

Transcript of the Minority (Roma) heritage pilot video

[music]

Tímea

ERIAC, the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture works with a Roma heritage concept which states that the European Roma have been living here for more than 600 years and have contributed naturally in the course of history to the culture of the nation states. Up until today, they still contribute to national cultural canons, to contemporary art and lifestyle, and therefore, are [an] integral part of European culture.

Eszter

[The minority heritage pilot focussed on the current status of minority and specifically Roma heritage in Europe and aimed at highlighting the participatory practices related to the preservation, (re-)use and mangagement of Roma heritage in Hungary. During the three years of the project, our intention was to bring parties together to try to overcome stereotypes and to break down the traditional top-down view of history, culture and heritage. Although the socio-political environment was quite challenging, with several proposed partners forced to withdraw at various stages of the pilot, we succeeded in bringing together stakeholders in reducing isolation and increasing visibility of the Roma heritage, of the activites and struggles, not only in Budapest but also in the deprived rural locations of Hungary. We were also aiming to show how the reappropriation of cultural heritage can result in the economic and social revival of Roma communities. Participatory practices seem to be suitable tools to construct the concept and the institutions of Roma heritage to both bring familiarisation and canonisation of a mostly ignored culture and also to reach out to Roma communities by allowing them to rediscover their own cultural history. Implementing new dimensions of culutral heritage in an area that has been mostly excluded from the national cultural canon, the REACH pilot could contribute to compensate these deficiencies.

After the first phase of the project, where we established an extended network of Roma cultural institutions, local actors, public entities and bottom-up initiatives, we started to organise specific events for dedicated researchers in close cooperation with our associated partners. The first local encounter took place in Hodász, at the only Roma country house in Hungary. This small institution, located in an extremely deprived sub-region in northeastern Hungary, not only plays an eminent role in preserving the Roma traditions but also in local community building and in ensuring diverse artistic and professional activities to the children and the teenagers of the village. The event included the presentation of the buildings of the country house, a small cob house presenting the living conditions of a relatively wealthier gypsy family with traditional furniture and homey stencils; a shabby house dug into the ground that represents the living state of the 1930s; the building of the so-called string kindergarten, named after the strings that had been stretched around the Gypsy slum; and the new community building representing the housing conditions of the 1970s, aiming to be the community centre of the local youth.]

Melinda:

We have been working with handcraft since 2012, we are managing a web-based radio station in Romani language and have, in my opinion, a specific museum-pedagogical practice. We display the equipment in the country house but in order to listen to the ballade, one has to go to the slum, knock on the door at the old man[']s house to hear him sing it. We intentionally envisaged this so that the old man becomes the host and therefore the visitor would gain direct experience as they could chat with each other. We did the same with the Hungarian folk culture, where the old lady shows typical Hungarian embroidery. If a tourist comes for a longer period, he or she can also eat a typical rural dish at someone's house. We are trying to boost rural tourism in this very difficult terrain in Nyírség, which is not as beautiful as the neighbouring Szatmár or Bereg landscape.

Eszter

The second sub-project of the pilot was dedicated to the Roma heritage of the 8th district in Budapest. The musical, artistic and community heritage of this specific urban neighbourhood was retraced in the frame of a research seminar for the cultural heritage M.A. students of Eötvös Loránd University. The seminar resulted in a conference and in a photography exhibition. Nyári Gyula's pictures document Roma cultural events that have taken place in the 8th district over the past 2-3 decades. Some of the places and institutions depicted on the photos no longer exist so these pictures are extremely important in maintaining the collective Roma memory of the district. Another REACH local encounter was hosted by the first secondary school in Europe that is devoted to prepare young Roma for Higher Education. The Gandhi secondary school located in Pécs was founded in 1992 by Roma activists. The main objective of the school is through education to produce future Roma representatives committed to the cause of the Roma and the continuation of Roma language and culture. Gandhi, together with the Talentum art school, are included in the national register of best safeguarding practices in Hungary, due to their educational programmes. And another element – the Hungarian and Gypsy dance traditions of Nagyecsed – is part of the national inventory of intangible cultural heritage. By contrasting different approaches and notions of Roma culture and intangible heritage, the role of formal and non-formal education was also very much highlighted during this discussion. Other significant events took place during the REACH opening conference in May 2018 at the Hungarian National Museum where the Minority Heritage pilot organised a roundtable discussion. Several interviews and discussions have been conducted in order to emphasise the good practices that different civil organisations are offering, not only [in] the field of cultural or artistic activities, but also in terms of education or sensibilisation in order to tackle discrimination and social inequalities.

Tímea:

I think it's important to state that in Central and Eastern Europe there is either no funding or very little funding in the national cultural funds for specifically Roma culture, and this is also the practice at the international levels. So [...] organisations might have initiatives for Roma, but the EU level, you cannot find Roma in any [text] [...] Minorities are mentioned but Roma specifically are not mentioned, so it is a very important objective but the transnational Roma intellectual alliance to make sure that when minorities are mentioned, in brackets are the texts related to culture and Roma cultural heritage, the Roma minority specifically mentioned.

Melinda:

These international Roma flashes – I cannot call them otherwise – are accidental. They are not planned for the long term, but through the field of anthropology, we are defining common research projects for five years and then we will implement the results in education. The question is, in whose interest would it be? Whose national interest would it be in the long term that we, Roma, would recognize ourselves, would become teachable and that they accept that we teach and that we teach together?

Tímea:

The Roma elite is also reflecting on what it means to be a Roma leader and establishes very significant participatory practices regarding the ways of legitimate European leadership and legitimate decision about the destiny of this minority in Europe. Moreover, we also aim to deal with such 'diseases' mentioned by Melinda, like misery, poverty and apathy, questioning how can we, as a Roma leadership, concentrate our energies toward these communities, who are in general living in very deprived and rural environments but who are also very resilient and sensitive, safeguarding their traditions.

Eszter:

Besides the scientific articles and conference talks, the main result of our pilot is probably the network of stakeholders, including NGOs, local authorities, cultural management experts, artists and researchers, that was built. This network could contribute towards the extension of its cultural practices, by learning innovative ways of cultural representation and social governance and in order to share different experiences of managing local minority heritage sites and practices.

Tímea

The most significant experience – of Gallery 8, for instance - in the field of Roma culture was that without the involvement of Roma actors, we could not establish efficient participatory practices in a space that sets Roma representation as an objective.