
Maja
ŠTAMBUK
and collaborators

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inadequate knowledge about the lifestyle and living conditions of the Roma

First, it is important to emphasise or to repeat the following: *It is necessary to be well acquainted with the Roma and their lifestyle to help them. Thus, every study and every action to improve the quality of their lives must take into account the social, economic and cultural aspects of their numerous problems and the unknown nature of their status, especially in Croatian society.* Even though a number of (social science) studies have been conducted, we still do not know the Roma population well.¹

What are the direct consequences of lack of good insight?

- Inevitably activities on the part of the state (and civil associations that deal with the identification and solving of problems, which, among other things, afflicts the Roma) as well as those joint activities with (a number) of Romani associations, do not succeed or do not succeed in the expected way because they were not adequately prepared;
- In addition, it is not impossible that particular activities undertaken with the best intentions cause more harm than good because the possible as well as the unexpected consequences were not foreseen in the preparatory stages.

Besides knowing the circumstances well, it is important to mutually agree on the steps of development with the respective population from the beginning. Namely, many studies and development project analyses in smaller societies or communities (just like rural) have shown that progress was more successful in those places *where the local population was included from the very beginning. These persons know what to expect in the long-term from particular activities or projects as well as the nature and extent of their role in them.*

Research of the Roma in Croatia is hindered by the fact that a significant number of persons that belong to this national minority declare themselves as non-Roma at censuses. In 2001 census, their official number was 9,463. According to census data, somewhat more than 50% of Roma live in only two counties (County of Međimurje and the City of Zagreb), while their number is insignificant in nine counties. Out of all national groups in Croatia, in the period 1991–2001 the Roma had the largest growth rate. The sample in this study was to a great extent adjusted to this “census situation”.

1. The Roma are the most nomadic people among the peoples of Europe. However, their greater attachment to space can be noted, and today they are less nomadic compared to recent times. Their social organisation has always been based on the family and in this way they significantly differ from other nomadic groups. Today, there are more Roma that are sedentary than those without addresses. The process of becoming sedentary is also at work in Croatia. The Roma are not a unique group since they differ in many ways. Unfortunately, research of the Roma in Croatia, in this sense, has not been carried out so we can only guess the differences. More of them permanently live in settlements and houses (barracks, huts) or flats.
2. It is often thought that the “nomadic” component of Romani identity facilitates their movement from place to place even when there is no special reason for this. However, results from this study show that they are very attached to spaces and that their eventual spatial aspirations are not far from their present locations. This finding directly shows that (for different reasons) the relocation of the Roma is an extremely traumatic experience and that it would be worthwhile to prevent the beginning of new wild “Romani settlements”.
3. The traditional socio-cultural identity of the Roma is fading so the Roma are to a large extent socially identified and presented through negative features or deficiencies: such as poverty and threat. In a society oriented towards multiculturalism and encouragement an equal *Other*, deficiencies and absences cannot be the long-term basis of identity differences that the subjectivity of the group is based on. There is more potential if the basis of their identification depends on the existing components of their cultural heritage for the shaping of a recognisable socio-cultural profile of the Roma as well as the revitalisation of their social identity.

4. The transition period did not favour the Roma population. Moreover, it is clear that the Roma did not reap any benefits from privatisation or ownership restitution. Similarly, the fiscal problems of the post-socialist state reduced public funds for construction or the maintenance of council housing, and we know that a part of the Roma population live in council housing.
5. Political transformation in post-socialist countries resulted in increased discrimination and violence towards the Roma. Political liberalisation created opportunities for the free expression of ethnic and cultural identities and for participation in society. Nevertheless, new challenges and difficulties appeared, because extremist groups gained political power and dominated the political sphere via which intolerance towards the Roma could be expressed. Moreover, the Roma were confronted with limited access to social services, as a result of the overall increased need for these services as well as budget cuts.
6. Although the Roma are a marginal group that in many ways (economic, political, social) dangerously come close to social exclusion, most of the respondents as members of the Romani minority (84.7%) said that based on personal experiences they feel respected in society.

The structure of communities

7. Since the Roma are undoubtedly a specific social group according to many features that are identifiable in society, it is worthwhile keeping in mind that they are not a homogeneous socio-cultural group but that within the Romani population there is diverse stratification. This study showed that stratification also occurs in the cultural sphere, shaping subgroups with special identities, lifestyles, and values. Sometimes these are not clearly defined; on the contrary, they remain canopied by unavoidable cultural specificities that make Romani society different to other societies.
8. The *absence* of a distinguished, autochthonous, social, cultural elite that would mediate in relations between "global" society and their small, minority society *makes it difficult to solve all the different sorts of problems that confront this minority*. The existence of a mediator that belongs to both sides would facilitate communication between the Romani local community and state i.e., state institutions.
9. The Roma population is young. There are two reasons for this: they have a larger number of children and the

life span of the Roma population is shorter compared to the surrounding populations. Data on a large number of youth, somewhat fewer numbers in the active workforce age group and almost absence in the over 60 age group in the researched households clearly indicates a very complex picture of the Romani population.

10. Modernisation processes in the surrounding majority society (industrialisation and the significance of education should be emphasised) create larger differences at the socio-professional level between the Roma and the majority of people. There is weak interest for their traditional services and products. Further, they did not manage to successfully “retrain” on time. Thus, traditional trades are gradually dying. Since there is still a strong influence of tradition in all social areas of life, a lack of adjustment to new times also socially, culturally and economically threatens Romani groups.
11. Unemployment within this population is high due to the low level of education and low skilled competency of the Romani population. On the other hand, sporadic, temporary, seasonal activities that bring in an income are widespread.
12. The low level of education among the Roma is recognisable as a cause or the key to the solution of their problems. On the scale of values “finished school” is at the bottom while poverty is accepted as a feature of the group and typical cultural features of the Roma such as folklore, customs, language and trades, etc. are belittled. Commonly, the nature of Romani poverty is extreme and permanent.
13. The roots of Romani poverty and heterogeneity of the Romani population are multi-dimensional. The different causes of Romani deprivation influence one another in a vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion. Romani poverty is indeed partly related to low education attainment, limited possibilities of participation in the workforce and large families, but it is also connected to minority status, i.e., with minority status and many dimensions of *social exclusion*. The level of poverty is frequently linked to the marginalisation of Romani settlements (the problem of spatial segregation). The Roma who live in distant and segregated communities have less chance of participating in the formal economy or of using the social services (educational, health). *Geographical and social exclusion* are important correlates of Romani poverty.

Economic base

14. The main source of income in Romani settlements is social welfare and not from “profitable” activity. Thus, it is not incorrect to say that this is non/activity. Temporary seasonal work is in second place. This is limited to particular seasons of the year. Considering the low education levels and poor professional competency of the Romani population, the jobs that they get are usually poorly paid ones. *The locations of settled Roma* are exclusively, first of all, provides their *sphere of life* because the settlement most often, in most cases, is not a place of work. They live there but do not work there and in this way the “Romani settlement” is “cheated” of a form of sociability.
15. Insight into this feature with regard to *locations of settled Roma* can serve as a guide to improve the housing conditions towards the installation of suitable activities within or at the edge of localities, especially those with a larger number of permanent inhabitants. Namely, the absence of employment/work in the settlement or somewhere nearby forces those who are educated and more entrepreneurial to seek work elsewhere. This essentially weakens the potential of the community to shape a complex social structure in the settlement that is necessary to make the life of the local community more dynamic and creates a level of solidarity and community that transcends the family. There is a distinct absence of roles that are based on “status in professions” or some special function in Romani settlements.

Family

16. The Romani family has mostly maintained two traditional functions (upbringing and education) and in this way preserved a high level of autonomy, independence and even economic independence as well as high inclusion especially in the social welfare system. Thus, when poverty appears as one of the main socio-cultural elements of Romani (self) identity, the family succeeds to preserve its traditional significance. Or perhaps it is because of this. *It seems that among the Roma a type of adaptation is at work with regard to economic activity and sources of income to the point that this does not disrupt the existing family system.* They choose activities that will include most family members, from the youngest to the oldest, including women.

17. The Roma like to live in large families with many children. They like to socialise, so a great importance is given to family occasions. The home (among sedentary Roma) is the *only* point of stability; it is the place where the family gathers. It is also desirable that the immediate social milieu (the external space) belongs to relatives.
18. The process of reducing the family to a married couple with unmarried children has already “migrated” into the Romani milieu. Almost 53% of the households in this study have these types of family. Single households are rare among the Romani population.
19. Family values, personal values and freedom are at the top of the list (health, children, respect, freedom, friendship, love, marriage) followed by work-materialistic values (work and money) while traditional and political values (politics, nation, religion) are at the bottom of the list. Based on these hierarchies, it can be concluded that life in poverty is not a lifestyle that the Roma prefer. Work is also rated highly on the scale of values, like as a means of creating many other values. Thus, the value system of the Roma is not importantly different from the value systems of society as a whole. However, it is questionable whether the Roma are able to realise the values that they declaratively support.
20. Extended family networks present a means of survival because they ensure a regular flow of finances (child endowment, family benefits, pensions, unemployment benefits). These family networks also serve as an information network on the labour market, possibilities of earning money, gains and losses of leaving the local community, etc.
21. Early marriages are also characteristic for the Romani ethnic group. These marriages, per se do not necessarily lead to poverty. They are more an indicator of poor educational aspirations and an early dropout rate that is further linked to low qualifications and poorly developed work skills.

Education

22. Education is the fundamental issue of the Romani population. Two sub-questions are imperative: why do the Roma avoid school so much (when they know that any social and economic shift is impossible without education) and why the state is not prepared to implement its law on compulsory primary education among

the Roma. Many Romani families do not have access to the economic life of the country. The number of potential active members in the Romani population is great. However, many are young whose skills are only marginally used.

23. Ideas about better lives are contrary to the housing practices and landscapes that the Romani settlement offers. It was shown that these types of aspirations were frequently related to higher levels of education. Thus, raising the level of education is imperative and the only guarantee of modernising Romani communities. The abandonment of some traditional types of behaviour is necessary since they threaten the health as well as the welfare of the individual, family and the whole community. *Thus, it is difficult to expect an improvement of life standard without change within the Romani cultural code.*
24. *Education is not recognised as an important need or as an actual problem among most parents.* Moreover, the role of education is not seen in a social and an economic sense, which could have a decisive role in integration processes in society.
25. The conceptualisation of an education system for the Roma needs to recognise the needs of the surrounding environment (within the framework of the regular school system) and the Roma. This should be towards the construction of a new integrative school and not a mechanical reconstruction of the existing. *The phenomena of dual marginalisation of Romani children at school and in the environment as well as poor results often bring about fatigue among both teachers and children. The schooling of Romani children is immanently a social issue.*
26. The most common sources of information are *Croatian television and the family/ friends.*

Settlements

27. In an analysis of Romani settlements, it is difficult to discover elements that are necessary for a credible and practical utilisable typology. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the following features: The first is *positional*. This allows us to differentiate where Romani structures are located: in the town, in the village, or in a rural area. The second feature is *the degree of separation*. There are clear differences between Romani settlements that are parts of existing settlements and Romani settlements that are detached structures. The third feature is *genetic*. According to this feature, pre-

mises initially built for other purposes and housing built for family residence can be differentiated.

28. Ideas about a desirable settlement directly rest on *cleanliness and related ecological descriptors* and on the *non-Roma difference* – more precisely on the similarity of Romani settlements with other non-Roma settlements. The use of the words: Romani and non-Romani settlements mean the difference between settlements that are municipally and economically “normal” and settlements that are municipally and economically substandard, which in this research has operatively qualified as Romani. Thus, the aspirational reaching out of the respondents for non-Romani settlements indicates their yearning for equipped and unneglected settlements. This is a wish for a settlement-that-is-like-every-other. The Roma, in this way, do not cease to be Romani with regard to the determinants of Romani identity.
29. It is worthwhile to *activate* the Roma and to motivate them to do more things together. Traditional neglect towards the settlement environment is clearly evident. An influential factor on the physiognomy of Romani settlements is rooted in the fact that Romani builders are, in the main, “*wild*” *builders*. Thus, their transformation in the community is necessary in which it will not be indifferent to where how and where they live.
30. We consider it interesting to caution state actors of development that more than half of the respondents state that they desire to live in a settlement where there is *no* Romani community, at least not as a decisive factor in administration and the orienting development of the settlement. However, on the other hand, less than half of the respondents state that the already mentioned determinants of a desirable settlement are *directly connected to the presence of the Romani community* in that type of settlement. It is possible to interpret this as a sign that sub-group has now appeared in the Romani population whose accumulation of life and social successes has loosened ties with other members of the Romani group. The choice of a non-Romani settlement as desirable is undoubtedly linked to an orientation towards social success. This suggests that the Romani group *is not homogeneous* in comparison to the central developmental issue of the group: how to cross the margin and become a successful group and not repress or disintegrate traditional determinants of Romani identity?
31. Distinct influences on the life of the community can be divided into a triangle: *settlement inhabitants-Romani*

associations-town/municipal government. Civil associations, political parties, experts, the government and others, according to the respondents only marginally influence the situation in the Romani settlement. However, response to the question as to what the community can do for itself only discloses *marginal jobs* like rubbish removal, cleaning, tidying up and similar. In second place, responses indicate that the community cannot do anything.

32. The existing housing is inadequate; the standard is very low; there is a marked lack of housing space and rooms. Dwellings are very poorly equipped and a lack of public utilities (electricity, running water) and facilities (bathroom and toilet) is evident. Residential structures often have earth floors. Moreover, walls even if they are made of proper building materials often do not provide insulation. All in all, housing conditions are so poor that they are often below the level of human dignity.
33. According to the subjective evaluations of the respondents, even though there is considerable dissatisfaction with the existing housing situation, it is often not as dramatic as one would expect considering the mentioned features of housing. *However, it is evident that among the respondents there is a group who would like to live differently.*

Recommendations

It is possible to combat Romani poverty in a number of ways among which the following should be included:

1. *Improve housing conditions* through the construction of infrastructure and development of public services especially in removed and distant Romani settlements (development of roads and telecommunications). The improvement of housing conditions also presupposes the clarification of ownership rights with regard to the land on which the Roma live and the encouragement of the local authorities to offer their services in Romani communities.
2. *Increase employment and earning opportunities* for the Roma through their inclusion in training programmes, consistent with anti-discrimination legislature and stimulating employers to employ the Roma. It is difficult to reduce high Romani unemployment rates not only because employers' disinclination towards the Romani employees but due to the motive of some Roma to register as unemployed. It is well-known that some Roma

register at employment bureaus to realise particular social rights

3. *Encourage schooling among Romani children* through reducing or eliminating the barriers that discourage Romani children to enter or stay in the education system (sometimes Romani children do not have enough food, clothes, or family support to continue their education). An important objective is to increase the inclusion of Romani children in pre-school institutions and to facilitate a secondary school education). A real possibility for some Roma (along with a larger number of students that finish primary and secondary school who are then more likely to find employment) is the encouragement of old trades, cottage industries in new ways (making souvenirs, handicrafts, useful products that are not manufactured) to earn a living in ways that are familiar to them.
4. *Improve access to health care* through information on health, health campaigns, and more frequent presence of health care workers in Romani settlements. Considering their living conditions, the Roma are more exposed to some illnesses compared to the non-Roma population, which means that it is necessary to systematically monitor their health. Moreover, the average lifespan of the Roma is one third shorter than the average lifespan of a non-Roma. *It is necessary to increase awareness on the importance of health, especially reproductive.* The promotion of different activities linked to health is necessary, especially among children.
5. *Deal with problems of social exclusion of the Roma* through anti-discriminatory legislature and practice. Raise awareness among the non-Roma through multi-cultural education and teaching about Romani history and culture. Socio-cultural factors influence the Roma's access to social services or on their communication with the providers of these services. As a result of poor knowledge of the language or poor communication skills, the Roma can have difficulty communication to teachers, doctors, local and state employees. Poor communication and deep-rooted stereotypes on the part of the Roma and non-Roma foster interpersonal mistrust. There are almost no Roma that work in the public services that would bridge the two cultures.
6. *Transform social welfare programmes* in such a way that they do not create a "dependency culture" and "poverty trap" (not to discourage the work initiative of the user). Social welfare benefits provide an important source of income among the Roma and the Roma are *over-repre-*

sented among the recipients of these benefits. It is necessary, to a greater extent, to include a component of work in aid programmes (public works) to improve and gain work skills to increase the level of employment. In addition, it is necessary to monitor how these social benefits are spent, as in many Romani settlements alcoholism and other forms of unacceptable behaviour are linked to poverty.

7. *Integrate the Roma into institutions of wider society* (educational, economic, social, and political). As some authors have warned exclusion from the community and group in which members belong needs to be differentiated from exclusion from society and social institutions. Participation in social institutions is the foundation of social status and ensures the material conditions of life. Besides, inclusion in institutions of wider society facilitates interaction with members of non-Roma and other Romani groups and participation in the dominant values of society. Intervention needs to be directed towards offering more opportunities for Romani initiative as well as reducing their isolation and social exclusion.
8. *Inclusion of the Roma in projects that have an impact on their lives. It is necessary for the Roma to actively participate in programmes that are intended for them.* “Rescue” from poverty and isolation cannot be realised without their involvement.
9. *Programmes of social protection* – along with the existing measures that the Roma use, assistance should be towards *schooling and projects of settlement urbanisation*.
10. *Find suitable ways of helping the Roma in self-organisation.* Namely, they have not (completely) built their national community, which hinders the realisation of their rights. In addition, they have not found a common plan of action. *Most of the Roma in Croatia are still formally outside of associations and organisations.*
11. It is absolutely necessary to *improve the existing educational system*, as well as the gradually establish a whole and specific education system for the Roma (setting up of kindergartens in Romani settlements, better organisation of preschool education...).
12. The initial results exist and they commit state institutions and the Romani national community to *cooperate and to be real in their approach* so that the Roma can preserve their national identity and cease living in ghettoised suburbanised settlements, without employment and on social benefits. Within the framework of all the problems related to the advancement of the Romani minority, *space planning, urbanisation and or-*

ganising the settlement in which the Roma live is a priority task. On the other hand, Romani settlements/localities of settled Roma are most often outside of city areas, often on somebody else's land and frequently without suitable/poor public utilities.

13. *Romani women have a central role in the dynamics of the household and in improving the quality of life.* The household is often the locus of their work, childcare, and social interactions and all the activities that occur in the household are her responsibility (e.g., she is solely accountable for making sure that her children are clean, fed, rested, and have done their homework, etc.). All public utility deficiencies and a lack of facilities in the household (especially if their cumulative effects are taken into account) influence the health and safety of all household members *which especially burdens Romani women.* Researchers noted that overcrowding, utility shutoffs, inadequate heating and other housing quality problems *may disrupt children's ability to rest or do homework and may also contribute to stress and depression in adults.* Addressing problem behaviour at school e.g., sleepy, inattentive children with soiled clothes may be futile without addressing the multiple poverty factors in family environments (e.g., no bed, no washing facilities and lack of paved roads...).
14. *Absence of educational and health facilities* also points to a distinct lack of accessible positive role models (e.g., doctors, child care workers, teachers) who might encourage a higher quality of life among the Roma. The effects of inadequate healthcare and education often impact disproportionately on women who frequently bear principal responsibility for family healthcare and education. Romani women also often provide the point of contact between Romani communities and public health services as well as educational institutions. *By improving access to healthcare/education for Romani women this would in turn improve the health/education and overall welfare of entire Romani communities.*
15. *Home-learning programmes* could also be developed specifically for Romani women to improve their skills since most adult women have been deprived of education. By improving their knowledge this would in turn improve the health, education and welfare of the entire Romani community.

FOOTNOTE

¹ It should be noted that not even Croatian society has been entirely researched yet.