the minority, emphasizing deconstruction of the former and power construction of the latter. Majorities should be "good enough communities" – to use Winnicott's term (1953) – to ensure a social context that enables not only their members but also minorities to change their positions and declare their interpretation of reality. Building up "good enough communities" requires majority members to recognize their dominant power positions and acknowledge minorities' subordinated statuses and a readiness to change this situation into a more equal dynamic for the benefit of both. At the same time, minorities should be empowered to articulate their own version of reality and act accordingly.

Our aim in this chapter is to highlight the psychological dynamics behind these processes and contribute to the efficacy of empowerment interventions. The theoretical propositions we advance will be supported with concrete examples drawn five studies with marginalized populations, Roma groups in particular.

Study 1 is an example of an unpublished study using participatory action research in a community development project in Rome born from a need expressed by the community of a Roma camp in Vicolo Savini. This bottom-up project is unique in that it features aspects of interculturality from its onset; Roma and non-Roma people worked together on a daily basis for two years.

Study 2 documents the Student Association of Roma at the University of Pécs (WHSZ) which empowers the small number of Roma students at the university with various strategies and means of achievement through, for example, grants, learning skills courses, language instruction, strengthening social networks, identity reinforcement, and conflict resolution training (Bigazzi, 2015a, 2015b; Bigazzi & Serdült, 2015). Studies 3 and 4 are both interview studies.

Study 3 analyzes the psychological effects of segregated ethnic education of Roma youth (Bokretas & Bigazzi, 2013). While Roma students from the WHSZ in Study 2 received support, the Roma youth in Study 3 have no affiliation with or assistance through community development programs (hereinafter referred to as NACD).

Study 4 examines how governmental regulation of unemployment affected intergroup relations and vulnerable youth populations in 2014 (Bigazzi & Bokretas, 2013, 2014).

Study 5 explores the views of the non-Roma society on the Roma minority in Hungary (Bigazzi, Fulop, Serdult, Kovago, & Polya, 2014).

Although the research methods and social contexts are diverse, taken together, these studies demonstrate how representational and identity processes influence intrapersonal well-being and intergroup harmony.

8.2 Theoretical Framework: Social Representation Theory and Social Identity Theory

Two classic social psychological theories provide the foundation for understanding humans as cultural beings. One is social representation theory (SRT), which focuses on the product of culture, the *cultural object*, whether abstract or concrete, real or imagined, living or inanimate. The key issue in this theory is how people of the same social group acknowledge, understand, feel, and behave in relation to an object. The second theory, social identity theory (SIT), highlights the perspective of those, the *cultural subjects*, in relation to the object.

In regard to *cultural objects*, SRT (Farr, 1993; Jovchelovitch, 1996; Moscovici, 1961, 1988; Wagner, 1998) rewrites the universal and generalized essence of psychological processes (e.g., identification, motivation, mental health, memory, learning, information processing, decision-making), proposing that these processes are social products that emerge, live, spread, and die through communicative interactions. These products are actively constructed and include the stimuli, the others, and ourselves (Moscovici, 1972; Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Marková, 2003). Individuals act and react according to their interpretations of the stimuli, which are

more or less shared as social representations (Duveen, 1998; Harré, 1984) in the communities to which the individuals belong. Differences between interpretations of reality emerge and collide between individuals of different cultures or even within individuals; this is what the SRT refers to as cognitive polyphasia (Jovchelovitch, 2002). For example, in Study 3, Roma youngsters studying in secondary school or university cope with difficulties concerning the different interpretations of schooling and learning, setting up a conflict between their family socialization environment and the expectations of the school context:

> Because there were no examples in the family. My mother is still asking: when do you finish school? And yes, I'm 23 now, and I'm still studying. They don't understand what university is. At least my parents don't understand. (23-year-old Roma student, NACD)

In regard to *cultural subjects*, SIT provides insights into both conscious and internalized memberships and associated emotional resources and values (Tajfel, 1981). Memberships that are (or become) salient act as motivators of behavior (Haslam, 2004; Reicher & Haslam, 2006; Tajfel, 1981). Thus, fellow group members, as opposed to members of different groups, are more likely to have similar worldviews, to experience more trust with in-group members, and to cooperate with each other (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Reicher & Haslam, 2006). AU4

To achieve positive evaluations and distinguish themselves from others, individuals engage in social comparison. Through this process they fulfil their belonging and meaning needs, identifying those who are the relevant others, evaluating and enhancing the group with which they identify, and reinforcing the self through membership. Most importantly, social comparison processes make it possible for the individual to satisfy needs of positivity (i.e., being evaluated positively) and distinctiveness. In Study 5, we asked 600 Hungarians whether they agreed with the statement *One of the biggest social conflicts in Hungary is that of the Roma people*. Their answers were coded regarding the kind of distinction they used; 50% of the whole sample evaluated Roma people according to their own normative system, thereby "comparing" minority members unfavorably:

> "I agree. The reasons concern the different culture and associated lifestyle, and inherited genes, which makes it impossible for them to change their socially unacceptable lifestyle. They are not able (or don't want) to socialize. Meanwhile they commit crimes in order to survive and receive social support for children." (44-year-old female with a university degree, Budapest)

> "I agree, totally. Unfortunately I work with Gypsies, I see their behaviour, their philosophy, I see how they relate to things. It is disappointing, but things are going worse. The problem is becoming unsolvable. They don't want to go to school, to work, just to be. They are parasites on the workers, and they are comfortable with it." (28-year-old male with a university degree, town)

At times, one's membership in an identity group does not confer a positive and distinctive identity for the individual. For instance, Roma youth often face negative judgments from non-Roma majority members. The following example from Study 3 illustrates how non-Roma individuals are the main reference frame even for Roma people:

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> I have a lot of inhibition, internal conflicts. Recently I was on a bus and a guy started to stare at me, as if he wanted me to feel my Gypsiness. And I became paranoid that I might smell like sweat. But then I thought hey, I took a shower an hour ago, but I sniffed at myself just to make sure. (24-year-old Roma student, NACD)

According to SIT, individuals can leave the group. Mobility is an individual strategy that can be used if (a) group membership is not a core element of the identity, (b) there is no sign of visible stigma for leaving, and (c) the individual perceives group boundaries as permeable. If these conditions are not satisfied, individuals will remain in the group. For those remaining, there are two types of strategies to ameliorate a negative social identity. The chosen strategy activated depends on the perceived stability and legitimacy of the social system (Tajfel, 1981). Those groups that perceive society as unstable and/or illegitimate will act for societal change. Groups that are unable to imagine a social order change are motivated to act in ways that ameliorate the image of the group so that it will be evaluated in a more positive way.

And what about unrecognized positive memberships that exist but are not identified by the individuals? SIT does not provide an answer to this question, as it focuses on the subjective perspective of acknowledged memberships as delimited in self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985). However, we think that recognition of common interests by various individuals in a local community can be an additional direction of social change. Thus, this is a question of working with identities and creating new belongings in local contexts. This work is a political act since it implicitly includes a desired social order.

Our various possible identifications and belongings are also cultural objects. When we speak about identity, it is important to note that humans do not behave singularly and autonomously in public spaces, but they act according to their interpretations of reality. This includes self-interpretations and related possibilities that are tied to the memberships in social categories available in their respective contexts. These in turn are offered and limited by and negotiated with others in their environment (Mead, 1934; Reicher, 2004; Stryker, 1968, 1987; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978, 1979).

Identity regulation processes can be understood as coping with threat. Tajfel (1981) described efforts for achieving a positive and distinctive identity; Breakwell elaborated on this concept in her description of identity regulation processes in Western cultures. She claimed that Western cultures aim to achieve self-esteem, distinctivity, continuity, and efficacy and that failure to achieve these characteristics results in identity threat (Breakwell, 1993; Vignoles, Chryssochoou, & Breakwell, 2002). The concept of identity threat applies mostly to the experience of stigmatized minorities, as stigmatization prevents maintaining a positively evaluated identity (Breakwell, 1986, 1993, 2010). For minority members, stigmatized identity elements are salient and form the core of identity, defining one's possibilities of existence. In study 3 we find examples of how these dynamics are rooted in the identity construction processes of Roma students. Stigmatization cannot be neglected or ignored as it is always present and identity constructions are embedded in continuous dialect with it:

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> It has a deep impact on your whole life how others think about you. You start to think that you are stupid, smelly or a freak in some way (25-year-old Roma student, NACD)

> …because they try to socialize you not to cry and to be proud to be a Gypsy, especially when you are mistreated. But how can you be proud if you are Gypsy and you can hear all the time how shitty Gypsies are? How can you be proud when the word Gypsy is so negative? (24-year-old Roma student, NACD)

Identity threat can be experienced without stigmatization from the outside. In these cases, threat is rooted in unprocessed past traumas and transmitted through socialization processes resulting in the subjective perception of being targeted. In this case, the core element of the identity is the subjective experience of being a victim. Identity construction can include the need to be recognized and acknowledged as a victim, which is a vulnerable, dependent position. Although collective victimhood (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009; Vollhardt, 2012) is often a characteristic of majorities, its psychological dynamics are similar to the threatened identity of stigmatized minorities. AU5

What threatened identities have in common with each other are the passive and subordinated positions, implicating complex consequences. One of the consequences influencing both psychological processes and intergroup relations is that of the self/other construction, which is based on a hierarchical relationship. The activation of this hierarchical relationship system implies superior and inferior positions. Groups differing in status are associated with different rights and duties (Andreouli, 2010) and these differences not only define the group's choices of action but also have a bearing on intergroup relations. These dynamics maintain existing social orders and are strictly related to power positions.

8.3 Empowerment Interventions

8.3.1 The Role of Social Interactions

Working with others in social contexts requires a focus on ongoing interactions embedded in the larger social environment rather than focusing solely on the individuals or specificities of their groups. Without considering the broader social context, "intergroup problems" might appear to be due to isolated individuals or groups, rather than consequences of existing intergroup relations, structural inequalities, and histories of oppression that fuel intergroup conflict and dominant narratives.

Focusing merely on target groups can also lead to incorrect and/or problematic conclusions as it can contribute to the "blaming the victim" phenomenon (Ryan, 1976). Blaming the victim phenomena at an intergroup level occurs in five steps: (1) a societal problem is identified, (2) the problem is attributed to a target group, (3) differences between that group and other groups are observed, (4) causes of differences are identified, (5) and, finally, social-political interventions are implemented with the aim to change the target group without considering systemic changes (Arató, 2012).

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It is paramount to prioritize the focus on interactions because through them social change can emerge. We continuously negotiate with others our conceptions of knowledge, norms, values, and who we are. Identity (*who I am*) and knowledge (*how I think about the world around me*) are formed in a continuous process of meaning construction. Others not only present their own positions, but react to and explicitly and implicitly judge ours. In Study 3, we observe examples of representation and identity negotiation from interviews with Roma high school and university students. They often report how others judge them:

> At home we do not live with Gypsies, but at the center of the village. Gypsies attack us saying that we have become Gadjos, and so on. They point at us, but it is not so funny. (23-year-old Roma student, NACD)

> They (the ethnic group in her village) insult me saying I am a slut and how I live well here because I get money. And how I dress differently from them. They still attack me like this. One of them shouted behind me on the street "[you] slut of Pécs" or "slut of Germany" because I visited Germany. (24-year-old Roma student, NACD)

> The mistress in the nursery all time put my bed in a different part, and it was viewed by all of the children (22-year-old Roma student, NACD)

Interactions in the context of economic and social relations create and recreate a cultural, political, and ideological texture of meanings. These meanings allow individuals to live in a more or less consensual world regarding visions of reality, interpretations of the past, norms and deviance, possible identification dimensions, methods of interactions, approved coping strategies, and plans for the future. New interactions, new in their structure for the participants or the role assessed, can create social change. To demonstrate this process, we draw an example from Study 1. This study documents how long-term community development processes can lead to psychological change in representations and identity constructions through new interactions.

> Shishiri, an NGO in Rome active between 2002 and 2004, was created in response to the request of S, a member of a Roma camp. S was living in the most populated camp of Europe in Rome with her husband and her nine children. S had worked with me previously in a focus group on collective memory of Roma a year before and asked that Roma and Gadjo (non-Roma) people collaborate together "to create something that will have weight, that will remain with us, with others, something new that can be pulled out only from a magic hat, a *shishiri*." Picnics were then organized in various parks all over Rome where our friends and families discussed plans for collaborations. In September 2002, 20 participants (10 Roma and 10 Gadjo) voted on our roles and on rules within our new organization and made closer acquaintances with each other through meetings. The group gradually succeeded in negotiating the boundaries of ethnic belonging and in resolving unavoidable conflicts necessary for dialogue. When conflicts arose, the continuously exposed common goals and the adopted problem resolution strategies requiring long hours of negotiation enhanced members involvement and investment. Over time, people began to trust each other, showed curiosity, and told about their stories and how they really felt, despite fears of public opinion. Members of this small community worked to create a shared vision of reality and Shishiri became an important part of our everyday lives. Each person changed through this process although the change was not always visible, nor under direct negotiation.

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> An example of this effect of invisible change was an explanation made by S in front of the students of the Loyola Chicago University campus in Rome. The campus invited Shishiri to speak about Roma people and their problems in Italy. S prepared a video about housing problems and camps for the occasion. At the end of the video students asked her why Roma people had so many children if they were so poor. S explained that "dead and aborted infants will return and take revenge, biting and poisoning the mothers." In the next year Shishiri was re-invited to the campus to speak to a new student group. This time, in response to the same question, S answered differently, explaining that "Romas think about families as small economic units, an interdependent system in which elders help the youngsters for the survival of all." We listened with surprise, as we had never talked about this issue, nor did we comment on her first answer 10 months before.

There is continuous tension between stability and change in social systems – between maintaining the status quo and changing the structure. In addition, when the need for change is expressed, barriers and resistance arise as the provision of change causes psychological and social anxiety. The negotiation about good and bad directions of change among the different parties, between participants and stakeholders involved, becomes a priority. These dynamics of change often prevent the recognition of diversity either of interests or identities, which is the first step to initiate negotiation and reconciliation of values, representations, and interests, and it is also a prerequisite for active participation and involvement.

> After a while, Shishiri (study 1) decided to create a dialogue with the stakeholders in Rome in addition to everyday rehearsal and assemblies. We asked for meetings with all the existing NGOs in the field, proposing cooperation of any kind. Our project was unique as both Roma and non-Roma were participating in these meetings; afterward we interpreted and discussed what happened as a group. Very soon, all these institutions refused to cooperate either implicitly or explicitly. The head of a historical NGO, which was responsible for a major integration project with Roma youth in Rome, asked me in front of Roma members if I *really thought I could work with these animals*. The head of another NGO operating primarily in political representation tried to discredit me in front of all the Roma camp, shouting loudly that *I could not enter the camp anymore, because I was a mole from the police*. Such attacks had the opposite effect and members concluded that it was happening because we were creating something new and disturbing the old mechanisms. In this way, attacks and refusals from the outside reinforced the community and new people joined our organization. After a year, we were made up of 70 people (nearly half of them Roma) and we created a theater piece without a place and without any money. However, we were very motivated to meet and work on our project every day.

Although individuals should be free to express their own views, a few exert influence on others according to their positions of power. Often these others do not even know they should be concerned, and not being involved, they do not actively participate in the negotiation. Moreover, as Howarth and her colleagues (2014) point out, participation is not only the expression of worldviews, acceptable values, and norms, but "participation can be conceptualised as the power to construct and convey particular representations over others. In other words, it refers to the symbolic power to construct legitimate social knowledge, norms and identities, and to disregard, marginalize or silence alternative ways of knowing and being" (Howarth et al., 2014, p. 2). Beyond the recognition of diversity, involvement in societal life, and deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings, values, and norms, the issue of power remains an important consideration.

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8.3.2 The Role of Power

While social change is embedded in interaction – broadening, confining, and establishing the borders of the cognitive world in social dialogue – change requires more than the process of interaction and the achievement of consensus among individuals or groups. Power differences matter. Powerful groups have the ability and opportunity to define the other as well as the whole social reality through their access to the construction and dissemination of social representations (Sarrica, Mazzara, & Brondi, 2016). Clearly, the process of representation is rooted in asymmetric social relations and embedded in contexts (Moscovici, 1988). Hence, some worldviews are overrepresented in society, while the views of minority groups lack the symbolic power of ensuring respect for their version of the world (Howarth et al., 2014; Jovchelovitch, 1996). These overrepresented or hegemonic representations of the world, including that of the social order, naturalize the existing social structure and become institutionalized through regulations and laws that support the social order. Study 4 provides an example of how different layers of communication maintain the status quo and regulate the social order.

> The Hungarian legislation passed a regulation in 2012 that reduced the monthly long-term unemployment allowance from 90 to 73 euros with the eligibility criterion to take part at least for a month per year in voluntary work (in organizations validated by the local governments, while local governments are not more obligated to provide public work opportunities). The task of finding employment becomes the responsibility of people on the periphery of society. The related political discourse sent systematic messages to everyone, the unemployed, the working poor, and the middle class, thereby redefining social relations for the whole society. Even the young unemployed could sense the different layers of the message of such a regulation.

This is how a 24-year-old young unemployed Roma woman explains these layers:

> It sends a message that Gypsies are just waiting for the allowance that the workers produce. They don't really want to work. I'm sure that people who have jobs think like this. The average person, the majority thinks like this….

> I think they want to frighten people into getting a job. I would work, but there is no work. Do you think that if they reduced salaries more, there would be work for people?

> …Is this money to be even poorer? Or to perish? Because it is quite a lot of money to die, but it is not very much to live on.

More important than the redefined unemployment allowance and its conditions is its effects; the unemployed became the agents of their own destiny, reframing their status in society. This had clear consequences for the social order and attitudes toward them changed toward greater negativity. As Howarth (2006) said "the reproduction of power relations depends on the continuous and creative (ab)use of representations that mystify, naturalise and legitimate access to power." (Howarth, 2006: 79). Such institutionalized, hegemonic representations demark identities and trans-

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360 mit messages about the self, about we and the others. Who are we? Who are they?
361 Is there any connection or just differences between us? If *us* at all exists?
362 These ideologically sustained social realities have significant effects from the
363 very beginning of life. They frame the primary environment, identity development,
364 possible coping mechanisms and later autonomy, and resilience. The environment
365 of socialization reflects this framing of society and adapts to this constructed reality
366 (Leman & Duveen, 1999; Sarrica, Roseti, Brondi, Cervelli, & Leone, 2016). In
367 study 3, we asked Roma high school and university students to reflect on their child-
368 hood (under 12 years of age) experiences about being a member of a minority:

369 Because my mother always told me… Nay, she didn't told me. I just know from her body
370 language that I have to behave in a different way with Hungarians than with Roma people.
371 (16-year-old Roma student, NCAD)

372 They taught me at home that I was different. And they told me that if a white person made
373 one step, I had to make two. And I always tried. Always more and more and more and more.
374 (17-year-old Roma student, NCAD)

375 These examples present the psychological states of being in a lower status posi-
376 tion. The psychological states become alive through the dialectic of these contents
377 and other environmental factors, such as the coping ability of the community, the
378 primary and surrounding environment, and characteristics of the individual. It is
379 evident that developing identity through socialization in these cases involves a sense
380 of being a member of a minority. Moreover, minority members' constant exposure
381 to disparaging views conditions them to continuously compare and differentiate
382 themselves in ways that elicit reinforcement (Clark & Clark, 1950); they develop a
383 need for constant approval, a dynamic similar to the victim role. Here is a good
384 example of the self-reflection expressed by a Roma high school student (study 3) on
385 how minority membership affects identity construction:

386 You have to be careful when to say this happened because I am Gypsy. Because we cause
387 pain to ourselves if in every situation where I feel discomfort I say that's because of my
388 origins. I try to separate these two. (22-year-old Roma university student, NCAD)

389 In the following section, we underscore how a well-functioning community can
390 provide a foundation of support, giving feedback about how to rectify unfavorable
391 situations and cope with the failures an individual encounters.

392 *8.3.3 The Role of Communities*

393 If power relations and dominant representations are questioned, then minorities can
394 become *empowered*. This means that the subordinated status of minorities is recog-
395 nized and minority members raise the need for change. The following example pres-
396 ents the actions of an empowered minority, initiated through a bottom-up process of
397 change.

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> The Wlislocki Henrik Student College (WHSZ) is a program supporting underprivileged and/or Roma students (mostly first generational intellectuals) since 2013 at the University of Pécs, Hungary. The access of Roma and Gypsy youth to higher education is currently as low as 1%. Reasons for such low enrollment are rooted in the inadequate functioning of society, including problems such as institutionalized segregation and racism. The WHSZ is focused on the empowerment of Roma intellectuals through a complex approach: although implemented in an academic milieu, its main objective is not only to support students' educational progress but to create a strong community to ground future social capital, facilitating their participation in public life and initiating dialogues between Roma, Gypsy, and non-Roma/Gypsy intellectuals, a key element for long-term success. To realize these ambitions, the multielement program aims to ensure a supportive environment which enables the students to process their failures in a constructive way and build an academic career instead of quitting the system altogether. Therefore, the WHSZ implements research projects, community weekends, foreign language courses, tutorial and mentoring systems, and volunteering initiatives to mediate a set of values and alternative representations for redefining self-interpretation and positioning processes (Varga, 2015). Although the WHSZ was organized in a top-down way, through constant interaction a strong connection developed between the members; the community started to break out beyond the formal frames of the project, and minority actions emerged in a bottom-up way. The following story is a good illustration: in December of 2014, graffiti appeared on a wall in front of the University: *Sallow skinned Gypsies, even with a diploma you won't be real Hungarians! You will still be parade-Gypsies!* This openly racist message reflects the dominant representation of Roma people, according to which Roma people do not graduate from university because the diploma is a privilege of (white) Hungarians. Students of the WHSZ gave a quick response to the graffiti: within a single day, they organized a public event through social media inviting Roma high school students, representatives from academia, and the press to participate and give voice to their alternative representation. Students used the letters of the original message to create new words like *dialogue*, *magic*, *voice*, and *love*; they wrote these alternative words on paper and covered the racist graffiti with them. The aim of the peaceful action was not only to negate the negative and restrictive representation of the Roma people but also to express their own views and versions of how they would like to be seen. These students realized that although they worked for their personal goals, they faced the same difficulties and barriers posed by stigmatization, which they could face together as members of a community.

A basic condition for bottom-up processes is that community members realize they have common goals, interests, and shared realities. These goals may change and transform once dialogical processes start concerning how to achieve them. Through dialogue, members articulate their interests and take account of others' perspectives. Discussing common goals enables people to feel involved; this is also where differences of opinion, tensions, and coalitions may emerge.

Two essential aspects of this bottom-up process are the decentralized or horizontal partnership and the ability to engage in constructive debate. The subject of criticism is not the speaker but the contents of their proposed position. Content-focused criticism is constructive since it considers arguments for and against the communicated position. A proposal requires an underlying personal view (self-statements) and content-based arguments (embedded in perspective) in order for participants to become involved, not feel threatened, and persist in the knowledge construction process. When individuals are empowered, they are open to consider alternative positions: *this is what I think according to my knowledge; it can be questioned, refuted, and reviewed together. This is my contribution, which can be*

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approved or contested to articulate a new position. Horizontal partnership means there are no “misconceptions” in this process of common knowledge construction, but each party’s contribution is an essential and constructive part of the outcome. Individual responsibility is replaced by responsibility taken by all participants in the dialogue. Participants’ approach to conflicts and debates and their mutual trust improve. Starting a discussion is threatening for participants. The first contribution reveals the otherwise invisible individual’s perspective, the way they think about themselves. This process reactivates the issues of responsibility, threat, anxiety, and self-esteem (Bigazzi, 2015a, 2015b).

If community members are able to keep focused on common goals and rely on interdependence to achieve them, then the community starts to *pulsate*, generating and progressively resolving conflicts constructively, which are required to create new levels of consensual states. These dialectics provide conflicted dualism, mutual tension, creative negation, participation in a never completely resolved dispute, and partial and open conclusions. Thus, new consensual knowledge is forged through (dialectic and contrasting) dialogue. New knowledge and involvement in the process of its construction change participants’ positions.

It is an objective that empowerments become independent from authorities. Activity and practice creates new identity possibilities, and alternative representations can be experienced. Intergroup conflict and intergroup harmony are rooted in the texture of context, power relations, and existing representational fields. To move conflictual relations toward harmony, stakeholders’ awareness of the role of the context is fundamental. Only in this way, through deconstructing our own power positions, can we invite the other to inclusive spaces, enabling the emergence of new alternative representations, partnerships based on dialogue, and the recognition of existing diversity to foster societal development.

Developmental psychology can deepen our understanding of how members of a society learn to cope with distress and to regulate emotions that emerge from intergroup relations and how they can remain open for societal change. From the very beginning of our existence, we face overwhelming experiences and an environment that helps its members restore a sense of continuity. As Winnicott (1953) pointed out in relation to the concept of mothering and the mother’s almost complete adaptation to the infant’s needs in the earliest stage of development, adaptational failures emerge gradually as the infant’s ability to deal with these failures increases. These failures are as important as the moments of perfect care; failures provide opportunities for the infant to experience the unknown and the unusual, giving them opportunities to practice, change, and develop. Environmental responses of acceptance are needed for the infant to experience reparation. The functionality of these failures are possibilities to experience the difference between the self and the others as well as reparation through the other’s active participation. Reparation reinforces the experience of autonomy and restores the continuity of the self. In this way, confidence and trust in the world arises and self-confidence increases. This process can be seen as primary empowerment, a process that influences resilience or mentalization (Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt, & Target, 1994).

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Ideally, the community later takes the role of a holding environment, fostering a sense of cohesiveness. This helps individuals face failures and remain open to new changing interpersonal, social, or societal relations. Thus, empowerment is deeply dependent on community, not single individuals. Societal change is the question of empowerment and of "good enough communities," holding environments that support adaptation to failures as the individual becomes ready to deal with them.

The development of holding or "good enough" communities needs to be facilitated by processes aimed at creating inclusive spaces for empowerment by the "elite," stakeholders, social workers, community developers, and actors of social interventions. Inclusive spaces are inclusive in both a material and a psychological sense. Achieving equality requires the elite to be aware of their superior power positions and make constant efforts to deconstruct them. Deconstruction is a prerequisite for changing the dominant forms of communication, creating inclusive space – an incubator – where new social realities and cognitive alternatives may emerge. In this space, minority groups or disadvantaged groups can elaborate their own perspectives, test the validity of possibilities, and later construct and disseminate their own versions of reality. Through this process, their positions of power also change as they reposition themselves in relation to others.

8.3.4 The Primacy of Context

It is also important to point out that fragmented societies with structural inequalities and oppressed communities are not functional. Unrecognized inequalities cause intergroup conflicts and over time these conflicts pose a threat to majorities. An example of this is ghettos and no-go zones where entering is impossible for outsiders; gaps in society mean the limitation of freedom for everyone. Action plans and interventions that do not address inequalities on a systemic level are dysfunctional because maintaining the existing social order reproduces the same errors. Only by accepting, understanding, and working with self-other differences can communities and societies evolve. Thus, inclusion and empowerment affect both minority groups and majority society.

The existence of diversity as a given condition is not subject to debate; the question is how society and individuals deal with it. Empowerment is also important for majorities, enabling them to develop self-confidence, perspective taking, mentalization, communication, and (create) innovation. A twin-track approach is required for intergroup harmony, one which includes empowerment for both minority *and* majority groups, albeit with different objectives.

The objective of empowering majorities is to enable them to give up dominant positions and take into account the possibility of systematic changes in order to consider minority perspectives. This can be implemented through identity reinforcement, which improves self-esteem, conditions for perspective taking, openness toward the other, and abilities of mentalization while decreasing psychological distance and depersonalization. In this way, majority members become more reflective

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and aware of their power and its consequences, and they are enabled to surrender their dominant positions in negotiation processes without experiencing identity threat.

By contrast, merely aiming to reduce prejudice or one-sidedly strengthening the social identity of the minority in a decontextualized way (e.g., teaching of Roma culture, language teaching in ethnic schools) does not produce inclusion or a sense of agency to create social change, nor does it create alternative/contesting representations. These faint attempts simply smooth over differences and conflicts through assimilation/integration to the extent that diversity is allowed as defined by the majority. There is no negotiation or creation of opportunity through representational change. These unfounded endeavors lead to identity crises, long-term transitional states, and feelings of abandonment. In Study 3, Roma university students who studied in a separated ethnic high school reported feelings of isolation, of belonging nowhere:

> It's very hard because my family doesn't accept me. My family tells me that I am different. Other prejudiced people and peers also tell me that I am different. Ok, I'm different. But that's because I have more opportunities and I can succeed better. But now, I don't belong anywhere (23-year-old Roma student, NACD)

By contrast, contextual empowerment guarantees and expands space for experiencing the interdependence between *ability*, *activity*, and *responsibility*. Contextual empowerment means that the instruments given to people enable them to change their knowledge concerning cultural objects and subjects rooted in their context.

> As reported by Bigazzi (study 1): S asked to create something together after an evening that I invited her to sing in my music band. That evening she arrived dressed up, chic, and elegant. A few days later she called me with her proposal and asked to meet together the officers of the City Hall of Rome who worked on Roma integration and whom she knew well. When we met there, I was surprised to see that she was dressed in a dirty yellow miniskirt and tights with obvious holes in them. She spoke with a strong Gypsy accent that she had never used with me. I did not realize in that moment that she was using a kind of role and relationing, worked out over time as a subject of *assistentialist* politics. Two years later we had an appointment with the city counselor of social policies and I noted that S was dressed quite elegantly, wearing a white blouse with a black jacket. She conversed ably without an accent; took notes in her small notepad; appeared self-confident, active, and assertive; and enjoyed the situation. She had shed the expected "Roma woman who needs help" role, repositioning herself in her political relationships over time through close and equal contact with some gadjos. This contact made her able to reposition herself, to construct and generalize alternative social representations of majority-minority relations.

The recognition and acknowledgment of abilities reinforce the identity of community members, increase their self-confidence, and enhance their activities and contributions to the community. Abilities and activities reinforce each other; as the awareness of abilities results in action, so that action, in turn, is reinforced resulting in improved abilities. In this process of empowerment people can feel their own development, and the flexibility of the boundaries of their competences, and they can recognize their shortcomings and potentials. Practice, continuous monitoring of abilities, and self-reflection and feedback from others, including both successes and failures, condition and cause the stability and complexities of our identity.

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Responsibility for actions and the repeatedly renewed attainment of skills depend on the perceived freedom of carrying out an action and on the increased stability of identity. Acknowledgment of a new (power) position and repositioning enables recognized membership in the community, the identification of common interests, and the establishment of organizations to represent these interests.

8.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, we outlined two main theoretical approaches of social psychology that offer the frame to understand how identity construction and representations/worldviews, subject and object, are strictly interconnected. From our perspective, working on identity and/or on worldviews is the foundation of empowerment processes.

Hence, this theoretical contribution aims to shift some of the emphasis and analytic focus of interventions regarding empowerment of minorities. Rather than focus interventions on the success of lone individuals or minorities as a target group, we discuss the importance of the interactions in the interventions or empowerment projects, rather than the success of lone individuals or demarcated minorities as target groups of the intervention. Interactions contain opportunities for social change where new interpretations of the self and reality can emerge and be shared. The possibility of active participation of individuals and their influence in these interactions depends on the acknowledgment of their diverse positions and respective forms of power in the specific context of a given interaction.

Communities also matter. Community responses to failures and needs are fundamental to a well-working empowerment strategy. We suggested that interventions can be more effective and more rooted in communities if the target group is broadened for the host community to include those who hold powerful positions. The deconstruction of power positions of the majority or its representatives (in our case primarily social workers, teachers, community developers) in contact with the minorities can give space to creating alternative social representations. To practice in a safe inclusive space ensures opportunities for expression, debate, and the creation of alternatives. In these interactions, failures – which are often delegated by the majority to the minority – need to be considered a natural part of every process and detached from the membership status.

The harder part of this process is that both the deconstruction of power positions and rise of alternative social representations can be threatening for members of the majority. Sensitization of power positions and developing self-confidence for this deconstruction may be considered basic elements in the education of professionals engaged in social service; this process might be considered as empowering the majority to be primed for inclusion.

We suggest that empowering minorities must be more context-specific, reflecting the concrete problems and needs of the community itself. This may be problematic for projects requiring hard data in order to maintain funding; traditional objective

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620 indicators are unable to detect the efficacy of context-specific initiatives despite the
621 fact that these empowerment strategies may be more adequate in addressing sys-
622 temic issues.

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