

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITIONS USED IN THE UPCOMING PROJECTS IN ORDER TO INVOLVE THE NATIONAL MINORITIES INTO THE ACTIVE SOCIAL LIFE

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### Abstract

*Peaceful and socially beneficial co-existence of Romani national minority with other members of the society is the current aim of many activities of various institutions. One of the most important aspects of promoting coexistence with Romani and introducing their community to others could be Romani cultural traditions. These traditions could be used in a variety of cultural and educational activities. Using these traditions could achieve better understanding of the Romani population but also to develop better coexistence of their own members belonging to their community.*

### Keywords:

*Romani, traditions, coexistence, project*

### INTRODUCTION

Social changes aiming to improve the coexistence of the majority with a minority can be achieved in many ways. One of them is organizing interesting free time and cultural activities that bring closer the culture and traditions of the social groups mutually, what is possible thanks to activities of various organizations. Prague 10 major activity is the Association for traditions of the ethnic minorities, which was founded at the turn of 2012/2013.

The aim of the Association is to try to involve national minorities into an active social life, recognizing their own traditions and roots, increasing the motivation to self-realization through the higher education. At the same time is the aim of the Association to use

interesting activities to convey information about the culture and traditions of minority communities to the other members of the society.

Appropriately supported coexistence of minority cultures (that are in the Czech Republic for centuries already) with the majority population contributes to building social and environmental health in the context of the comprehensive health concept as understood by WHO. For this reason, the contribution focuses on the introduction of the project to promote social health of the society; introducing an example which can be suitably modified for other cultures having long embedded roots in the Czech Republic. The paper shows in this form, in particular, the fact that in our social conditions still are substantial reserves to support coexistence of the majority

population and minorities; even in those cases when the minorities have been living in our country for several generations. Until the society finds ways to support each other in a conflict-free coexistence of the ethnic cultures existing in our country, it is not meaningful to consider the acceptance of new immigrants from completely different cultural and social backgrounds.

### **The association for traditions of the ethnic minorities (Prague – microregion Prague Vršovice) – a response to social changes**

Social changes aiming to improve the coexistence of the majority with a minority can be achieved in many ways. One of them is organizing interesting free time and cultural activities that bring closer the culture and traditions of the social groups mutually, what is possible thanks to activities of various organizations. Prague 10 major activity is the Association for traditions of the ethnic minorities, which was founded at the turn of 2012/2013.

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The highest number in our society is represented by the Romani

population. To assimilate this group had many attempts and was hit by conscious or subconscious resistance. Romani people do not want to give up their customs and way of life, previously did not know the official language – Czech, what led to difficulties in common communication. It was evident that high number of Romani children have failed in the education system and were moved from elementary schools to special schools (separated). The majority language and culture ignorance meant no success and low self-confidence still in the adulthood of Romani (cf. Říčan, 1998). At the same time number of experience shows that many Romani families can naturally get along with their surroundings and can achieve interesting social fulfilment, which may work as a role model for the other members of their community.

The present situation is more favourable, the younger generation tends to be better involved, but still faces myths of the society in which they live - e.g. that Gypsies are stealing, lying, does not work etc.. At the same time, Romani people originally ruled a number of interesting crafts: blacksmithing, cauldron producing, bell making, trough making, basketry, horse handling, making bricks and often made living as musicians<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Musicians along with blacksmiths were the largest and highly honoured group among settled Gypsies. Musical instruments they used to produce themselves. One of the earliest handcraft was 'drumla' - a small metal instrument in a horseshoe-shape with a spring which a finger strum and mouth makes a sound (details Davidová, 1995).

It is therefore necessary to give the younger generation a chance for success and visibility of their national traditions and customs, family traditions (wedding, birth, baptism - kirvipen, death), culture, and thereby provide space for understanding of the differences in Gypsy life to open a better link to an interesting convergence of cultures and traditions of Czech and Romani. Romani traditions are different due to customizing their own worldview and their spiritual culture that is an Indian, Christian and folk cultural blend influenced by the immediate vicinity (Rybář, 2000). These includes e.g. Easter (Patraďi), which Romani see as a spring celebration unlike to our community, Christmas (Karachonya) represents forgiveness and feast of memories of the deceased, Feast of the God's Mother (Rusalja), St. Sarah Fest –as the patron of Gypsy and many others (details, Lázníčková, 1999).

Every activity based on the active cooperation of the Romani community as such, requires very good knowledge of the community, region (in this case is the micro-region Praha 10), including a good knowledge of the families living standards in the region. It is necessary to properly identify activists and families who have relevant influence in the particular Gypsy community.

### **Planned activities of the Association for traditions of the ethnic minorities**

One of the major efforts of the newly founded Association in Prague

10 is organizing activities that are close to the nature of this group. It uses the natural effects of music and dance, which has had a strong motive for national traditions of Romani culture for centuries.

The most natural activity that the Association is working on is to form a Gypsy music band whose members would have other opportunities to participate on other events in the micro-region, and therefore a natural and positive way to make the population aware of their activities. Within this band will be possible to provide an opportunity for young singers-beginners who come out of the singing competitions organized for this national minority.

Organizing competitions whether singing or speech giving is a very important awakening of their own self-esteem and sense of belonging, where participation and success is a good motivation to the further effort for the social recognition, and thus to obtain a prestigious position in their community and society (cf. Šauerová , 2013a, Šauerová, 2013b).

An example of such competition could be singing competition "Roma Nightingale", which is intended for children 1st to 5th grade or speech contest entitled "The Most Beautiful Gypsy Fairy-tale", which will be based on the traditions of Gypsy folk literature. These competitions can properly be based on the experience of similar competitions - e.g. Prague Egg, Prague Chalice (competition for older children). These competitions are having in literature, poetry reading and singing long tradition, whereas the authors used to participate in these

types of competitions in a long term with a different inclusion<sup>2</sup>. In order to connect these two cultural worlds and so the other participants could understand the Romani story specifics, will Romani children speak Czech, while some passages may perform in their "vernacular" as well.

The Gypsy tales or fables can also create interesting formation for other children, same way can be organized "Festival of Gypsy Fairy-tales" etc. connecting communities is here quite clear and understandable.

Festival can be suitably connected with an exhibition that would be followed by pictures of Romani children and excerpts from Romani traditions (e.g., Gypsy costumes, especially the Vlach Gypsies, their costumes are among the most colourful and beautiful ones).

### **The importance of folk literature – fairy tales and fables in the educational (and socializing) process.**

The use of tales is particularly suitable in the child population, storytelling develops children's imagination, which plays a very important role in shaping the personality of the child and his/her

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<sup>2</sup> I. Hušínová has long participated in organizing these activities, since 2008 is the author and organizer of a nationwide, annual contest 'Princess and Prince of the Czech Fairy-tale', which is trying to revive the children's relationship with the Czech fairy-tale, it is also an educational tool and support to the interaction between parents and children (details. Hušínová, 2009). M. Šauerová has participated at these activities as a consultant, juror, as well as a graphic author of diplomas and certificates.

self-confidence (cf. Šauerová, 2010, Klapetek, 2012).

Fairy-tales of all nations always played educational, informative and entertaining role. Every nation or smaller social groups, reflected their way of life in good and evil, in a fictional or fanciful stories that is passed from generation to generation. The greatest benefit of fairy-tales is the point of view. Fairy-tales play in the society the same role as the individual adolescent's dreaming in the ontogeny (Pi'tha, 1999). All generations have chosen their own patterns in fairy-tales, whereas individuals can recognize their archetypal characters in fairy-tales as in reality where is both - good and evil.

Gypsies have been closed ethnic group from the outside world for a long time, so their fairy-tales, legends and fables stayed preserved in its original mission and full spectrum.

This tradition is in the Romani population formed mainly by word of mouth, where the authenticity is not as appreciated as the individuality of each narrator.

They are even more beneficial because they are focused on imagination and improvisation, that are very important for grasping the reality and dealing with it.

In particular we should pay more attention to Gypsy folk literature, because it is gradually becoming the history. Even though it is the only source of their experience and historical awareness. Such source might be considered, for example, the myth of the origin of Gypsies:

*"At the beginning God was alone in the world. But it is hard to live alone, so*

*he wanted to create people. He kneaded a man from a dough and put him into the oven to bake. But had no experience how to make a human, and when was pulled from the oven, he was all black and charred. So God said, "Well, I'll let you live where is hot, the sun. Thus arose the black people. He made another person from a dough. And again put him into the oven. But this time he was afraid not to make him as black as before and he pulled him from the oven prematurely. And this guy was a half-baked, white as curd. My God, oh my God, what shall I do about this creature?" said God. "Back to the oven is impossible!" Then God said, "You're going to live in those places where it is more cold than hot." And so the white people were created. Once more kneaded God the man to try it for a third time. Hopefully, he will succeed this time to make it just right. Put him in the oven and watched. When he pulled him out, the creature was not too black or too white, but nice like coffee, just as it should be. And God said to him: "You can live everywhere you want, in all places. You can live where is warm, and where is cold." (Horváthová, 1999).*

Folk literature in the Romani community develops very creatively, for example enchanting stories in response to current stimuli (e.g. incredible experiences of Gypsies in Canada), but that's another area.

When organizing similar activities, it is important to remember that Romani fairy tales are different, very specific compare to the traditional Czech ones. Despite the cultural differences, however, Romani identity

is formed on the base of their fairy-tales.

### **Form of organization**

Essential part of the organization activities is providing information to public and getting interest of children and families. The most natural way is the communication through schools social workers and activists whose role can be considered indispensable.

It is not just one event but a few long-term sub-activities in which is entire synergy of many components that take care of the child population.

We must not miss the middle and older generation which is especially in the Romani community honoured even today, as the source of many cultural traditions for the younger generation in their own community.

To link the youngest and the oldest generation would be very effective in the contest "Best Gypsy Cookbook". There could be connected Gypsy traditional food while possibly promoting a healthy lifestyle and proper diet.

These activities would be followed by lectures and workshops open to wide public. It would be the most natural way to promote the Romani traditions, skills, craftsmanship and talents.

### **The possibility to better inform the Roma community in the microregion Prague Vršovice**

Each project needs enthusiastic collaborating team, well-equipped

background and effective medialisation of the intended activities.

The project information can be provided to the target groups in following ways:

- via information in regional magazine monthly P 10;
- via primary schools and other educational institutions;
- via Social Committee;
- via social workers;
- via Romani activists and curator.

Interaction of Romani curator with other units (child care, social committees, schools, Gypsy families, specific fieldwork) is very important to probe especially their background in Prague 10 to establish the cooperation, getting the trust that is absolutely necessary to build the relationship and to create sufficient space to promote the planned activities.

Romani curator's position must be seen as one of the essential parts to link the Association activities with the Romani community, it is obvious that a member of such community facilitates mutual communication and helps to establish especially the trust and mutual cooperation.

Romani curator can also help mapping the situation of Romani families in the region (the number of families, living conditions, socio-economic situation, etc.). He can also help to tip the dominant families with a positive impact on the rest of the community. These families are advisably good to have close connections to gain their trust, getting them to cooperate.

With regard to the planned activities of the Association is suitable to identify places at the very beginning where the various activities can be implemented. Prague 10 has actually basis as follows:

- theatre "Vzlet";
- theatre "Mana";
- culture center "KD Barikádníků";
- spaces in schools, e.g. nice theatre at primary school - 'U Vršovického nádraží';
- visit churches at Easter or Christmas holidays to connect cultures, traditions and religion;
- future plans is to contact the operator of sports and cultural complex Eden.

## CONCLUSION

To bring closer the cultural traditions of the Romani community can help society to learn more about their way of life, which is one of the ways to mitigate the impact of myths that are about Gypsies spread in the society. Certainly we cannot deny that there are troublesome areas in Czech Republic there (Chánov) where local conditions determine the specifics, Gypsy groups specifically with low education and social habits, which are concentrated in particular, though modern ghettos where these people do not know how to live. We must consider their past due to their nomadic life and the ways of life related with that.

It is therefore necessary to select appropriate educational activities based on their own cultural traditions of

the Roma community to increase self-confidence of individuals and reinforce the importance and pride of their origin and connectedness with their national minority.

The target group for the Association activities will be children and young people, with whom we want to increase the motivation to work on education and healthy lifestyle.

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