Soft Social Infrastructure as a Multicultural System

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SOFT SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE (SSI) is defined as 'being born with the emergence of a social unit and subordinated to unwritten rules of human relations'. The core of this structure is social capital which gives power to SSI to operate and regulate the behaviour of a social unit. An attempt to outline the mechanism of basic SSI components formation in a multicultural setting is presented. It describes a complicated structure, the study of which requires a system approach integrating SSI within the whole social unit as a system. One of crucial problems in creating a contributive and adequately operating SSI is the cultural integration between majority and minority groups. This paper studies ways of integrating minorities with the rest of population and in this way turns them into an indivisible part of society. In order to complete the interaction successfully many conditions have to be fulfilled, including a change in social attitudes towards minorities, a rise in their standard of living, overcoming prejudices towards minorities, etc.

INTRODUCTION

The paper is based on the assumption of the existence of two faces of the social unit management: the formal, called hard social infrastructure, set according to the legal rules, whereas the other – informal, which we call soft social infrastructure (SSI) is subordinated to the unwritten rules of human informal relations. The core of this structure is social capital[1] which gives power to SSI to operate and regulate the state and behaviour of a social unit.

For this reason, we start with explaining the role of SSI for the development of a unit. We assume sustainability as a desirable element of behaviour and focus on the ways SSI helps it. Our next assumption is that while both infrastructures play the role of feedback steering management, the SSI role is more subtle since it functions as a homeostatic

mechanism that manages inherent stability of sustainable behaviour.

By including s s i in the analysis, we do not only receive a more accurate picture of reality but we have also gained a methodological instrument to reveal two facets of social unit management. One, formal and legally determined, which steers the social unit's management in accordance with legal regulations, and the second, informal, based on mutual trust, which complements the formal structure and helps increasing the stability of a social unit. In the past many research papers devoted the major part of their attention to formal structures, therefore the studies on informal structures of management have just started to be made.

Next, we present the result of a study related to the formation of s s i in a multicultural setting, including minority and majority groups. As Seymen (2006) indicates: 'In order to be able to manage cultural diversity in organisations effectively, it is advisable to develop a "cultural diversity management model" peculiar to organisation by considering positive and negative aspects of different perspectives discussed in the study'. Such tasks are easier to realize if the influence of s s i is taken into account. For this reason, we need to first outline the mechanism behind the formation of basic s s i components. As this structure is very complicated, it requires a system approach integrating s s i with the whole social unit. A crucial task needed for the creation of a contributive and adequately operating s s i is cultural integration between majority and minority groups.

s s i as a multicultural structure

The starting point is generalised upon the collective identity in Anderson's imagined political community, which permits us to avoid discussing features of real social units. According to Anderson, such a community is imaginary because 'not even the members of the smallest nation shall ever know, meet or hear of the majority of their fellow-members. Nevertheless the image of their close relationship is very much alive in their mind' (Anderson 1991, 5–7).

In cultural aspects, initially there is a homogeneous community. New members with other cultural identities are joining it. Over time this results in the formation of a minority group whose cultural values

differ from the cultural values of a majority group. This causes deformation in social capital and s s i. The way in which social capital is modified in this community defines the efficiency of s s i homeostatic mechanisms. It is reasonable to expect that the formation of minorities perturbs the quality of social capital and, due to cultural differences, destroys the efficiency of s s i. The problem is how minority and majority groups could dynamically interact within the community to avoid distortive effects of cultural differences.

[75]

From this perspective, Balkan societies can be used as specific case studies. The multicultural variety of ethnic groups within the Balkans which were defined by Todorova as 'a culturally vibrant region' (Todorova 2003) reveals many cases of interaction within a varied multicultural setting. The mechanism behind the formation of social capital in the multicultural setting in the Balkans has very specific features and any attempt at its generalization may lead to the simplification of a complex social and cultural environment, all of which might result in a distorted picture of reality. As Todorova points out, generalizations based on reductionism and stereotyping the Balkans has a long tradition in dominant scholarly discourses (Todorova 1997).

By translating these remarks into the language of the dynamic model of multicultural s s i, and assuming sustainable behaviour as the criterion for optimality, our task is to reveal how minority and majority cultures affect the disturbance of optimal behaviour. Two extremes are possible: no disturbance of optimality within the community, or else a complete diversion from sustainability due to cultural differences.

The solution of a problem in dynamics means that s s i either stays in a sustainable state or moves towards it and cultural differences introducing disturbances are overcome by some terminal date. Cultural integration is used here not in a sense of full acceptance of cultural values by the minority but in an exchange of cultural values between majority and minority in which the system attains sustainability.

These remarks show that having a homogenous s s i is unrealistic in real life and it may not necessarily reach optimality. s s i as a multicultural system may, however, play its feedback role in some sub-optimal conditions, in the so called second-best solution. To explain this we need to introduce additional conditions, such as the change in the so-

cial attitude towards minorities, the rise in their standard of living, overcoming prejudices the society has against them, business ethics, etc. The accumulation of the knowledge of various aspects of these issues 'will reduce misunderstanding, aid in negotiation, and build trust and respect' (Sims 2006) – conditions which are very important in the creation of effective s s i.

The experience of advances and rapidly growing economies indicates that both the creation of new jobs and also investments in areas and regions populated by minorities facilitate interaction between the majority and minority which represents the first step in minority cultural integration. Successful integration greatly depends on the quality of social capital generated in these communities. Social capital represents a precondition for establishing informal links with the rest of the population. The study of social capital is thus of the utmost importance to reveal the mechanisms by which the minority integrates with the rest of society.

BASIC PREREQUISITES FOR CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Culture plays an important role in realising the aims of economic and social development (Fukuyama 2001; Tabellini 2006). P. Bourdieu's category of cultural capital includes such indicators of knowledge as skills, level of education, advantages a person has and which give him or her higher status in the society, including higher expectations (Bourdieu 2005). An attempt has been undertaken by some authors to outline the place of cultural capital in the implementation of sustainable development policy (Danchev 2006). It was indicated that social capital facilitates social systems to reach sustainability. However, social coherence is a crucial factor for establishing the sustainability of a society consisting of different cultures. The importance of this problem is indicated by Fontaine (2007), who introduces six perspectives, namely: the anthropological approach, the psychological approach, the stereotyping approach, the knowledge management (k m) approach and the system thinking approach to explain the case of cultural diversity and social stability.

To shed light on the problem of cultural coherence there is a need to begin the analyses with the prerequisites for cultural integration.

Our starting point is the vision of culture as a system of dynamic reshaping of values in which some values are enriched with new connotations, whereas others lose their influence, and so on. Since this is a very complicated dynamic set difficult to formalize and to simplify the picture, the values related to sustainability are divided into two groups. In one group, values that help to reach sustainability are included and they are called constructive values. In the other group, destructive values are put that drive the system away from sustainability. Next, there is a need for an exchange of values to reach cultural integration, which depends on the level of openness of a given culture. Openness in this case means the propensity to show interest and consequently to adapt the values of other cultures over a period of time.

[77]

Kuran and Sandholm (2007) present a model of cultural integration involving two mechanisms: behavioural adaptations motivated by coordination, and preference changes shaped by socialization and the need for self-consistency. This approach is, however, not applied as in this case the aim is not to reach cultural blending, but rather to preserve the identity of each culture over time and enrich it with the elements of other cultures. This procedure is a so-called preference adaptation.

The enrichment of individuals with elements of other cultures improves the quality of their human capital (Coleman 1988) which facilitates informal interrelations, that is social capital. It means that cultural integration is to result in protection and encouragement of local cultures and the enrichment of individual culture of the members of the community for reaching a sufficient level of self-esteem and self-consistency. This is important for the formation of such properties of human capital which facilitate the genesis of social capital. The ideas formulated by some psychologists on self-consistency as a fundamental human drive (Cialdini 2001; Aronson 1988) seem quite attractive for the aims of our analysis. The preference adaptation hypothesis is applied in this sense, which means reaching self-consistence by adapting cultural values from other population groups and enriching one's own value system. Thus, through dynamic interactions, cultures enrich their identities shifting the whole value system of the individuals upwards, that is enriching it with new elements.

To test this hypothesis there is a need to look for a setting in which

there are communities (majorities and minorities) that have lived together for a very long time. The change of socio-economic conditions creates a new setting to which they have to adjust in order to continue their path to sustainability. Analyzing such a specific case allows us [78] to formulate new theoretical conclusions and to enhance the theory of s s i. Very suitable for this aim is the case of the Roma population in the Republic of Bulgaria. Some considerations of Akerlof and Kranton (2002) are used to explain the presently observed social insecurity among the Bulgarian Roma. They are complemented with two basic sources of preference change proposed by Kuran and Sandholm (2007): socialization and the need for self-consistency.

For a wider view of the topic, and to ensure a better analysis of the effects of cultural integration between majority and minority groups, a model is constructed which includes three aggregations of strongly interconnected cultural value systems: (1) global culture – culture universe for all countries: classical literature, art, music, Internet, pop culture, etc.; (2) majority culture – the culture of the prevailing ethnos (Bulgarian in our case); (3) minority culture – the culture of local minorities.

These three cultural aggregations do not present isolated levels; rather there is an overlap among them. The problem of cultural integration can be reduced to a mutual transfer of cultural values among cultures. In our case the culture of minorities is not endangered by the culture of the majority; quite the contrary, it is further developing by adapting constructive values from it. However, this is a too restrictive assumption which should be removed in future studies.

During the process of interaction among various cultures there is a mutual exchange of constructive and destructive values among them. The effects of these interactions depend on many circumstances of which, in our opinion, the most decisive is the level of openness of interacting cultures. A rise in homogenization of both cultures can be observed provided that both cultures are equally open and accept values from one another. In this case homogenization is inevitable, and both cultures keep their identity in a new, specific way which calls for an additional study.

Cultural integration can be divided into several stages: (1) *cultural*

coexistence – in the beginning, the minority culture exists together with global and majority cultures, they do not interact, minorities are actually isolated from the society. (2) *cultural exchange* – the minority starts to accept some cultural values (goods) of global and majority cultures as, for example, celebrating basic national and religious holidays, participating in national social and cultural initiatives, etc.; this exchange is normally selective, in the sense that a minority may accept or reject some values (goods) of the majority and of global cultures (in many cases there is a combination of both); (3) *cultural integration* – the minority accepts a sufficient number of values (goods) from other cultures and becomes an integrated part of society. Although there may be some loss of cultural identity of the minority, it is compensated by the enrichment of an individual culture and of its members with values from other cultures, which means an improvement in the terms of their human capital. The final effect on social capital and s s i is expected to be positive. Various authors offer different explanations of the case. Most studies assume the creation of a hybrid culture (for example in the North America situation), which is not the case here. The paper analyses the circumstances when minorities preserve their own culture, adding to it values from other cultures. In this model both cultures are preserved, in this way creating a mixed s s i. To reveal this structure a case study is prepared and analysed.

[79]

ROMA AS A MINORITY GROUP

To test the effect of cultural differences on s s i, the Balkan area has been chosen as a source for examples of multicultural systems. During its historic development this area has brought together many ethnic groups, part of which have been granted minority status. This has created a unique cultural diversity in the Balkans (Todorova 1997).

Many interesting studies have been carried out in this direction. Wright and Drewery (2006) show that 'individuals from different cultures experience the same behaviours in multicultural teams differently'. This study is among the first attempts to shed light on the problem in the Balkan area. The findings for multicultural interactions and s s i in this area with very specific features are expected to enrich both theory and practice with new nuances.

TABLE 1   Ethnic structure of the Bulgarian population

Ethnic group	Number	Share of total
Bulgarian	6655210	84.32%
Turks	746664	9.46%
Roma	370908	4.70%
Russians	15595	0.20%
Armenians	10566	0.13%
Macedonians	5071	0.06%
Greeks	3408	0.04%
Ukrainians	2489	0.03%
Jews	1363	0.02%
Romanians	1088	0.01%
Other	18792	0.24%
Not-identified	62108	0.79%
Total	7893262	100.00%

SOURCE   National Statistical Institute (http://www.nsi.bg/index_e.htm).

The structure of ethnic diversity in Bulgaria according to the last census is presented in table 1. Roma, called also Gypsies, as a dominating minority group are used as our case study of ethnic diversity in Bulgaria.[2]

There are no exact statistics for the actual Roma population in Bulgaria. Part of them identify themselves as Bulgarians or ethnic Turks. According to Tomova's representative study (Tomova 1995) about 46 percent of the Roma identify themselves as Turks, while the others indicate they are either Bulgarians or Gypsies (Roma). Nevertheless, according to some studies, the share of the Roma population dynamically increased from 2.2 percent of the total population at the beginning of the 1980s to 4.6 percent at the beginning of the 21st century (Kertikov 2006).

At present the minority of Roma represent a significant demographic, economic and social problem for the country. Most of them belong to the poorest segment of population and have the highest birth rates. According to the Bulgarian sociologist K. Kertikov, the percentage of children in Roma families is as follows: 1 child – 11.5 percent, 23.8 percent with two children, 26.8 percent with three children,

13 percent with 4 children, 6.8 percent with 5 children and 3–4 percent with more than 6 children (Kertikov 2006). Using the 2001 census data, Kertikov finds that 9.2 percent of the total Roma population lives in the area of Montata (9.2 percent), 7.4 percent in Dobrich, 7.3 percent in Sliven, 7.1 percent in Shumen, 6.8 percent in Pazardjik, 5.6 percent in Stara Zagora, 4.8 percent in Yambol, 4.3 percent in Turgovishte, 4.1 percent in Haskovo, and 4.0 percent in Vidin. In all other Bulgaria regions the percentage of the Roma population in comparison to total Roma population is less than 4.0 percent (Kertikov 2006).

The social status of the Roma has deteriorated during the social transformation of Bulgarian society after 1989, when the policy of their integration changed dramatically (Verdery 1996). Despite open discussions of problems due to a drop in economic activity and strong income differentiation, there has been a rise in poverty among the Roma and the crimes linked to it. The increasing share of Roma in the total population, resulting from a rise in poverty and a drop in cultural and human capital, is of growing economic and social concern. The rising discrepancy of the income level among Roma and the rest of the population is a source of serious social tension which gives birth to various nationalist sentiments.

At the same time it must be noted that the problem of integration of Roma is not new and it has deep historic roots. Bulgarian writer Yordan Radichkov describes the gypsies as 'interesting people' (Radichkov 2006). D. Bojilov thinks that 'the behaviour of the predominant part of the Gypsies is such that if it is used by the rest of population, the state will simply collapse' (Bojilov 2006). He thinks that they cannot be integrated for many reasons. Commenting on the so-called 'Gypsy terror' promoted by the Bulgarian nationalists, Kanev (http://www.mediatimesreview.com/september05/ataka.php) indicates that 'There are not more neglected, isolated and discriminated people in Bulgaria than Roma [...] They the are object of selective choice by the legal system and state bureaucracy which in Bulgaria, like elsewhere, moves along the line of least resistance. Due to this the repression is not focused on the organised crimes and the crimes of the rich and those in power, instead the focus is on those who are helpless or have no money, links and access to qualified solicitors.'

Such extreme opinions are cited in order to show that the attitude towards Roma is not unambiguous and that the explanation of the features of cultural integration between minorities and the majority in the Balkans is a complex task.

KEY ISSUES OF SSI AS A MULTICULTURAL SYSTEM

Considerations presented above were tested by a study based on interviews with the Roma population in several places in Bulgaria: the capital Sofia, the district city of Burgas and the adjacent village of Gorno Ezerovo, as well as a small town near Sofia – Svoge where there are areas populated by Roma. These areas were accepted as representative communities.

The distribution of the respondents in the sample was 37 percent male and 63 percent female. Only 22 percent of all respondents have permanent employment, the other 78 percent are unemployed. 6 percent of the respondents are between 16 and 19 years old, 29 percent are between 20 and 29, 34 percent are between 30 and 39, 12 percent are between 40 and 45, 6 percent are between 46 and 49, and 3 percent are between 50 and 59. The respondents above the age of 59 account for 10 percent of the sample. Approximately a half of respondents (49 percent) are from the small village Gorno Ezerovo, 31 percent comes from the suburb Pobeda of Burgas, 8 percent from Svogue whereas the other 12 percent are from various places in Bulgaria. Although most of the respondents live in urban areas, their manner of residing is much closer to the rural than to the urban way of life.

The respondents participated actively in the interviews, showed understanding of the importance of the initiative, and supported it – although they did not believe that the initiative could contribute towards the solution for their problems. Altogether 145 households were interviewed; however, depending on the aim of the analysis, some observations have been omitted due to incomplete answers. The data gathered in our research were processed initially by factor analysis, followed by regression analysis. For technical reasons only the summary of results is included in the report.

The analysis of SSI as a multicultural system indicates that the cultural integration of the Roma minority in Bulgaria is a process strongly
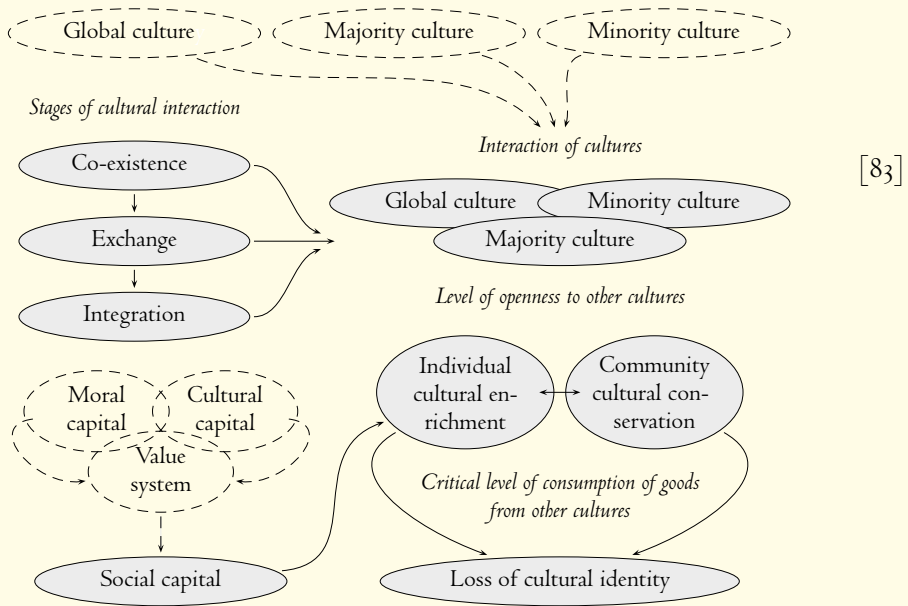
FIGURE 1   A model of cultural integration in a multicultural setting

dependent on complex factors, the most important of which is the standard of living. At present, many reasons keep impeding this process. Among them we can single out poverty, discrimination, a need to overcome the prejudices toward Roma that still exist in the society, Roma's poor education, etc.

Data analysis and the construction of the model, an on-going process, follow the basic logic of the scheme presented in figure 1. Although the research shed light on various details, its comprehensive completion requires complex efforts of various social sciences.

The model is an attempt to describe how cultural interaction can help the community to reach a sustainable state in a multicultural setting. It is based on the assumption that ss1 is a homeostatic mechanism to support sustainability and that social capital is the basic driving force behind it. In the search of 'deep parameters' of mechanisms generating social capital, moral and cultural capitals are used as the deepest foundations of human behaviour. For this reason the quality of social capital of all ethnic groups in the community appears as an

important precondition for effective cultural interaction. Moral and cultural capitals in a society directly and indirectly affect social capital creating such personality in the individuals which can facilitate or, on the contrary, impede social capital from generating. Correspondingly,

[84]   it also affects the quality of s s i.

THE SOCIAL TRUST

Studying the features of social capital in various ethnic groups shows that there are various preconditions for generating social capital. In short they can be presented by two mental qualities of individuals which are regarded as basic characteristics: the marginal propensity to help each other and the marginal propensity to recognize the leader (Danchev 2006). The first is needed for outlining horizontal aspects of informal association, the second for its hierarchy. Several questions were formulated in order to pin down various aspects of these characteristics in the respondents.

How the respondents were prone to ask for help when they found themselves in a difficult situation (what we sincerely did not want to happen) was a question revealing horizontal aspects of social capital characteristics. Not all respondents answered this question, in fact only 23 did. The prevailing opinion is that probably somebody will help (39.1 percent), while 17.4 percent hope friends will help and 13.0 percent believe that their friends would help if they could. Two extreme answers (nobody will help or everybody will help) are supported by few respondents. Although according to Samers (2005, 880), 'trust is not generalized throughout informal economies' our study shows that this expression of social trust is a significant precondition for horizontal association within the community.

The propensity to enter into social engagements is another reflection of the preconditions to generate social capital. As Lee, Barnowe and McNabb (2005) show 'the differences in cultural and political contexts result in variation in the way societies perceive environmental issues and social concerns'. To test the propensity to enter into social engagement we asked the respondents how they solve their everyday problems. As an example we chose a fallen tree on the street and how they intend to remove it from there. With all respondents answering

this question, only 3.5 percent declare they do not care about it, 34.5 percent do not react as they think they cannot do anything, 34.5 percent wonder what they should do and 13.8 percent first consult their family and friends.

A complement to this question is the query concerning whom the [85] problems are discussed with. The respondents discuss their problems in the following way: 20.7 percent discusses them with friends, 71.4 percent with their husband or wife and 7.1 percent with anybody, which is regarded as an indicator of moderate openness and concentration of social capital within a family.

The marginal propensity of trust reflects a normal reaction to the expectations from the others and the obligations deriving from it. It follows the assumption that trust normally exists when there is equilibrium between expectations and obligations. Only 3.4 percent of respondents do not believe in anybody, 34.5 percent doubt in everybody, 10.3 percent are prone to believe sometimes, 37.9 percent believe in people in majority of the cases and no one believes in everybody. These answers are regarded as evidence of a moderate level of openness.

The marginal propensity to associate with others is reflected by the willingness of the respondents to participate in civil society for protection of their interests. Civil society is a new phenomenon for Bulgarians and there are many abuses with various N G Os and therefore strong scepticism toward them is present in society, often regarding N G Os, as a kind of mafia or money-laundering structures. This is the reason why only 17.2 percent of the respondents definitely do not want to participate in any N G O, while 13.8 percent would participate if they find any sense in it. On the other hand 20.7 percent of the respondents would participate from time to time and 31.0 percent would definitely participate.

There are several reasons why the respondents would or would not participate in N G Os. As a rule few respondents specify reasons for their reaction towards N G Os. Among those who would participate in a civil society, two thirds think that in this way they could protect each other whereas one third trust that N G Os will protect them well. The scepticism in N G Os is reflected by several reasons. The preference to protect themselves alone is expressed by one fourth of respondents,

while three-fourths think that too much is spoken and nothing is done for their protection. Despite the relatively small number of observations, the information gathered gives sufficient background to formulate a hypothesis of the social capital quality among the Roma population. It is of a quality that creates positive predispositions for cultural interactions and integration with the rest of population. SSI as a main steering instrument in this community plays its homeostatic role adequately, allowing for Roma continuous adjustment to the changing conditions. The social status of Roma is getting worse due to the slow and controversial social as well as economic transformation.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

The collection of data related to the socio-economic characteristics of the sample indicated above is normally a traditional part of such studies. Several basic features are outlined.

Evidence of the level of poverty among the Roma minority is reflected in the fact that they spend on average 129 BGN per week on food. If we assume that an average Roma household has 4 people this accounts for 4.6 BGN per day or the equivalent of 2.4€ (exchange rate on 8 August, 2008 1.95 BGN = 1€). For comparison, the price of a city transport ticket is about 50 cents in Bulgaria, the price of one kg of bread is approximately 60 cents and one kg of meat costs about 4.5€. This shows that the Roma live near the poverty line. Their monthly income is also very low (about 100–200 BGN or 50–100€). Most of them are unemployed and social aid is the only source of their income, which in many cases creates the effect of adverse selection (Greenwald 1986). Others have temporary jobs and irregular sources of income.

This situation defines the general setting of the Roma's life as very difficult. They were the first to be fired at the start of the transformation of Bulgarian society. 62.1 percent think life is going bad, 17.2 percent think life is not as good as it used to be, 3.5 percent think that there is no change in the quality of life and the same is the percentage of whose who think life conditions are improving.

The basic reason for the drop in the standard of living of the Roma minority is explained by the lack of the necessary level of education which would allow them to find a suitable job. The average level of ed-

ucation of respondents is low – the years of schooling are on average 7–8 years, which means primary and secondary school – mandatory according to the Bulgarian legislation. Bulgarian researcher Vladislav Georgiev (2006) indicates that only 0.2 percent of the Roma graduate with higher education, 4.6 percent finish secondary schools, 32 percent finish primary schools and the rest remain illiterate. 'The inability of socially excluded families to access crucial social goods such as education on the same terms as others' (Warrington 2005, 798) is a phenomenon observed even in industrial countries. In addition the Roma minority due to rising poverty keep losing even the access to such public goods as education, a thing quite affordable in the past.

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This creates preconditions for change in the number of children in households – a problem broadly discussed in Bulgaria recently, and the problem is linked to the so-called 'disappearance' of the Bulgarian nation due to a strong drop in natural birth rates among the Bulgarian population. Our survey indicated that even the number of children in Roma households is not as big as it used to be. An average household number among Roma is 4–5 people, with no more than 3 children. The very Roma confess that the number of children is in decline due to the difficult life. On the contrary, 61.1 percent of respondents admit that the difficulties do not confuse them – they have as many children as they want, while only 16.7 percent of respondents think they have fewer children because of the difficult life. However, 5.6 percent think that the difficulties stimulate them to have more children to help the family survive. Although controversial, a drop in the numbers of children in Roma households is distinctly observed.

Only few answers were provided for the question of how they would prefer to plan their future life. Most respondents prefer to find a good job, work a lot and live 'as white people do' – a popular saying in Bulgaria. Only 10 percent prefer to stay in the same position, and the same is the share of those who prefer to receive social benefits and to live with them as they do at present – hardly making both ends meet.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the ssi behaviour as a multicultural system unambiguously indicates that, even limited within the majority – minority

[88] setting, it is a complicated problem to study. These complications are exacerbated in a society undergoing the process of social transformation that includes many distortions and controversies (Creed 1998). While s s i changes in these new conditions, the deterioration in the social status of minorities draws its quality down, impeding strongly the homeostatic nature of s s i. Many factors influence the majority-minority controversy in a negative way. The results of the study presented above show discrimination, the need to overcome prejudices toward Roma existing in Bulgarian society, Roma poor education, etc. Important economic and political conclusions derive from this fact. The creation of new jobs and proper financial investments in the areas and regions populated by Roma would facilitate not only their cultural integration but also the process of homogenizing s s i necessary for adequate sustainable behaviour. Such homogeneity does not mean a loss of cultural identity, but reaching a higher level in the quality of social capital in which cultural differences do not move the system away from sustainability.

The results of our study in Roma communities indicate that most of them understand clearly their social status and are ready to contribute towards finding adequate solutions. Such important elements of social capital as the propensity to socialise among themselves and also with other communities are evidence of a good precondition for social communication. The study shows that these communities have specific social capital which is, as a whole, favourable for the normal functioning of s s i. Provided the economic conditions change, this would facilitate the Roma to overcome many negative elements in their behaviour and transform them into an integral part together with the rest of the population.

First of all there is a need to improve conditions for the rise in educational level of the Roma what would increase Roma opportunities to find a suitable job, and enable more adequate participation in political and economic life of the country. The present situation does not provide adequate opportunities for the poor to receive quality education. The very educational system suffered serious drawbacks during the transformation period. The rise of poverty and polarization in society stimulates the rise of nationalist and racist movements which draw the

process of cultural integration back to cultural isolation. The quality of social capital deteriorates drawing down the stability of s s i. As a result minorities might once again become a neglected and discriminated part of the society to which they naturally belong.

[89]

NOTES

1 Due to technical reasons we avoid the discussion of the genealogy of this concept. For details see Grootaert (1998).

2 According to the UN classification since the 1990s the Gypsies have been called Roma in order to avoid the discriminative and neglecting elements from the past attitude to this ethnic group.

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