

# ROMA HEROES

FOUNDATION BRICKS



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**FOUNDATION BRICKS**

# **ROMA HEROES**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Roma people belong to the biggest ethnic minority of Europe and the attitude towards them are among the most negative ones within the EU reported by Eurobarometer. The members of this group face social and economic problems and discrimination more often than most of the other minority groups. As they face different kind of challenges, their inclusion can be realized only in a complex way, which includes social, economic, educational, cultural, and other aspects as well. As they experience situations in which they are treated (or they perceive themselves to be treated) as 'invaluable' citizens or victims more often than the members of the majority, their self-esteem is eroded and they hardly ever believe that they can shape their own lives and that of the other members of their communities. This tendency is getting worse as they do not see cultural values, human examples, or positive stories related to the success of other active Roma people, that could inspire them. The lack of such stories and cultural values (or at least their visibility) ruins also the knowledge and attitudes of the members of the majority regarding the Roma groups. The economic and social initiatives that try to improve this situation very often fail because it is hard to empower a group that lacks its own cultural heritage that could inspire them to become active citizens. The complex inclusion can be successful in case it also has a focus on cultural inclusion. The Roma cultural heritage is rich in the fields of music, dance or even fine arts – genres, which are more about feelings than active dramatic heroes that make decisions based on their values, take the responsibility, do actions, and bring change into their own lives and into the lives of the other members of their communities. In our opinion, the 'victim' narrative cannot empower a group or bring its members closer to mainstream society, but the narrative of 'heroes and actors' can.

We – four Roma and interethnic theatre organizations - will create a methodology and realize workshops by which we will work with young people focusing on the values of Roma theatre, dramatic heroes, the heroes living around them and their own heroic acts. With the help of our initiative we will empower them, develop their intergroup attitudes and relations, creative, cooperative skills, self-expression, and critical thinking.

In this material we present the historical and social contexts of the partner countries, where the project is realized parallelly and we describe the target groups we will work with. Afterwards, we will highlight why art in general, especially theatre, storytelling and different gamification methods can develop intergroup relations and empower the vulnerable young people. We will reflect on the existing methods and cases of art and education initiatives realized by the project promoters and other organizations in their countries, which will add important aspects to our present work. We will show the main tools and results of the Roma Heroes pilot workshops realized in Hungary since 2017. Afterwards, we describe shortly the Roma theatres in different European countries and the monodramas put into the focus by the workshops. Before closing, we will focus on some practical issues and dilemma, which will be relevant regarding the further steps of our work.

# 1. NEEDS AND REALITIES

## Italy:

### Roma people in Italy

The Roma community in Italy consists of about 120-170 000 people, this is 0.25% of the population. Only half of these people (45%) are Italian citizens, most of them originate from countries like Bosnia, Kosovo or Serbia, countries that are not EU members, making it difficult to acquire citizenship. These communities, after the desegregation of former Yugoslavia, are definitively settled in Italy and do not live a nomadic life despite all the legal hinders. Still today, the law does take charge of the minors until the major age but refuses to legalize their parents if they do not reach the standard for citizenship, such as work and income. Obligatory schooling is followed with a certain distrust both from youngsters and parents, as it is perceived often as a form of control. At the reach of the major age citizenship is often refused even for those born in Italy, and while they are not registered either in the originating countries. It has created a generation of invisible youth, living borderline, an easy prey for criminality. Since 2003, a significant number of people is also coming from Romania. As EU members, they have free entry but rarely reach the standard for citizenship. These communities are mostly working at collecting and recycling scrap, they are often organized into bigger groups, tend to travel back and forth from their original homes, sending the children to Italian schools only seasonally.

### Ghettos in Rome

There is a Roma community of about 7000 people in Rome, almost 4000 people living in legal camps maintained by the state, segregated

from the rest of the population. There are 8 state-maintained camps in Rome since the early 90ies, and similar ghettos can be found in other cities as well. <https://www.21luglio.org/2018/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/rapporto-annuale-2018.pdf> Their goal is to preserve the nomadic culture; however, the reality is far from the political intention. The camps tend to be at far to reach places, near the highways or agricultural sites, which makes it difficult for the residents to access education (there is a school bus system for elementary school pupils but not for high school students), work and healthcare. The camps consist of steel huts or mobile homes, surrounded by fences, and guarded by CCTV, however, often there is no public lighting, and public safety is problematic. Hygiene is also insufficient, and the residents are often in bad health, having problems with alcohol, drugs, or live in bad mental condition. The fact that the Roma people are often discriminated in the healthcare system aggravates this situation. Those who immigrated to the country without legal papers, about 15 000 people, are not eligible to healthcare services. The residents of the legal or illegal camps often end up here after being evicted from their homes. Living here is also connected to strict requirements, for example, children have to go to school. Often, no notice is issued prior to the eviction, so the families do not have time to look for alternatives. Applying for social housing is made difficult as one must have at least a five-year legal employment. Unemployment rate is 4-5 times of that of the non-Roma. When looking for an employment, it is a huge disadvantage to have the camp as the legal address. Roma people often do occasional work.

*<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/italy/report-italy/>*

*<https://www.21luglio.org/2018/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/rapporto-annuale-2018.pdf>*

## Focused communities

Our organization, the Rampa Prenestina, sets its goals focusing on local action since 2002 when Sebastiano Spinella founded it. Ever since we relate to a small Roma community of around 300 people (of whom around 80 are minors), in the eastern inner suburb of the capital city of Rome, named Campo Gordiani. It is one of the first Roma settlements in the city, dating back to the 90ies, mainly of Serbian origin. They are now the 4th generation living in Italy of whom three generations settled in this camp while only the latest two have followed an approximate scholarship, because Serbia is not part of EU there has been and there are still some problems related to citizenship, even for the members of the last two generations who were born in Italy. We can find the highest rate of unemployment among adults here, mainly due to discrimination and poor education. Many families live from rare black work and mainly from improvised work, such as selling flowers, collecting scrap iron, collecting objects from dumps to be sold in small black markets, ultimately begging from door to door, in the streets or by churches, this practice was severely restricted by the law in the latest years. This situation lasted for decades and has preserved the condition of severe poverty, produced waves of high rate criminal practice ranging from pickpockets, burglary, to more severe crimes such as drug dealing, this latter practice caused great damage to the community, disrupting the traditional family order, by turning the younger generation (who become drug-addicts) against the older one (that perceive drug use as an immoral practice).

## Younger Generations

In the context depicted above, the last generations of youth are growing up with a relatively positive input, on the one hand generated by

new technologies of communication and on the other hand, by the scholarship program for Roma youth launched in the 90'ies. Most Roma students abandon their higher education studies and despite the general pauperization of the national politics on education, we see today that the younger generations have a clearer awareness about their condition. They are struggling to improve their education, find a job, overcome discrimination, and they are searching the possibility of inclusion into the mainstream society to build a better future. Through our work with the younger generation we aim to help the youth to raise their awareness on their own potential and on building their own future. We experience that wider knowledge in the field of art and artistic practices such as music, theatre, cinema, visual art has a strong impact on them and provide them with tools to shape their personal vision and discover the potential of teamwork with their peers. In the beauty of arts all frontiers and boundaries break down and individuals of any origin find common threads on every fields of life. We do not consider art as a professional outlet, even if some individuals have the potential to become professional artists, but consider it an overall educational tool for gaining positive personality development and active citizenship. Therefore, beside the artistic work, we facilitate improvements in other fields by hosting workshops of other organizations, we hold information desks on occasional job offers, vocational training courses as well as help students in doing their homework, driving license courses etc. We periodically hold workshops on diverse handcrafts and offer an open workshop on the restoration of musical instruments.

At the moment, we have a group of 5 young adults who follow our activities in different fields: Igor has been making a progress as an accordion restorer for the last 3 years, he is currently included as a volunteer in the National Civil Service, takes part in our various project,

takes responsibility on various levels, for instance, he is the coordinator of his community's Roma football team trying to register the team on a national level. We helped Erik entering the hairdresser school of his dreams, and he concluded his studies with a price for best student. Besides, he is studying to get a driving license, he is improving his music skills and his command of English; he is also the captain of the above mentioned football team. Denny has entered the National Civil Service in another organization, while studying English and music with us, and taking a course to get a driving license. The cousins Miroslav and Erik successfully finished the workshop on support for primary school children last year. We have been supporting all of them in various fields of life, not least in the search for work by helping them elaborating their CV and using the computer and the internet. They often help facilitating their community and have developed the awareness of the members of the community to candidate for the present project.

The fore-mentioned project of the national Roma football team (Five-a-Side Football) is our new project this year, and it was suggested and coordinated by the Legal Representative of the Somalia Team. He pointed out the importance of having a team representing the Roma on an international level. Football is widely practiced among the Roma youth, the project, however, has brought about 10 new young adults closer to our organization, and they got interested in our other activities, too.

## **Romania:**

Roma people in Romania

According to the last census held in 2002 in Romania, altogether

535,140 people identified themselves as Roma. It means about 2.5 % of the total population, but it is widely acknowledged that this figure belittles the real number. Estimates made in 2004 by the European Commission and UNHCR consider the number of the Roma between 1,800,000 and 2,500,000. Thus, the Roma is the largest minority in Romania, a minority whose history of abuses and neglect seems never ending.

During the Middle Ages, immediately after their arrival in the territory of today's Romania, most Roma people were enslaved. This situation persisted until the nineteenth century, when slavery was finally abolished, but despite this, the Roma continued to suffer strong disadvantages and discrimination in the following centuries.

In World War II, the pro-fascist authorities deported about 25,000 Roma to Transnistria. Altogether, approximately 40,000 Roma from Romania were killed in the Holocaust. Even after the war, the Roma people continued to be targeted for discrimination. During the communist regime aggressive policies of assimilation were implemented. The Roma were forced to abandon their traditional handicrafts and trades, as well as their nomad lifestyle, they were forced to settle down, then were sent to work in agricultural collectives. After the decay of the regime, these assimilation policies were replaced by a brutal indifference.

'In the 1990s, around half of the active adult Roma population was unemployed; 27 % of the children below the age of 14 were illiterate; and as many as 40 % failed to attend the first years of school. Different Roma sources indicated the continued violence against the Roma and alleged more than one hundred attacks on settlements, including arson, in the period 1990-94. According to one opinion poll commissioned in

1991, almost 70 % of the Romanians have strong antipathy towards the Roma. There was reliable evidence that some police harassed the Roma and failed to respond promptly to the Roma calls for assistance. (<https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-14/>)

Many Roma became unemployed, without housing or state benefits. The human rights situation that the Roma were being confronted with started to attract attention in human rights reports and in the mass media. Despite the attention, the effort and the money invested in stopping this chain of abuses, the episodes of anti-Roma violence continued to be reported. After an anti-discrimination ordinance and a government programme addressing Romani issues, the situation is still a subject of concern: unemployment rates are still high, educational level is low, and the negative and stereotyped image of the minority still prevails in the society.

One of the most common examples of discriminating practices refers to the educational system. Schools with high number of Romani pupils offer poor facilities and high numbers of unqualified personnel. This fact has a harmful impact: the result of the negative experience the children have at school, in part, contributes to the high drop-out rates among the Roma.

To address the problem that the Roma children get differential education and are shunted into inferior classrooms separate from other children, the government issued a notice on the banning of school segregation in 2004.

'Despite some progress that followed the adoption of the 2001 strategy, some Roma organizations criticized this approach for its sluggishness and lack of sufficient resources. The Roma remain under-represented on national and local levels. In 2005 the government

estimated that around 50,000 Roma lacked identity documents, and it made efforts to tackle such problems as inadequate housing, unemployment, and access to healthcare services. The social inclusion of the Roma remains a problem; the overall living conditions are still inadequate; the unemployment rate of the Roma remains high; police abuse against the Roma is a persistent problem; many Roma children still face segregation at school, and forced evictions continue' writes Mihai Surdu in the Roma Rights Review. (<http://www.errc.org/roma-rights-journal/20-years-of-roma-rights-the-anniversary-archive-issue-is-out-today> - 'The quality of Education in Romanian Schools with High Percentage of Romani Pupils', Mihai Surdu, p.48)

In the same publication, Valeriu Nicolae, a Romani activist states in the title of his article that being a "Gypsy" is the worst social stigma in Romania. To underline his position he makes a list of instances of anti-Romani speeches made by well-known public figures and politicians. The content of the speeches range from degrading jokes to extermination claims. None of the statements attracted negative stigma on the speakers, or any reactions regarding the hate speech they propagate, but became just some other instances of public humiliation of the Romani minority.

The Roma are still facing a social exclusion deeply rooted in history which stands in contradiction with the fundamental values of the European Union. The fact that this reality is ignored in Romania can be one of the reasons for the social exclusion that has been perpetuated over time. Among the most discriminated social categories, according to the studies conducted by the National Council for Combating Discrimination, are the Roma people. A first pillar of support for both a European and a national social integration policy is the evocation of Roma culture and experience and its transposition into consumer cultural goods that

would diminish social stigma. By presenting Roma theatre productions, the projects developed by Giuvlipen correspond to the local and the European cultural development strategies, which aim to develop a cultural offer that integrates ethnic diversity through their strategic mission.

A survey realized in 2015 by TNS CSOP for the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania “Elie Wiesel” shows some alarming data: 61% of respondents believe that the Roma are a problem or a threat to Romania; 26% have not heard about the Holocaust; of those who have heard of the Holocaust only 18% associate the event / term with the persecution or extermination of the Roma, and only 20% with the ghettos and camps in Transnistria. Moreover, according to an analysis conducted by the Centre for Legal Resources in 2016, history textbooks accredited by the National Ministry of Education and used in Romanian schools, either ignore this historical event or minimize its importance by dedicating too little space to it or praising historical characters who were involved in acts of violence against the Roma (for example, Marshal Antonescu is presented as a “brilliant strategist”).

## **Roma culture and representation**

Another issue is the representation of Roma culture as non-contemporary but a traditional one. The only form in which Roma culture managed to penetrate and be accepted in public space is in its traditional, folklorized form (colourful skirts, dances, fiddler music, craftsmanship), tamed and cut off from the realities of contemporary experiences. However, contemporary Roma culture exists, it is alive, dynamic and should be supported.

Taking responsibility for showing the values of Roma culture, contributing to the change of the social mentality and instilling a sense of

pride of our cultural and identity heritage among Roma communities is a challenge for our association.

Although the Roma are the second biggest minority in Romania (officially and the biggest one in practice), there is no Roma state theatre or sections dedicated to Roma plays in the existing theatres (unlike for other national minorities). Contemporary theatre productions - both state and independent - do not address Roma issues, and if they do (through their characters in particular), they do so by resorting to stereotypes or superficial representations. There is not a cultural institution that would bring together Roma actors, directors, playwrights, and there is no interest for a critical and responsible approach to Roma issues in the theatre. In Romania, there is no space in which a project of Roma theatrical self-representation can be possible, a space in which the historical and contemporary experiences of the Roma can be presented. There are a few projects in the independent theatre scene that address specific issues, but these are realized from little resources and attempt to structure a line research and representation which is scarcely visible.

However, there is an interest from some political representatives in such a project. It turned out from the public discussions of our last year's tournament that there is institutional and political interest and that with work, insistence and a constant public presence, it is possible to include such a cultural project in the short and medium-term plans of some local public institutions (in this case that of the City Hall of Bucharest).

### **Focused communities**

Through every project we, Giuvlipen Theatre, are engaged, we aim to empower the Roma communities to use artistic tools to take part in a

dialogue on the systemic discrimination and the negative attitude of local authorities. These issues directly affect the precarity of the communities' lives and their health conditions.

So far, in many poor Roma communities we identified as the main problems the lack of identity papers which can offer access to the healthcare system, as well as the lack of infrastructure, the ghettoization and isolation of the community, as well as the negative cultural stereotypes toward the Roma people. All the issues are seriously limiting the Roma people's access to healthcare services.

In the frame of this project, we plan to work in two poor Roma communities where E-Romnja, our long-term partner association, has already developed active initiative groups consisting of Roma women. In each community we will have a facilitator who belongs to the community and can mediate between our team and the participants of the workshops.

One of the cities where we plan to organize workshops is Mizil, a city with a population about 15,000 people, situated between Ploiești and Buzău. It is divided into many areas which are predominantly populated by Roma people, such as: Dalas, Fefelei, Poteras and Cartier. "Cartier" is the community with which E-Romnja started to work five years ago.

The community is situated in the western part of the city, far away from the centre of the city and outside of foreign investors' view. The community's population is about 1,500 - 2,000 Romani speakers, most identifying themselves as belonging to the "Ursari" group.

Between the neighbourhood and the rest of the city, there is a great difference regarding infrastructure. In the new part of Cartier, there is

no sewage system, there are no paved roads and sidewalks, and there is no street lighting. The Roma people of Mizil live in compact communities in neighbourhoods that face these everyday problems.

For the people in the community, getting to the city hall and get access to services is not very easy, since the physical distance between the neighbourhood and the building of the local authorities becomes a decisive factor, as well as little tolerance and openness of the authorities towards the Roma community create an invisible gap between them.

The Initiative Group of the Roma Women of Mizil has its roots in the summer of 2013, and initially it was formed of eight members. The dynamic of the group has changed due to the free movement for labour within Europe, however, currently the group counts fifteen active members.

The second community is in Valea Seacă, a commune situated in Eastern Romania. All social classes of the Roma and the non-Roma people can be found here: wealthy people, people living in poverty, as well as a kind of a middle class. Of course, every social class has its specific problems. E-Romnja decided to form three initiative groups in the areas that have significant populations of Roma women so as to better respond to the various needs of women, and to facilitate their participation at meetings, too.

We will work with the women in the initiative group in Palamida, which confronts itself with extreme poverty in comparison to the rest of the community. The problems the women confront themselves with are very different: starting from difficulties encountered in accessing social services, lack of food in low-income families, sanitary issues, to bullying the Roma children and other abuses coming from the non-Roma.

## Hungary:

### Roma people in Hungary

#### Numbers, groups, languages

The Roma are the biggest ethnic minority in Hungary (including 12 national minorities). According to the country-wide census made in 2011 their number is 316,000 according to self-identification. However in reality their number can be around 800,000. This is altogether 8 % of the total population. The reason of the above mentioned difference is that many Roma people don't identify themselves Roma at the time of the censuses because they are afraid of stigmatization, and that would hamper their inclusion/assimilation aspirations. The Roma living in Hungary belong to three larger groups – the biggest group is the “Romungro” – who are the most integrated groups speaking Hungarian as a mother language for long time. The second biggest group, and the most traditional, the “Oláh cigány” speaking different dialects of the Romani language, meanwhile the “Beás” originally speak ancient Romanian, but they also assimilated in the Hungarian society related to the “Oláh”. Most of the Roma people living in Hungary don't speak their own languages anymore. Some groups call themselves “Roma” according to the international politically correct denomination, meanwhile other relevant groups prefer to use the word “Cigány”, which means “Gipsy”.

#### Historical context

Groups of Roma people have been living in Hungary since the 14th – 15th century. In the early times they had a wandering lifestyle, but later on, beginning from the 18th century their forced settlement and assimilation have been realized. Queen Maria Theresa also made numerous

Roma people killed, those who did not want to settle. The Roma people usually worked as handicraftsmen, traders, temporary workers, and musicians, who ensured important services also for the rural majority of the society and the higher classes (musicians). As they were settled, their opportunities for the wandering professions decreased, meanwhile they did not become integral parts of the peasants' societies but lived in segregated settlements usually outside the villages. The financial and social situations of the musicians were quite different and also kind of higher related to the rest of Roma communities and the low classes of the majority as well. For the above mentioned diverse cultural, linguistic and social background the Roma communities were quite different – but dominantly underprivileged also before World War 2, when a relevant rate of the Roma people became the victim of the Holocaust. During the state socialist regime their assimilation process continued, and in the system of the 100% employment where the focus was on the working class instead of the ethnic differences, their social situation dominantly ameliorated. At the same time, it also led to the huge loss of their cultural heritage and language. After the political change in 1989, when most of the traditional socialist industries closed, and the number of unemployment increased significantly, the situation of the Roma people deteriorated even much more than that of the groups of the majority. As the economic crisis was stronger in the regions where the Roma lived in high numbers, the general situation of these regions got worse in general, too. After the long decades of silence about national and ethnic issues within society, the Roma people became victims of the anger of the majority (caused by the macro-economic changes) and structural discrimination.

Present Contexts:

<http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/terstat/2018/01/ts580101.pdf>

The Roma people in Hungary are in a much worse situation on diverse fields than the members of the majority. They often face school segregation and frequent bad-quality elementary schools, from where further education can hardly be reached. The education level of the Roma people is much lower than that of the majority. Less than 20% of them have finished secondary school education and only 1% have a university or college degree. These numbers are low, but still relatively higher than in most of the European countries. Numerous educational programs and scholarships have been realized by private and public initiatives, too, which supported the education of young Roma people. Besides the educational problems, we must also depict the residential situation. Around every 5th Roma people live in segregated settlements where the basic comfort level is unavailable (e.g. electricity or running water), which would be also necessary in order to be able to study, work and relax properly, which are keys for progress on any levels of life. The health situation of Roma people is also much worse than that of the majority. The unhealthy residential circumstances, and mainly the discrimination of the health system and the low level of health-consciousness also contribute to the fact that their life expectancy is 10 years lower than that of the majority. The rate of unemployed and inactive Roma people is 50%, which is much higher than the general national rate. The reasons of this phenomena are the low level of education (mentioned above), the discriminative practice of numerous employers, and the lack of inspiring examples or network (unemployment of more generations, narrow network mostly inside the community). As the majority of the Roma population live in the economical disadvantaged regions of Hungary, and many of them live in remote parts of villages - their geographical situation also contribute to this situation. Hate speech and hate crime also targeted Roma communities several times in the last decades, and the tension among the Roma and the non-Roma people - especially in the economically challenged regions, increased.

## **Narratives**

On the one hand there is a relevant narrative, which focuses on the “own-fault” of the Roma people, declaring that they do not want to work, or change their life, they prefer to have illegal incomes and do crimes, so they are more dangerous to the society than the groups that can be supported or with which they can cooperate. On the other hand, there is a narrative, which only focuses on the structural discriminatory and the phenomena of segregation, and on the responsibility of the institutions and the majority. Both narratives, although they counter to each-other, present the Roma as passive victims, who cannot shape their own future and that of the country. The narratives of most of the Roma organizations focus on the differences between the Roma and the majority, and the helpless situation of their own communities. The negative/passive/victim image is not attractive enough to the young people to believe that they can be tools for a change, and it does not motivate them to identify themselves with a positive Roma identity. This identity could be different than the one dominated by stereotypes related to the Roma characters disseminated by the commercial media contents (focusing on extreme poverty, gangsters or media stars having superficial life). We are convinced that another narrative is needed, which highlights the problems and at the same time the values, too and which presents Roma heroes who makes conscious decisions based on their own values and decisions, and they are able to shape their future.

## **Focused communities**

Although there is only a small number of young Roma people frequenting universities/colleagues, their proportion is still relevant in an international perspective. Most Roma university students will be

come first generation intellectuals who have already done relevant social and often geographical mobility, too when they finished their high school studies and continued their studies in higher education. They study in a community of students and teachers predominated by the members of the majority. The life of their families and communities are usually quite different from their own lives. So, they are between two worlds, have connections and relationships in both “worlds” but sometimes they don’t feel belonging to any of them. They are no longer like their Roma communities but they are still far from their university peers. The social mobility gives a lot of challenges for them, and the biggest challenge is maybe to preserve their positive Roma identity and still become part of the mainstream intellectuals. It is challenging for them not to be assimilated and not to forget where they come from, not to stay outsiders in the academic world when they experience their own identity as a “counter culture”. They have experienced big expectations from all sides many times. They should still help in their family, stay “good” Roma guys and girls, and at the same time be “good students” who are not too much different from the ones coming from the mainstream society, and who can reach similar successes. In this situation they either leave behind their Roma identity and become assimilated professionals who don’t seem Roma any more, or they become first of all ‘Roma’ professionals, with all kind of tensions coming from this stigma.

We held many workshops for Roma university students and involved some of them in our artistic and educational work. We received feedback which proved, that the stories of the active Roma heroes and the general human values of “Roma stories”, the interethnic discussion, and our attitudes that we didn’t bring them expectations – how they as Roma university students should behave, act for their communities stand up for human rights or become just like the students of

the majority - they appreciated a lot. They have experienced during their studies the lack of Roma culture, historical and social contexts with values in the education, so the workshops presenting the Roma dramas empowered them, and ensured them an opportunity for having positive Roma identity. We also had feedback that the partnership attitude and interactive, open methods we used with them was also new and positive for them, and it was a great experience and success, when they shared their hero stories and created creative work in cooperative methods with each other – producing their own messages.

As many people from these groups want to continue the cooperation with us on a higher level, we will target them in this project and try to reflect on the topics and issues which are relevant to them. We are ensured that giving them voice – not the voice of someone else but their own ones – can have a relevant impact also on the wider groups of the Roma people. The groups of Roma university students are organized in grass root initiatives and special Roma colleges function in more than 10 Hungarian towns, too. They are usually run by some of the historical Christian churches. The members of these colleges receive a scholarship and an opportunity to take language courses and access other services, meanwhile they are obliged to participate in special trainings that are usually realized during the weekends.

## **Spain:**

Roma people in Spain

Numbers, distribution, language

The second chapter of the Spanish Constitution called 'Rights and Freedoms, article 14' declares: Spaniards are equal before the law,

without any discrimination based on birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other condition or personal/social circumstance. Therefore, it is strictly forbidden to collect data on race by the public statistic institutes. Currently, the Spanish Roma population is estimated to range from 500,000 up to 1,000,000 people with a most concentrated presence in Andalusia, where around 40% of the Spanish Roma men and women reside, and the proportion of Roma people is also higher than the average in Catalonia, Valencia and Madrid (*Fundación Secretariado Gitano*). All social demographic studies shows that it is a young population, wherein around a third are aged below 16 years, and with substantially higher birth rates than that of the average population, although in the last decade this rate has begun to decrease. In terms of the social situation, the Roma profile in Spain is heterogeneous and diverse; it is a common error to associate a given ethnic group with situations of material deprivation, social exclusion or self-exclusion. Many Roma people enjoy medium to high socio-economic levels and are fully integrated into society. Moreover, a substantial number of Roma have seen progress in the last decades with the implementation of democracy in Spain.

The majority of the Roma people living in Spain don't speak 'caló', the language that was spoken by the Spanish Roma population since throughout history it was one of the repressed aspects of their lives. Some groups started to call themselves "Roma" in the last few years, in the sense of the politically correct international denomination, meanwhile other relevant groups prefer to use the word "Gitano", which means "Gipsy".

## Historical context

The Roma people have been present in Spain since the 15th centu-

ry, and, as in the rest of Europe, their history has been marked by persecution, attempts of assimilation, repression and phases of social exclusion.

The first documented expulsion law dates from 1499 and it was signed by the Catholic Queen and King, even though the actual expulsion did not take place.

From 1499 to 1783 the Spanish Roma suffered over 250 persecution laws, being the most bloody one by far “La gran redada” ordered by Fernando VI on the night of 30th July 1749 when over 9000 Roma were taken from their houses by force at midnight and separated according to genre. The men and boys were incarcerated (mainly in the Carraca, Cádiz), the women and girls were taken to the Alcazaba in Malaga. The objective was to prevent them having kids and therefore, the extermination of the Roma would be achieved. They suffered this situation for over sixteen years, and they lost all their goods and properties. This is the first documented attempt of genocide in history.

The last providence against the Roma in Spain was abolished in 1978.

Present Contexts:

The situation of the Spanish Roma population improved a lot in the decades after the Franco dictatorship ended. The “*Spanish Model of Inclusion*” has been even put as a model to be followed. But even though we have reached some satisfactory statistics, such as the 99% of the Roma kids attend primary school, there are improvements in the health system and even if there are two Roma members in the Spanish parliament, we still have a lot to do to achieve real inclusion and reduction of anti-Gypsyism in Spain.

## Narratives:

On the one hand, we still have some narratives among the majority of the population that identify the Roma with concepts such as being lazy, uneducated, drug dealers, problem makers, dirty, etc

Although the negative attitudes toward the Roma might be stronger in other countries, the Roma remain the most despised minority in Spain: 40 % of the population would be disturbed if they had a Romani neighbour, and 25% would not allow their children attending school together with Romani students. This deep suspicion and mistrust carries over to the streets. The Roma are 10 times more likely to be stopped by the police for identification than those of a Caucasian appearance. On the other hand, we have narratives in some Roma population saying that there are no possibilities since we are stigmatized, but also many of us are aware of the fact that "The final element which contributed to changes experienced by the Spanish Roma was the hard work and sacrifice that the Romani families made the most of the available opportunities. These families opened the way for a Roma middle-class in Spain. We are the children of people who, despite tremendous obstacles and discrimination, managed to improve their lives." (Maya and Mirga, 2014)

## Focused communities:

The group that we will be working with is from Polígono Sur, Sevilla, Spain, known as one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods in Europe, with one of the lowest rent per capita throughout Europe.

Target group: young people (Roma and non-Roma) from Polígono Sur

Needs: there is a very high rate of unemployment among the youth,

high rate of school dropout, 22,4 % rate of truancy. Very few students follow studies after the mandatory school years, in Spain school is compulsory until the age of 16. (Municipal report. Diagnóstico de Zonas con Necesidades de Transformación Social, 2015 Ayuntamiento de Sevilla) The families have exceptionally low income and many young people are required to help out in the family trades.

Local context. This neighbourhood is quite large with over 50,000 people living in it. It is divided into six sections: Murillo, Martínez Montañez, Avenida de la Paz, barriada Antonio Machado, La Oliva and Las Letanías.



We will be working in a new cultural space opened in 2018 called Factoría Cultural.



## 2. EMPATHY AND THE POTENTIAL OF ART

After overviewing the social contexts in each partner country, we should examine how art can empower people and bring them closer to each-other. It is important to explore why art has an importance related to the development of empathy, along with other skills and competences, which are needed for a social change.

In all the traditional cultures and societies of the world, the origins of art are combined with the sacred and the care, the evolution of the individual and the education of a person in life. Learning is intertwined with the direct and creative, “artistic” experience in a wide sense of the term, where educating, in the significance of “pulling out”, brings us back to the fundamental pedagogical process according to which, in the person-student, everything subsists already; the good educator helps to express it and give shape to the natural creativity that everyone possesses, preserving its particular characteristics. Art as a creative process is part of every pedagogical journey aimed at training the individual for life.

The method of the educator and the pedagogue must not be separated from the deep and active observation of the student, using every artistic language as a tool for growth, knowledge, and learning.

It is an educational method in which a series of values are placed at the base of the educational relationship and are declined in a series of different educational practices according to the contexts.

The centre of interest is not what we learn, but how we learn, because the person’s development (what kind of person he/she will be formed) depends on how the learning process takes place. This concept does

not want to impose an already structured worldview that the student must assimilate to but it starts with the question: what is the intention that governs the relationship of the educator and the educated? If we renounce a direct and forced transmission of knowledge – or it is better to say persuasive, which is a sweetened version -, the educational relationship will be an exchange that circulates and produces shared learning.

The learning process implies an active participation of the learning subject in the assimilation process: without it, learning could not take place. It is only seemingly a univocal operation: the learning process is produced during the communication of those who have the knowledge and those who do not possess it; in reality it is a “mediation” in which the active participation of the learner is necessary, as without it, no concrete result would be given, and we could not speak about a successful transmission.

Enhancing creative and expressive skills through arts involves the use of multiple art forms (theatre, dance and movement, music and rhythm, plastic-pictorial art and creative storytelling), in the belief that it is not possible to separate the different artistic expressions from each-other, and that each of them can intervene on one or more different human dimensions and functions (the body, the roles and relationships, the ability to play and imagine, the affective expression, etc.). It allows synergies and completeness in the expressive process.

*“It is now clear that the function of art in the social sphere and in inclusive pedagogy has a much broader scope than what was believed until recently. The concept and practice of inclusiveness are the pillars of the epistemological foundations of art”. (Paulo Freire)*

*“Whoever works with his hands is a worker, who works with his hands and his head is a craftsman, who works with his hands, his head and his heart is an artist.” (S. Francis of Assisi)*

Art has always been the essential form of expression of the human spirit.

Since the beginning of human history, man had felt the mysterious inner urge to express himself through what we today call “art”; it is a necessary, unavoidable instinct to tell his story, sometimes stronger than other basic needs.

Art is the pure expression of the nobility of the human soul and despite it has been misused overtime by religious and power elites to impress and show power over the masses, it does not have boundaries of class, race, borders, nationality. It shows wherever a human soul transcend itself through poetry, music, visions.

Art is not to be learned in any school; we can learn techniques, tools, instruments to refine the means of expression, but art remains a natural expression of the inner soul of man of all conditions.

We see this clearly in the case of children: before they learn to talk, they sing; before they learn to walk, they dance; before they learn to write, they draw and tell stories.

Art is the way to express emotions we embody and through which we get to know ourselves.

To accustom children and youth to the beauty of art we teach them the beauty of life. If we give children and youth the tools to express

themselves in artistic ways, it helps them discovering their potential of imagination and building their own future as world citizens. It also contributes to their healthy psychological and physical development.

The practice of music and dance teaches rhythm, mathematics, physics, that are the basics of many other fields, enhances the brain performance and manual skills. Drawing and painting enhances the power of observation, circus arts like juggling, enhance brain capacity and it became a common practice among scholars of physics in German and French universities to use circus elements; tightrope walking and acrobatics empowers the body and balances the brain. Circus arts are applied today by many French primary schools as an alternative to classic gymnastic.

The works of the masters of pedagogy like Paulo Freire, the creator of “the pedagogy of the oppressed” or José Antonio Abreu, the creator of the “method” show us the educative potential of arts. We can observe that a great number of children have been helped out of misery, abandon, crime and overall mislead lives with the help of arts, while some became great professional musicians, dancers and painters. The importance of the work of these masters was recognized by the authorities and governments: they have adopted these methods in different institutional programs, and in various Universities all over the world. It is also taught in social, psychological, and anthropological fields.

## GROUP IDENTITY

Social identity has been defined as: “the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to a certain social group, together with some emotional and value significant to him/her of this group membership” (Tajfel,

1972, p.292). Social identity theory proposes that the focus of people's self-definition is partly determined by their group membership and contributes to a person's self-concept and self-esteem (Tanti, Stukas, Halloran & Foddy, 2011). People tend to classify themselves and others into categories based on certain features and then identify themselves more with the members of their own category (in-group) than with members of other categories (out-group) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987). Individuals with a high group identity tend to incorporate aspects of the group in their self-concepts. This, in turn, influences their social perceptions or positive feelings about their in-group (Goldman et al., 2006, Operario & Fiske, 2001).

When the interpersonal similarity among in-group members is high, it also tends to heighten attraction between individuals (Byrne, 1971). This leads to a similarity bias in favour of similar in-group members and bias against out-group members (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). This is also in line with the similarity-attraction paradigm which posits that the more similar people there are, the more the similar people are liked. Considerable research has provided evidence for the similarity attraction paradigm (see Byrne, 1997, for a review). The social identity theory was extended through the development of self-categorization theory (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

The self-categorization theory focuses on interpersonal similarity, such as attitudes and values (Turner 1999, Williams & O'Reilly 1998, Berscheid & Reis, 1998, Byrne 1971). It makes a distinction between social and personal identity, stating that social identity relies on the individuals' group memberships and personal identity does not, and is relatively independent of group membership (Treppe & Los, 2017).

This perspective mentions that social identities can be activated by

comparing yourself and others on the base of relative differences and similarities. This process is done in the social context of the person and therefore, a person can have different social identities in different contexts, depending on the contextual cues provided (Tanti et al., 2011). Additionally, the context is also influences whether social or personal identity (or both) become salient and hence, what kind of behaviour can be seen (Treppe & Los, 2017).

When looking at youngsters, it has been shown that a strong identification with one's group promotes group formation, self-esteem, and the ability to cope with developmental issues while growing into an adult (Palmonari, Pombeni, & Kirchler, 1990 in Tanti et al., 2011). It also consequentially creates in-group/out-group distinction (Brenick & Killen, 2014), decreases liking and increases the use of the stereotypes for the out-group members (Ragins, 1997; Lankau, Riordan & Thomas, 2005) and the self-stereotyping of in-group members (Tanti et al, 2011). Even having an excluded out-group sometimes is seen as a necessity and a legitimate means to maintain group identity and group cohesion (Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010). Additionally, in-group favouritism can occur which is defined as 'the relatively positive evaluation and treatment of the in-group ( Mummendy & Wensel, 1999 p.161). People are no longer represented as individuals but as being a part of an in-group prototype.

In certain contexts, being part of that in-group brings the self-perception and the way a person behaves according to the in-group's prototype. This can also lead to stereotyping or ethnocentrism (Hogg & Terry, 2000). As for the group of young adolescents, they specifically experience changes in cognitive and social domain, because of the activation of cognitive categorizations of the self in social situations (e.g., Turner et al., 1987), which play a significant role in the effect on their

social identity (Tanti et al, 2011)), We can conclude that social identity is dynamic, it depends on the power of the self (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

## INTERGROUP BIAS AND STEREOTYPING

Based on the above mentioned social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1987), self-categorization theory (Turner, 1982) and the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), we now know people tend to classify themselves and others into categories and in terms of group prototypes that reflect belief sets, attitudes, norms, values and behaviours (Hogg, 2001). This is the cause of in-group and out-group formation. As people tend to like their in-group members more than the out-group members (Byrne, 1971), bias in favour of similar in-group members and bias against out-group members are created (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Therefore, it decreases the liking of other group members and increases stereotyping and biases against out group members (Ragins, 1997; Lankau, Riordan & Thomas, 2005).

These biases can be very broad and a recently conducted research has shown that intergroup bias 'includes a broad collection of reactions to outgroup category members, ranging from the earliest stages of neural responses associated with face encoding and affective responses, to shifts in attention and eye gaze, to the automatic activation of conceptual associations, to manifold effects that include deficits in emotion recognition and identification of outgroup faces, and ultimately a lowered willingness to interact with an outgroup member. The list goes on' (Kawakami, Amodio & Hugenberg, 2017 p, 4,). For example, if a person does not recognize a face as clearly human, thus it fails to activate human related concepts, it is more difficult to categorize it as human. As a consequence, that person can be dehumanized. Also, the face can categorize people in being warm or dominant for example.

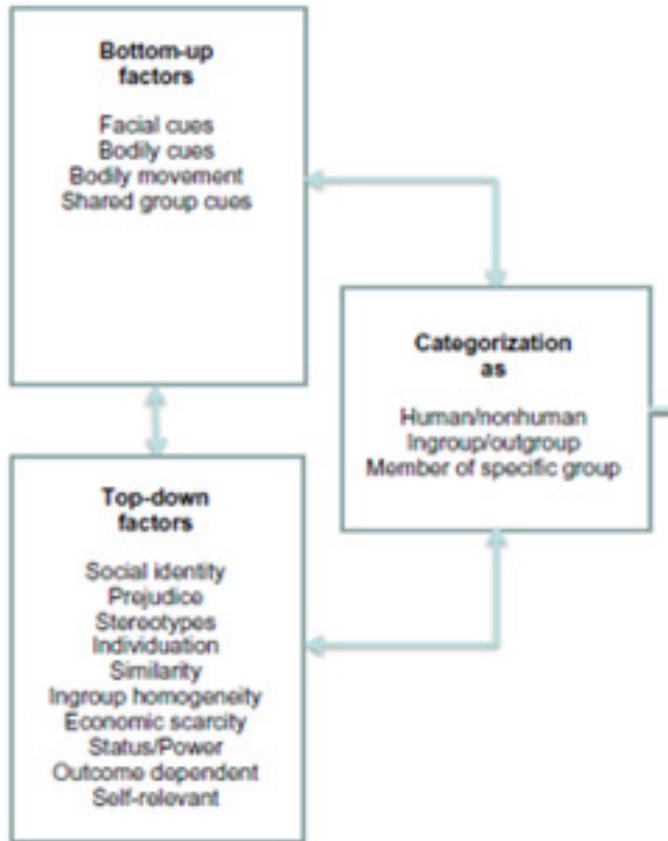


Figure 1: factors of categorization ((Kawakami et al.,2017)

As it can be seen in figure 1, also top down factors influence the way we categorize people in ‘us versus them’. This can be prejudice, motivation, prior knowledge, or certain expectancies. For example, black men are perceived as more muscular than white men, even when they are similar and as a consequence, white people also perceive black muscular men as more threatening and potentially harmful. It means that black stereotypes affect the bodily perceptions and are translated

into different threats across the race of the perceiver (Wilson, Rule & Hugenberg in Kawakami et al.,2017). People who are clear representatives of groups, visible features, gender or race, are often more stereotyped than when these features are less clear (Kahn and Davies, 2011). Also, stereotyping has been shown to be rooted in mechanisms of semantic memory and are more likely to be expressed in, for example, verbal responses. It means that there is some neural basis of stereotyping. Further research is needed but it seems to depend on multiple processes.

Stereotypes are the characteristics that we link to people in a social category (Kawakami et al.,2017). It is interesting to realize that stereotyping is considered to be the cognitive component of the in-group/out-group process and prejudice is the evaluative component. And as we already know, we usually (there are some exceptions) tend to evaluate the out-group more negatively than the in-group (Dovidio et al, 1997). Stereotypes and prejudice can influence our ability to identify emotions in out- group members in Kawakami et al.,2017).

However, there are also implicit processes that can operate outside of a persons' conscious awareness. For example, people may not recognize that they have specific associations with social groups or are unaware of how these associations affect the way they react to certain social out-group members (Kawakami et al., 2017). A research has shown that with intergroup bias, people their implicit motivation is to discriminate, and the process of perception facilitates this motive. This may constrain self-regulation, and is thus particularly evil (Kawakami et al.,2017). Next, we will discuss how these effects can be diminished or decreased.

## EMOTIONAL IDENTIFICATION AND EMPATHY

Emotional identification is very important to facilitate communication and a research has indeed shown that we are better in recognizing the emotions of the members of the in-group instead of the outgroup (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). What is even more disturbing that people have the tendency not being very emphatic when something bad happens to an outgroup member and sometimes even have delight in it (Kawakami et al., 2017). A research has shown that people experience brain activity in the reward related area when a socially competitive target (outgroup) experiences physical and emotional suffering (Cikara, Bruneau & Saxe, 2011). Implicit outgroup identification, stereotyping, and prejudice influence our ability to understand the emotions of outgroup members, as well as our empathy and reactions to the misfortunes of the outgroup members (Kawakami et al., 2017). When trying to reduce biases, it has been mentioned that inclusiveness and overarching commonalities between groups should be emphasized (Houlette et al., 2004; Stephan & Stephan, 2001 in Dovidio, Gaertner, Ufkes, Saguy & Pearson, 2016).

Reduction in biases can be activated when people identify themselves more with a certain outgroup member (see them as more similar to themselves) and care and empathy increase about their wellbeing (e.g. Cikara & Fiske, 2011; Cikara, Bruneau, van Bavel & Sakse, 2014 in Kawakami et al., 2017). Empathy means that 'people recognize emotional experiences in others, experience matched sensations and emotions, and are motivated to alleviate those others' suffering, frequently resulting in helping behaviours' (Cikara et al., 2011 p.149).

It is mentioned that inducing empathy for a person in an out-group can improve the attitude toward the whole group (see Batson, 1991 in Batson, Chang, Orr & Rowland, 2012).

Batson et al. (1997) developed an empathy attitude model that claims that there are several steps to increase the positive attitudes towards a group:

1. Adopting the perspective of an individual in need who is a member of a stigmatized group (i.e., imagining how the individual is affected by his or her situation) leads to increased empathic feelings for this individual.
2. These empathic feelings lead to a perception of increased valuing of the individual's welfare.
3. Assuming that this individual's group membership is a salient component of his or her plight, the increased valuing should generalize to the group as a whole, increasing positive beliefs about, feelings toward, and concern for the group (Batson et al. (1997, p106) .

When looking at adolescents, research has shown that the ability to show empathy was related to less relational peer victimization, social problems, and internalizing disorders, such as depression (Gleason, Jensen-Campbell, & Ickes, 2009). Additionally, students who are better able to perceive, understand and regulate their emotions, show more emotional awareness, which as a result leads to a better understanding of self and others' emotions and consequences of their behaviours. Therefore, empathy plays an important role in the promotion of psychological and social adjustment in youth (Castillo, Salguero, Fernández-Berrocal & Balluerka, 2013). Emotional regulation has been linked to emotional intelligence, which we will discuss next.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND RESILIENCE

Taking these findings into account, emotional intelligence (EI) may play an important role when looking at the mistreatment of an outgroup member and the promotion of empathic abilities.

EI is a person's ability to:

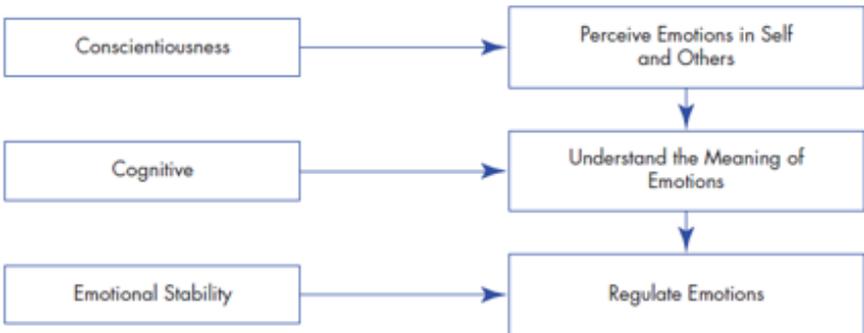


Figure 2: Cascading model of EI (Robbins & Judge, 2015)

People who know their emotions and can read emotional cues are likely to be most effective in different aspects of life than people who have a low EI. For example, when a person is able to recognize, understand and regulate one's own and others' emotions, it will increase skills to solve conflict and be able to create more healthy relationships (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011). Additionally, EI can influence the development and maintenance of relationships (Goleman 1995) and can play an important role in the quality of interpersonal relationships (Saarni, 1999 in Schutte, Malouf, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, Rhodes & Wndorf). A research has also shown that people with a low degree of emotional intelligence (and therefore, can see less of the other's perspective) have more subtle, racist attitudes and prejudices (Onraet, Van Hiel, De Keersmaecker, Fontaine, 2017).

When looking at youth literature, for students who received EI instructions, a positive classroom climate was created (Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012) and they experienced less anxiety, social stress, and depression, than students who were not trained in EI (Ruiz-Aranda, Castillo, Salguero, Cabello, Fernández-Berrocal, & Baluerka, 2012; Ruiz-Aranda, Salguero, Cabello, Palomera, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2012 in Castillo et al., 2013).

Resilience leads to positive youth development (Larson, 2006) and empathy develops extensively during adolescence (Shellenbarger, 2013). Resilience is helpful for adolescents in gaining a healthy sense of identity (Dent, 2016), while empathy helps in the development of emotional as well as social competence in adolescence and adulthood (Allemande, Steiger & Fend, 2014).

Resilience is defined as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors (American Psychological Association, 2014). Lee, Cheung & Kwong (2012) in their review on resilience, put forward its three main aspects, resilience as a capacity, as a process and as a result. In all these capacities the construct of resilience is an important developmental construct for adolescents. Resilience is an ability to bounce back from stressful experiences effectively and quickly (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004) when one does so, he not only gets a sense of self achievement but it also makes him believe that he is strong enough to face any hardships in the future, which resonates positive feelings even in the aftermath of difficult times. Resilience acts as a protective factor which enhances positive thoughts and leads to healthy personality characteristics (Shastri, 2013).

Resilience has been found to play a role in promoting and enhancing individuals "well-being by various researchers (Kimberly, Christopher & Kulig, 2000; Souril & Hasanirad, 2011; Hasse et al., 2014; Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015; Scoloveno, 2015). Resilience prepares an individual to fight against and remain vigilant regarding any sort of risk, thus, acting as a deterrent to any potential maladaptive coping and behaviour. Psychological well-being is also found to be positively influenced by empathy (Ickes, 2003; Khajeh, Baharloo & Soliemani, 2014; Bourgault et al., 2015; Shanafelt, 2005; Choi et al, 2016; Morelliet al., 2017). Empathy enhances an individual's self-image and helps to maintain relationships (Chung, 2014) which add up to the well-being of an individual. Empathy is a key component of resilience (Brooks & Goldstein, 2003) as when one tries to understand the perspective of others, he also prepares oneself to tackle any situation that might come his way. By putting ourselves in others' situation we can learn resilience without even being going through the stressful situation. Various researchers, over the years have found a positive correlation between empathy and resilience (Samani et al., 2007; Grant & Kinman, 2014; Haramati & Weissinger, 2015; Smith & Hollinger-Smith, 2015).

Resilience gives an individual a better confidence and sense of self which empowers them to deal effectively with stress and negative emotions, and thus, plays important role in psychological health. Rutter (2008) found that there is a common misconception that people who are resilient experience no negative emotions or thoughts and display high wellbeing and optimism in all situations. Contrary to this misconception, the reality remains that resiliency is demonstrated within individuals who can effectively and relatively easily navigate their way around crises and utilize effective methods to cope.

An empathetic individual has positive perception of one's own self resulting from their empathetic feelings and actions towards others. According to Lyubomirsky and Layous's (2013) positive-activity model, acts of kindness and gratitude towards others enhance the well-being of an individual. Empathy enhances self-esteem and purpose in life but overindulgence in the emotion can also result in increased physiological difficulties (Manczak, DeLomgis & Chen, 2016)

Stories connect people. As the famous motto says: 'The enemy is someone whose story you don't yet know', one can conclude that the stories you do know will understand the story's owner better. This leads to people knowing and understanding each-other better.

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### 3. BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH STORYTELLING

Crossing the centuries and the most diverse latitudes, the stories told have accompanied the childhood and lives of women and men from all walks of life, helping human beings, from the early years, to face difficulties and fears.

Fairy tales traditionally accompanied girls and children in that difficult transition between waking and sleeping. And, wisely, they accompanied them with the only sonority of the voice, letting the images be discovered and hatched by those who listened to them in the darkness.

Narrating and listening to stories is an ancient, elementary human practice that responds to the need to try to give meaning to one's life.

When in the world the majority of the population was peasant and lived in the countryside, oral narration constituted a very powerful means of communication and individual and collective growth.

We believe that the idea that a community is created around a shared narrative is highly valued. It applies to large communities, but also to small temporary groups, as can be that of a class of girls and boys, who often struggle to feel like a community. Narration is freedom of speech, sharing of experiences, joining worlds, facilitating identification.

Telling a story, for example your own story, or a story invented or read, is a creative act. The tone of the voice, the rhythm of the narration, the images that follow one another and the words chosen, tell a lot about the person who tells it, give it a form and a creative identity. The theme

of the identity in this sense is central to storytelling, both individually and as a community. Listening to stories creates a shared experience.

Through narration, anyone directly experiences the power of narrative, creating meaningful connections with each-other and with the community members. As Hamilton and Weiss (2005) tell us: „Narration is the oldest form of education. People around the world have always told stories as a way of transmitting their cultural beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations. Why? Stories are at the centre of everything that makes us human.“

What are the multiple benefits of storytelling? Storytelling and action intertwine within the circle containing, giving the possibility to make one's own path of awareness, alliance, transformation, to give shape to emotions, to talk about oneself in order to find oneself, be understood, laugh and cry. Storytelling and arts in general create communication and trust in a group or a community, because where there is sharing, bridges and networks are built, beyond social and cultural differences.

Storytelling in particular has a wide range of applications in teaching and in schools. Storytelling also teaches us how to re-read and re-think. History brings story and intimacy together. While in telling stories, you talk a little about yourself and you can use your imagination and with your images you can turn on the imagination of those listening to you. Building stories changes the point of view, even in the readings of the past, perhaps there is an unexpected psychological aspect that makes one feel safe and free. Telling is a moment of freedom and peace, it's a beautiful game.

## 4. WHY DOES (ROMA) DRAMA MATTER?

The history of theatre and drama has proven many times that a society can only become a community of active people who are responsible for their deeds and who are able to influence their own fate if the members of the community can express themselves in the form of drama and theatre. Lyric and epic works - similarly to music or fine art - mostly concentrate on emotions, states of being and events. In these works, personal action, involvement and verbal assertion of interests are not a priority. Greek democracy could not have been complete without the Greek theatre. In the rise of the middle class, William Shakespeare played a crucial role in England, Molière in France and the works of Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill or Tennessee Williams were equally important to build a modern democracy in the United States – just to mention a few societies and a few playwrights. Without the dramas of Chekhov, even the less successful struggle to create a strong middle class in Russia at the turn of the previous century cannot be understood. Unless the Roma community is able to create and get to know their own drama literature and understand, cognize and internalize the questions of success or failure of the characters who are active 'here and now', make decisions and take responsibility, it is unlikely that they can become active and successful without their own stories, written and performed by their own members.

In order to see how diverse the social context of the different Roma communities and characters throughout Europe are, and to see how diverse the Roma dramatic heroes are – regarding their values, challenges, decisions, activities, results and impacts it's important to have a short overview on the focused plays and the Roma drama in general, we can work in depth in our educational methodology.

## 5. THE HERO

After we've examined the potential impact of art in general regarding the development of people and how it brings closer the members of different groups, and after we've seen the special potential of storytelling and dramas, now we will present the concept of the hero, which is relevant in all dramas since this model can be used when we speak about active citizens, too.

The concept of Hero is value neutral, which means the characteristics of the hero's journey can be true for all the active characters (active citizens), even if their values are not the same as ours, or their decisions or activities are not acceptable for us. Some heroes can be regarded positive in a group and negative in another one. We can analyse and discuss the details of the hero's journey, but there are some aspects, which will be valid for all of them.

**A challenging situation** – Every hero must experience or see a challenging or problematic situation in its surroundings. The nature of the challenge can be existential (e.g. a dragon wants to eat his lover, or a nuclear bomb will kill thousands of people in case they do not do something). But it can be also more related to some ethical standards (e.g. the dead person must be buried in a traditional way, virgin girls can't be married off against their will) or even symbolic related to some ethical standards (the minister has to apologize for something, the daughter should get back the scarf of her grandmother).

Sometimes challenges can be related to opposite interests of two different groups (e.g. the land in question should belong to one or other nation) or it can also relate to emotions (e.g. revenge should be taken, the crying girl should smile again). Many times the nature of the chal-

challenge is mixed (e.g. emotional and opposite interests appear, when I want to marry the loved woman another guy will marry her instead of me) or its nature can be interpreted differently looking at it from different aspects (e.g. Muslim women need to wear a scarf because of ethical standards or because of the interest of their husbands). But in any case, in a challenging situation we might see a hero, who cannot have the opportunity to become a hero in ordinary times.

We must also consider the **roots** of the hero (where they come from, what experiences they have), which is also connected to their values (what counts as a value for them, what they would fight for, what matters to him as a priority) and can be characterized through his/her relationships (inside and outside of the family, community, classes, nations). The future actions of the hero might be easier to figure out if the roots, values and relationships show into the same direction, but they might be diverse and even contradictory (e.g. In my group everybody hated group B, I was taught to fight for my group, but my mother said to be peaceful, or I never had a bad experience with group B and I have a lover from group B, so what can I do in case a war between the two groups?) We can understand the situation of the hero, and his/her point only if we consider all these elements, together with his/her own physical, mental and spiritual, open and hidden characteristics. However, one can become a hero even if he is small, weak and shy in some situations.

Afterwards, the heroes always make **decisions** – and they usually choose the harder option that most people do not like. Fighting with a dragon or letting people hide in your cellar in order that they can hide from the Nazis are harder choices than just crying with the others when the dragon eats the girl, or telling that you can't host them, because it is dangerous for you. But what is hard or is challenging for

one person can be quite different for another, according to their circumstances (giving birth to a baby at the age of 14 is not a hard decision in some communities, meanwhile in others it is) and their personal characteristics are also determining (for someone it's hard to stay silent, for the other it is hard to say something in a tense situation).

Decision making is sometimes driven by instincts, and they are often conscious following a thorough consideration of the possible effects of our decisions. But in both cases, there is a point when somehow, a 'Yes' is expressed by the person, by his/her body, soul or mouth.

After the decision has been made there is always an **action**. It can be remarkably diverse regarding the genre of the activity (physical or verbal fight, trick, peaceful approach etc.) and it can also last for a very short time, only for a couple of minutes, or it can last long (e.g. decades of living with a psychically challenged child). We can have different aspects if the activity is normal, or very extreme, and there are smaller and bigger heroic acts according to our points of views. But what is always important that the given activity bring some **change** – it can be a change in the life of the hero, his/her own community, or the whole world. The change can be direct (e.g. when solving the given problem) or indirect (when the hero fails – and might become a victim, too - but serves as an inspiring example for other people, or for the next generations).

Beside this model on the hero – used by the Independent Theater, there are other relevant models to be used.

In *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell demonstrated that many of the most popular stories shared a specific formula, even over thousands of years and across cultures. The formula is now common-

ly referred to as mythic structure, or the hero's journey. Along with a specific plot structure, the hero's journey has a repeating cast of characters, known as character archetypes. There are the eight archetypes that can be found:

### 1. THE HERO:

The hero is the audience's personal tour guide during the adventure i.e. the story. It is critical that the audience can relate to him because they experience the story through his eyes. During the journey, the hero will leave the world they are familiar with and enter a new one. This new world will be so different that whatever skills the hero had previously will no longer be sufficient. Together, the hero and the audience will master the rules of the new world and save the day.

### 2. THE MENTOR:

The hero has to learn how to survive in the new world incredibly fast, so the mentor appears to give them a fighting chance. This mentor will describe how the new world operates and instruct the hero how to use any innate abilities he has. The mentor will also give the hero an equipment, because at level one the hero never has any decent weapons or armour. Often, the mentor will perform another important task – getting the plot moving. Heroes can be reluctant to leave the world they know for another one they do not. Once the hero is on the right path and has what they need to survive, the mentor disappears. Heroes must fight without his help.

### 3. THE ALLY:

The hero will have some great challenges ahead that are too great for

one person to face them alone. They will need someone to distract the guards, hack into the mainframe, or carry their gear. Plus, the journey could get a little dull without another character to interact with.

#### 4. THE HERALD:

The herald appears near the beginning of the plot to announce the need for change in the hero's life. They are the catalysts who set the whole adventure in motion. While they often bring news of a threat on a distant land, they can also simply show the dissatisfied hero a tempting glimpse of a new life. Occasionally, they point the hero out, picking them for a journey they would not otherwise take.

#### 5. THE TRICKSTER:

The trickster adds fun and humour to the story. When times are gloomy or emotionally tense, the trickster gives the audience a welcome break. Often, the trickster has another job: challenging the status quo. A good trickster offers an outside perspective and raised important questions. They're also great for lamp shading the story or the actions of the other characters.

#### 6. THE SHAPESHIFTER:

The shapeshifter blurs the line between ally and enemy. Often, they begin as an ally, then betray the hero at a critical moment. Sometimes, their loyalty is in question as they waver back and forth. Regardless, they provide a tantalizing combination of appeal and possible danger. Shapeshifters benefit the stories by creating interesting relationships between the characters, and by adding tension to scenes filled with allies.

## 7. THE GUARDIAN:

The guardian, or threshold guardian, tests the hero before he faces great challenges. They can appear at any stage of the story, but they always block an entrance or border of some kind. Their message to the hero is clear: "go home and forget your quest." They also have a message for the audience: "this way lies danger." Then the hero must prove their value by answering a riddle, sneaking past, or defeating the guardian in combat.

## 8. THE SHADOW:

Shadows are villains in the story. They exist to create threat and conflict, and to give the hero something to struggle with. Like many of the other archetypes, shadows do not specifically have to be characters. The shadow is especially effective if it mirrors the hero in some way. It shows the audience the twisted person the hero could become if he heads down the wrong path and highlights the hero's internal struggle. This, in turn, makes the hero's success more meaningful.

## 6. METHODOLOGIES RELATED ART AND YOUTH WORK

After we presented the general artistic potentials and the concept of the hero, it's important to examine the methods of the partner organizations and other initiatives of their countries. We can also effectively build these elements in the realization of this project.

### **Italy:**

The methodology of Rampa Prenestina is based on the fundamental impact of artistic languages with focus on creative educational processes and training aimed at children, young people and adults in professional training. The practice we have elaborated during the last 20 years in this field was inspired by the work of leading pedagogues such as Franco Lorenzoni, Paulo Freire, Josè Antonio Abreu. Their work contributes to the educational experience of Sebastiano Spinella and his colleague Ursula Mainardi, the representatives of the Association. They have a wide range of experience in the field of theatrical art, including circus, music, storytelling, and creative play in general.

The contamination of different training fields such as educational, social and therapeutic has favoured the construction of an active and open methodology idea to apply in different contexts and situations. The main objective is to provide and stimulate a creative and reflective process, aimed at the acquisition of skills and awareness-raising of people's potential and capabilities. Group work always favours growth and individual evaluation, and create an intimate and protected context, facilitating the personal process of giving shape to emotions and thoughts in the perspective of greater awareness and balance. Through the tools of theatre, music and circus, storytelling, creative

play and music, we intend to create a personal and collective expressive path, to discover and strengthen our identity and image as a „heroic“ self.

Like the other archetypes drawn from the collective imagination, the archetype of the Hero can be traced through traditional and non-traditional stories, tales, legends as well as personal stories. It will allow us shedding light on the objectives of our methodology and strengthening its impact.

#### EXAMPLES OF WORK TOOLS

- Childhood and street games. (Traditional and well-known children games, easily recognizable by the participants, we use them as first approach when visiting the campsite and inviting children to play along. The aim is to establish a first connection and awake their desire to participate. Later the same games are elaborated step by step into a theatrical structure.)
- Cooperative games. (Collective relational games aimed at creating relations among the participants, helping them in knowing each other and overcoming the barriers like diffidence and shyness.)
- Attention and concentration games. (Developing the skills of the participants, often showing lack of concentration, especially in groups of peers, which are required for further work.)
- Games of trust, contact, and relationship. (To get to know the other and build trust among the group members.)
- Discovery and space management games. (The participants often live in the restricted space of the camp, in small containers, shacks, caravans, with little experience of training halls. It is important to show them a different perception of the space. They need renewed experience in the use of space in the relational and theatrical meaning, such as intimate space, relational space, social space, performing space.)

- Expressive plays and theatrical improvisation. (To improve stage presence, eloquence, body language, acting skills, ability to speak in public.)
- Use of mask and puppet theatre.
- Musicality and rhythm, the discovery of musical instruments, the use of the voice in speech and in singing. (It is a very important step in the development of one's own personal way (or ways) of expression, it can result in discovering musical skills, but it mainly helps improving the recognition of different modality of tone and rhythms of communication.)
- Presenting yourself (The first important step to acquire consciousness of one's own identity and uniqueness beyond everyday life. To discover the hero and heroine in oneself, in your own life and in the other's, an example of a hero and a heroine around us. Seeing oneself and their peers with new eyes.)
- The clown: to laugh at oneself in the pursuit of lightness. (Discover the value of self-irony, the poetry of simplicity, the value of making others smile; recognize and share one's own fragility, and to get to the point to realise that it is often what we have in common with everyone.)
- Invention and storytelling. (Training of imagination, building capacity of turning everyday life events into epic happenings.)
- The awakening of imagination and personal memory. (Through illustrations, photographs, music, and songs, also through sensorial experiences like smell and touch.)

#### EXAMPLE OF A LABORATORY MEETING (2-3 HOURS)

- Welcome
- Individual presentation through games
- Discovery of personal, social and structural space through games
- Practice of creative and expressive tools (theatrical games, circus instruments, clowns, songs)

- Improvisations to put into practice the tools given
- Work in small groups or individuals give shape to expressive stimuli.
- Presentation of work to others
- Discussion and exchange of feelings and opinions in a group
- Closing with relaxation
- Final greetings.

## **Romania:**

Our main tool (Giuvlipen) during our activities is art with a clear social message.

We think we can provide social change by the use of theatre because it has the power to make the authorities from the audience empathize and get aware of the problems that the Roma people have to face in their jurisdiction.

Roma Actors Association was founded by a group of Roma actors, artists and cultural experts in November 2015, with the purpose of creating a structure for reflection and action in the field of art, as a form of combating the exclusion of the Roma. The objectives of Roma Actors Association are cultural integration, artistic and cultural innovation in the art field, especially in theatre, the promotion of Roma rights through art. Roma Actors Association was created in Bucharest, in an active cultural space with the mission of increasing the access to art products for vulnerable groups and of using art for supporting these vulnerable groups.

Since 2014, when Giuvlipen was founded as an informal group, we observed that art has the capacity to create a space for the serious discussion of the social problems of specific communities and it can

produce concrete change for the audience and their communities. By discussing these topics together with Roma people in the theatre of the oppressed / forum theatre workshops and after the performances, we want to create spaces that can be further developed through debate and the establishment of support groups for the people in need.

Giuvlipen organized forum theatre workshops as part of the project “Phenja. Violence against women has no color!”, a project implemented by E-Romnija Association. The themes of the workshops were: violence against Roma women, early marriage, dropping out from school, gender inequality. The forum theatre workshops took place in Giurgiu and Giulesti with Roma participants. Between November 2015 and March 2016, Giuvlipen held forum theatre workshops for the Roma community from Valea Seacă, Bacau. The workshops focused on Roma migration, violence against Roma women and racism in the health-care system etc.

In 2017 we started two forum theatre workshops in two Roma communities (Mizil and Ferentari) as part of the Sasto Vesto! project, supported by OSF. In the first part of the project, in the spring of 2017, we started working with the Roma communities in Ferentari (Ferentari, health in withdrawal) and Mizil (Take care of your health!), in partnership with E-Romnija association. The theatre performance was played in the community, at “Stela and Dana community center”, with the co-ordination of Zita Moldovan.

Mizil is one of the cities with the highest number of people infected with HIV in Romania, and every year, one or more young people in the Roma communities die because of the lack of treatment. The families of these young people, due to lack of information and ignorance of

HIV / AIDS, are often stigmatized and wrongfully judged for their children's illness. The lack of medical education affects the community in many ways, for example, young girls are not encouraged to go to the gynaecologist, as they have the impression that it is only necessary after they have begun sexual life.

In the Roma community in Ferentari, our show took place during the time that the Mayor of Sector 5 closed Caracuda – a Social Services Center in Ferentari, therefore, he committed an abuse of public health against people in need in the neighbourhood. In solidarity, many associations have signed a petition against the authorities' abuse. NGO representatives and local activists discussed the possible ways and forms of resistance related to the community's health problems in the absence of the authorities.

In 2018, the project continued with forum theater performances made together with the representatives of the Roma communities in Colentina and Ferentari, Bucharest. The "Sasti Vesti" ("In/accessible Public Health System for Roma Women: Stories from the Boldean Community") and "I am ... (In/accessible Public Health System for Roma Women: Stories from Ferentari)" took place in the company of several representatives at the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance of the University of Bucharest.

The central theme of the two events was the lack of the Roma women's access to the public health system and the lack of their reproductive rights, emphasizing both the intimate space of the family and the community, as well as the relationship between the patient or the Roma patient and the family doctor. We discussed to what extent ethnic stereotypes and social labels can influence their lives. "Sasti Vesti" was coordinated by actress Zita Moldovan.

Sasto Vesto! used forum theatre as a social mechanism in order to bring awareness and to create empathy from the medical staff and state authorities (who were sitting in the audience) regarding the Roma people's access to healthcare services. The forum theatre performances brought together the members of two Roma communities by providing the context to have a debate on the real issues of accessing healthcare services.

The theatre forum workshops informed and empowered two Roma communities about their rights, established a meaningful communication between the Roma communities and the healthcare service providers by creating a safe space for dialogue and mutual knowledge. The theatre performances that were created following the workshops were performed by the participants. The two performances promote the rights of the Roma people coming from vulnerable communities and raise awareness of various healthcare issues that Roma people are facing.

Using artistic tools, the goal was to empower the Roma communities in struggling with the systemic discrimination and the negative attitude of local authorities, which directly affect the precarity of their lives and their health conditions.

The project answered the questions regarding the access to specific healthcare services which are needed in the community through the theatre forum workshops and performances. They also had an educational role by offering relevant information on specific issues that Roma people are confronting to the communities and to a larger audience. Unfortunately, the relevant authorities, our main target audience, did not respond to our invitation.

The health care providers had the opportunity to see the direct perspective of the communities that they should work with, to confront and dismantle the existing stereotypes concerning the Roma people (for example, there is a stereotype that Roma people do not access the healthcare system for cultural reasons or lack of education). The theatre workshop provided accessible mechanisms to create personal narratives concerning the access to health services and forms to demand change. Also, through the two performances by Giuvlipen, we engaged representatives of other NGOs as well as intellectuals, artists and activists to search for solutions to the specific healthcare issues of the Roma communities.

Some of the issues that we identified as the biggest problems in many poor Roma communities were the lack of identity papers which can offer access to the healthcare system, as well as the lack of infrastructure, ghettoization and isolation of the community, as well as the negative cultural stereotypes that contribute to the fact that the Roma people's access to healthcare services is limited.

In each community that we selected, we organized 3-week-long theatre workshops based on the discussions and improvisations of specific problems that had emerged over the course of the two months.

We had meetings with the people from the two communities, who were invited by the community facilitators of the project, we had open discussions about healthcare providers, community issues and based on these meetings, as well as on the knowledge of the facilitators, we formed a group of 5 members of each community who were available to participate in the workshops and together we developed the story of the forum performance. Following the experience of the previous workshops, we wanted to include more women in the workshops and

focus on specific issues that women are facing. All these activities and concerns were reflected in two performances, targeted to a larger theatre audience in Bucharest. The two performances were also performed in the communities where we had had the workshops.

The main issues concerning the access to healthcare services of the community were put into these forum theatre performances which mediated a dialogue between the community and the most relevant authorities responsible for the access of Roma people to healthcare services.

Through our project we wanted to influence family doctors, medical nurses, administrative managers in medical institutions, but also local authorities, Child Protection, Prefecture, Social Assistance Services, Police, the mayor, local community leaders - the decision makers who can influence the improvement of the health conditions of the Roma people and can also change their negative perceptions of Roma people.

### **Hungary:**

As we mentioned above, in Hungary there have been numerous educational – also artistic – initiatives focusing on the empowerment of Roma people and informing and attitude shaping initiatives targeting the members of the majority regarding Roma communities. Most of the initiatives are launched by private NGOs, meanwhile there are also ones realized by the state. There are long-term theatre programs with educational and community development focuses, where the members of some Roma communities are involved in theatre productions, which usually have a participatory approach. These initiatives are usually led by non-Roma professionals, who facilitate the work of

the community – including focusing topics, which are relevant to the community, sharing stories, building dramaturgy, realize rehearsals and performances afterwards. These kind of community theatres develop the competences and self-esteem of the members of the creative group, meanwhile present the issues and approaches of these communities to the target audience members (usually ones of the majority), in order to inform and raise their awareness to these issues and the values and challenges of the disadvantaged communities. Such initiatives have been realized by Káva, Sajátszínház and Utcaszak, among others. These are positive examples, but we have some critical comments. On the one hand, even if the productions were built on the stories of the Roma communities very often, the procedure of the creation and the focus on issues are facilitated by non-Roma professionals, which is an obstacle of self-representations. And on the other hand, the performances were realized only by Roma people coming from the communities, which creates a segregated group (with non-Roma leaders). Thus, they lack external aspects, and the opportunity to have an interethnic cooperation during the production process.

When Independent Theater Hungary realized long-term theatre programs to educate young people and involve them into the realization and dissemination of theatre performances – we usually tried to create interethnic teams and in the artistic/educational leadership there was always Roma self-representation, too. Also, in the stories of the performances we want to include various, relevant social aspects. In these programs we also focused on having a very intensive and strict art education part (even 15 hours a week) and ensured a scholarship for the youngsters (which was only paid fully to those who were always on time for the rehearsals in a given month) – which ensured that some of the young people involved also became theatre professionals later and all of them learnt a strong work ethic. This way we

also focus on the professional empowerment of the targeted young people. That is why we only work with the ones who really want to do a lot for reaching their aims – which aspect is less open to everyone than in the case of “low threshold” projects, which aim to involve a wider target group, and where artistic production and professional development are less important priorities than the empowerment and development of the communities in general.

## WORKSHOPS ABOUT ROMA BY ROMA

We must highlight Uccu Foundation, an organization that has been realizing workshops on Roma identity and Roma-related issues to classes of different schools that are predominantly frequented by the majority. Their workshops are held by young Roma people. The aim of the initiative is to ensure personal encounters and discussion between Roma and non-Roma people, and based on facts, personal stories and common experiences improve the attitude of the workshop participants towards the Roma. We find this opportunity particularly important from the point of view of the development of the targeted students and the empowerment of the young Roma people holding the workshops, too. The only thing that we find problematic from our point of view is that the workshops are held only by Roma facilitators – so it does not provide an opportunity to show the inclusive cooperation between Roma and non-Roma people, and to include interethnic aspects in the discussion from the sides of the facilitators. For these reasons, in our workshops we always try to work with one Roma and one non-Roma facilitator, and we also try to have one man and one woman in charge, in order to present a good example of interethnic and intergender cooperation, and ensure the presence of different aspects during the workshop. Another important aspect related to the methods of Uccu and our earlier activities is that sometimes it is less

effective to focus too directly on the topic regarding which we want to change the general attitude. Since such direct interventions can have a controversial impact in case the participants have the feeling that we want to press a message on them. So sometimes we prefer to focus on different topics (e.g. theatre, stories of heroes etc.) – which happen to have Roma-related aspects, instead of focusing on ‘Roma’ topics.

As for direct messages of the workshops, our point of view is that it is not good to bring a strong ideology or a direct message to the participants – instead we point out the value of respecting different opinions, safe space and critical thinking – because if the trainers want to push some narratives (e.g. the structural discrimination is the main reason for the situation of Roma people, so the institutions and the majority have all the responsibilities) it can have controversial impact on the participants. In our work the value-neutral and open approach of the trainers is especially important, which is quite difficult to stick to, especially in situations when a participant uses hate speech against the Roma communities. Once, at the beginning of a workshop one of the participants asked: “Is it a problem if I hate the Roma?” The Roma and the non-Roma facilitators did not show any frustration just said gently: “No, it is not a problem, we came here to speak about your thoughts, too.”

## INDIRECT IMPACTS OF GAMIFICATION

As it is mentioned above, sometimes the indirect effects of the workshops are stronger than the direct ones. When we using games we build on this phenomenon. There are initiatives that do not invite the participants to ‘learn or discuss about the Roma’, but to play a game. It can be a board game – in case of Sociopoly, for instance – where the groups of participants get a character of different disadvantaged

families living in a village, where they face different situations, have to make decisions together and experience that however hard they try, they don't have enough financial resources to avoid asking for loans and/or to ensure basic things such as food, shoes or glasses for their children. In the detective game "Grid" of Autonomia Foundation and in "Detectivity" the participants need to solve the crime mystery. During the game they receive information about the challenges of the Roma communities and have a personal discussion with a Roma character – played by a Roma person. In both gamification situations the direct goal is to win a game in order to solve a situation, and an indirect effect is that they receive information, encounter with a disadvantaged/Roma person, or experience the challenges of these people in the frame of the game. The indirect impact is truly relevant, such as the personal encounter with a Roma person. We can also mention the treasure hunting method, which has also been tried out for social education purposes. Smaller game tools are also useful in the workshops to involve, refresh, connect, energize or develop the participants. Without gamification, the frontal presentations and sometimes even the interactive discussions can be not interesting enough for the young people. For this reason, we try to involve gamification in the workshops and also in the longer educational or artistic development programmes we work in, too.

## ART AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT AND A TOOL FOR SHARING STORIES AND MESSAGES

Maybe the most relevant and wide-spread initiative that uses art for empowering Roma youngsters is 'Knowledge6Power' which created songs and video clips with the involvement of Roma youngsters. The rap/slam poetry texts focus on the importance of education – but in a trendy, funny and user-friendly way. The songs speak to the Roma

guys and inspire them to study and to focus on their own potential instead of external issues. This aspect is particularly important in our point of view. No one has become stronger or more successful because others felt sorry for him/her, but because he/she realized that his/her situation is bad and is caused by objective external circumstances they don't have control over. On the other hand it is very important to formulate empowering messages in a language and style that is relevant to the targeted audience. Self-representation was also realized in this project. The tool for creating a short song together with a group is also a good means of sharing stories and values, which are relevant for us. Furthermore, creating lyrics and music is very often more attractive for disadvantaged young people than writing a text.

In our workshops we usually give opportunity to the participants to work on some of their stories and to create some creative products in a cooperative way (e.g. short videos, a theatre scene, written materials, cartoons etc.). The genre can also be figured out by the group members according to the story and message they want to work on and disseminate. The cooperative creation process develops the cooperative competences, creative work develops self-expression, and the result provides an experience of success which develops self-esteem, too. A (hero) story can be shared and discussed in many ways. We would highlight storytelling, letter/diary writing, audio recording of a story, making a short video, and different theatre forms such as forum theatre, picture theatre, or our own method the TheDe (Theater and Debate) – when the participants can choose a character related to a given problematic situation, and have to debate with the others from the point of view of the character. This is useful in debate situations because more extreme or special aspects can come up through the “characters” than through the participants’ own points of views. The character also ensures safety for the participants. The most interest-

ing and valuable work and stories of the participants are also shared in the project blog of Independent Theater, which ensures that the stories and messages of the (Roma) youngsters can reach the members of the wider society, and have impact on its members. Of course, we only share the videos and/or texts with the consent of the creators.

The methodology of the pilot Roma Heroes workshops – which serves as an important basis of this project will be described later.

### **Spain:**

We would like to present some of the intervention strategies that our group has used in the last twenty-five years of theatre practice in Spain:

#### **STORYTELLING:**

Storytelling sessions are usually punctual interventions that do not have continuity in time and therefore, are good opportunities to awareness raising but maybe not so interesting for long term changes. What we usually do when doing Gypsy Tale sessions is start by asking the question: If I say the word “gypsy” what comes up to your mind? Participants are asked to react without too much thinking, in a spontaneous manner. The words (or sentences) that come out are written in a blackboard (or similar device). No comments are done by the storyteller but if dialogue among participants occurs it is not prevented. After participation has occurred the storyteller informs the participants that she/he is Roma and that she/he has brought some “Gypsy tales” to share with them. A selection (according to the age) of tales is presented and some time is kept at the end of the session for dialogue among participants and the storyteller.

Storytelling workshops are longer in time (usually minimum of four weeks with a 2 hours session per week and a maximum of a trimester with a 2 hours session per week). For these interventions a combination of folktales and personal stories together with dynamics aiming at building bridges and connections among participants are used. In these workshops there is no production of a performance neither by the storyteller (who is more of a facilitator) nor by the participants.

## THEATRE:

### Theatre of Life and Experience:



In this methodology biographical stories are used as a learning tool, which is a way to develop critical thinking and to raise awareness of social issues and history, to give voice to those who are usually unheard.

## THEMES WORKED:

1. Who am I?
2. Childhood and games

3. School times

4. Boyfriends and girlfriends

5. Work

6. Family

7. Trips (or journeys)

8. And now...

- When: between 2001-2006

- Where:

  - In Adult education schools in Sevilla 2001- 2004

  - At Adult Education University Sevilla 2005, 2006

- Municipal educational area program.

- Targeted audience: Adults (illiterate and university graduates)

- Objective: to create a theatre performance based on the personal stories shared during the process.

- Artist worked along with the teacher in the classroom.

- 3 phases:

1. Workshop for the teachers on the program and on how to use life and experience stories. Capacity building. Over 30 teachers are trained.

2. Classroom process. We edited a guide for teachers and once a week we attended the occasions to monitor the process that became the basis of the methodology used for the entire course.

3. Play rehearsals and presentation. Theatre forum with the audience (most of which consisted of other students from the school who did not take part in this process.) Evaluation.

- The program was a total success; there are many teachers and social workers using this methodology nowadays in Spain. When we began this method, it was hardly known or used.

- As a result of this program a theatre group was formed at the Adult University of Sevilla and it is still producing plays every season.

## THEATRE FORUM:

Participants view a play and afterwards a dialogue on the theme presented takes place among the participants the actors and the director of the play.

## OTHER PROGRAMS:

### Interculture

This was a municipal program with the citizen's participation coming from the area of Sevilla's Town Hall.

We worked in 15 various pre-primary and primary schools from different neighbourhoods, especially where migrants live in a high number. In some schools there are children from over 35 different nationalities.

### THREE PHASES:

#### 1. TEACHERS' WORKSHOP

#### 2. INTERCULTURAL DAYS AT SCHOOLS:

- Day 1 tales and legends from the world
- Day 2: games
- Day 3: songs and dances

#### 3. EVALUATION AND EXCHANGE OF GOOD PRACTICES

## OBJECTIVES

1. Promoting the inclusion of children and their families coming from different nationalities, showing the customs and the peculiarities of these nations to the rest of the educational community,
2. Integrating the values and potentials coming from other cultures to enrich children and primary school education

3. Achieving the incorporation and integration of the parents coming from other cultures and nationalities into different school activities, which will promote their medium-term insertion into society.
4. Raising awareness among all, of the parents, the students and teachers, to solidarity and mutual tolerance among all cultures, this way preventing future exclusion and discrimination against social groups.
5. Developing and continuing the promotion of integration and peaceful coexistence of cultures and religions beginning from childhood, helping the future generations in creating a more rational way of thinking

## 7. ROMA THEATRE

Our project focuses on Roma dramas and Roma dramatic heroes, and through them on the values, and the challenges of diverse Roma communities throughout Europe. We intend to empower the (Roma) people and develop the attitude, relationship and active cooperation between Roma and non-Roma groups, thus, it is important to have an overview on European Roma Theatre and the monodramas we will deal with during the project.

### **The beginnings**

Gypsy performing arts have been present in Europe ever since the first Roma people arrived in the area - even though, at the time it was not institutionalized. However, circus and theatre performances were traditionally part of the repertoire of the nomadic communities, such as fortune-telling, selling herbs or harnesses, leather straps, everyday goods of metal or wood. In this case, theatre was not only meant for entertaining the spectators but also to recruit the public to whom they advertised their goods. The members of these companies were clowns, jugglers, performers, musicians, and storytellers who tried to catch people's attention with funny or touching stories.

Although performing art has a long past within the Roma communities, theatre in the modern sense - having a strong connection to written dramas and/or to stages - started at the end of the 19th century.

Below you can find a short summary of the Roma theatres in some European countries, and the short descriptions of the Roma dramas that have been presented and recorded on the 1st and 2nd Roma Heroes International Roma Storytelling Festival in Hungary in 2017 and 2018.

These dramas and related educational materials – or some of them – will be used in the educational activities realized in this project, too.

## **Russia**

The first official permanent Gypsy theatre was founded in Russia and still works today: this is called Romeni Theatre in Moscow and was founded in 1931. The first theatre play in Romani language premiered much earlier in Theatre Maly, Moscow in 1887.

## **Romania:**

In Romania, performing arts were not only related to a nomadic lifestyle. Performers were slaves, court jesters and clowns for 300 years. They had a significant impact on Romanian theatre, since back at the time, there was no other form of theatre in Romania. Thus, today's Romanian theatre arts are built upon their traditions. Despite all of this and despite of the fact that biggest Roma minority lives in Romania, there is no official Roma theatre in the country. To fight the stereotypical and negative representation, Sorin Sandru and Rudy Moca staged an adaptation of the play Stormy Night by Caragiale in Romani language with Gypsy actors in 2010. The premiere was huge success, but it also evoked a lot of hatred. The show was followed by several performances dealing with politics, three out of which were also performed in Budapest, at the 1st and 2nd International Roma Heroes Festival, organized by Independent Theatre Hungary.

Alex Fifea: You Didn't See Anything

„When he saw the police patrol car he ran away. This is what caught police-men's attention. They caught him and took him to the police station with no particular reason at all.” - The case of Daniel Dumitrache

On March 4, 2014, Gabriel-Daniel Dumitrache, aged 26, living in district 3 in Bucharest without an official address, left the house he shared with his mother and many other family members around 7 p.m., on his way to work. An ethnic gypsy, Daniel had no education and no job, but earned his living as a „parking boy” and an odd-job man. Parking boys are men who indicate available street parking spaces to drivers, in exchange for a tip. They know each other, they “do the parking” in established places, avoiding overlapping each other’s territory. Some of them are Gypsies, some of them are or were drug- users, many of them have no ID papers, some of them are homeless. The only thing they all have in common is extreme poverty. On the night of March 4, several policemen showed up at the house of Daniel’s mother and asked for Daniels’s ID card. About 20 minutes after the policemen had left with Daniel’s birth certificate, the police announced his family that he was dead. The family accuses the police of having beaten him to death, as according to official documents, the death occurred at a police building where suspects are usually brought in. The death certificate noted that the death was caused by acute anaemia, (loosing too much blood) massive hemoperitoneum and pathologic rupture of the spleen. The document was registered on 05.03.2014, mentioning that the death occurred on March 4.

The director David Schwartz and the actor Alex Fifea read about the death of Daniel in a newspaper and they got interested in it. For one year, the members of the community also attended the hearings and read the testimonies. They accompanied the parking men for their daily work and took interviews with Dani’s relatives and friends. The play was written based on these notes and voice recordings. The police wanted to cover up the case, about 30 policemen stated at court that they „didn’t see anything”, they knew nothing about what had happened, this way covering the offender. The hearings were delayed, the judges were constantly replaced, finally, the last one made

the judgement. The policeman who is called Moldoveanu in the play, was sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment for grievous bodily injury resulting in involuntary manslaughter. If he was found guilty in torture resulting in manslaughter, the sentence should have been 15-25 years of imprisonment. No other policeman was convicted. But even the imprisonment of one policeman was possible thanks to the active participation and presence of the artists at the trial.

Beside the heroic activity of the artists we must also mention that Dani had also witnessed when the police used aggression against one of his fellows, and he was ready to go into court and give evidence against the police. It could have been one of the reasons for which he was caught and killed later. The braveness of witnessing can be considered a heroic act, too.

The play raises the issue of activity and social impact of artists and creators. Can they have immediate impact on the development of an unjust situation? Presenting the fight against discrimination in the theatre will be an important part of the work of the new generation of artists, too.

Theater art was not just inspirational for the spectators but the next performance also helped the actress to strengthen her own identity and shape the image of to her own Roma identity.

Alina Serban: I Declare at My Own Risk

„I wish to go on to University. For this I need a decent place to live and study.”

This play is an autobiographical monodrama presenting the main

stages of Alina Serban's life. She starts with her childhood, tells how her family got impoverished, how she lost her parents and how she finally got to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. The key scene of the play is when she fills in the application form. This decision has changed her life. Alina is a Roma girl from Romania who got her faith in education from her mother. She was born in a middle-class family but soon they became poor and moved to the backyard of her father's relatives where both peaceful environment and basic sanitation were missing. First, they intended to stay for three weeks, later the plan changed to six months but finally, she lived in the yard for 12 years. This environment and the lack of prospects left its mark on the people living here, and Alina did not want to become one of them. What is more, she did not want to be a Roma. Later it changed when she realized at a festival that being Roma is cool – from feedbacks of non-Roma people! She was studying for her final exams at high school when her family was about to be evicted. She did not have adequate circumstances for studying but she wanted to graduate from high school and go on to university. So, she decided to change her life and therefore, applied for social care and for placement in a state home. By now, she has become an acclaimed actress who is proud of her origin.

This play raises the issue if it is acceptable/advisable to present negative facts about Roma people or it only has a negative impact on the majority's perception of the Roma? Can we change our lives despite the objective obstacles? How much harder it is to go to university from the slum than from a middle-class family?

The next play also leaves it open if early marriage is good or bad. Mihaela Drăgan actress made a play on the special situation of Roma women in Romania and early marriages.

## Mihaela Drăgan: Tell Them About Me

„And at once I got this idea! There wasn't any Pentecostal boy in any of the families my father would have married me to! So, I thought: If I become one, my chances to get married would be 0!”

The play presents the topic of early marriage, a common tradition in many Roma communities, from different women's point of views. One of them, Roxana is a Romanian Roma girl. She was supposed to get married at an early age and her parents forbade her to go to school. Her father insisted on her husband being Roma. To avoid marriage, Roxana changed religion. She started to go to a congregation where there were no Roma men who she could have married. Even though she managed to escape early marriage, she had to stop studying. Roxana could not identify with the expectations of her family, she felt closer to majority society. She secretly kept on going to school and worked as an educational assistant. Her task was to recruit Roma children for various projects and with this work she finally reconnected with her Roma identity.

Roxana lives in a small Romanian town, in Buzau, in a zlatari Roma community. Usually, the girls go to school until the age of 11 or 12 so that they can learn how to write and read. The boys study until the age of 14-15, they complete 8 classes, as it is indispensable for obtaining a driving license in Romania. Entering the marriage, the bride is supposed to be virgin because her virginity represents the honour of her family. The family of the groom many times pays a significant amount of money to the bride's family at the wedding. Related to the play we can discuss the contexts, reasons for and against early marriage, the conflicts which Roxana and other Roma youngsters can have with the majority and their own community, too.

Mihaela Dragan is an actress and a playwright living in Bucharest. She wrote the play *Del Duma – Tell Them About Me* based on interview with Romanian Roma women, and she performs it as a one- woman show. Together with Mihai Lukács, they created the play *La Harneala* about the forced eviction of Roma communities.

In 2015, Mihaela Drăgan founded *Giuvlipen*, a Roma feminist theatre company. One of their main aims is not to be regarded as a social or activist theatre but to be acclaimed for the artistic value of their work.

## **Spain**

Spanish Gitanos had significant theatre art traditions way before flamenco appeared. Gitanos were portrayed in theatre since the 15th century, in a rather stereotypical and negative way; however, these characters were played by Roma actors. In the 18th century, Roma people in Spain had no civil rights. In 1753, after the Brotherhood of Gitanos in Sevilla was founded, the Gypsies joined the catholic procession dancing and singing, thus, they created a new theatrical form and drew social attention to Gitanos. By the 19th century, portraying Gitanos in operas (such as *Carmen*) was customary and this century was the time of the emergence of flamenco, too. Even though we can talk about Spanish Roma performing arts, the first Gypsy woman to acquire classic theatrical training was Gabriella Ortega Gomez (1915-1995) who grew up in a traditional flamenco artist family. The play *With Profound Dignity* by Sonia Carmona Tapia was written partly to honour her work, and partly to the honour of Emília Fernandez Rodriguez, the first beatified Roma woman.

Sonia Carmona Tapia: *With Profound Dignity*

„Is there a war that belongs to us? What war? We are sons of the road why would we burn down the roads!“

Emília Fernandez Rodriguez was the first beatified Roma woman. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, she was newlywed. To avoid her husband to be enlisted for military service, they temporarily blinded the man, but later the militia learnt about the trick, so the couple was sentenced to imprisonment. By that time, Emília was already pregnant, so her fellow inmates shared their meagre meals with her in the prison. She learnt religious chants and prayers from a fellow inmate, since a lot of Catholics were held captive there by the communists. The prison governor offered to set her free if she told who had taught her these holy songs but she refused to do so. She was sent to solitary confinement and she even gave birth to her baby in prison. Ten days after the labour Emília died, and we do not know what happened to the child. The Catholic church beatified Emília in 2014.

Gabriela Ortega Gómez studied acting at the University of Sevilla, she was the first actress at the Spanish University Theatre. She was admired by many exceptional artists, portrayed in paintings and awarded a golden medal for her work in 1958. The Franco-regime did not let her recite works written by banned poets, for example, Federico García Lorca and Rafael Alberti. As she resisted this ban she was finally expelled from Spain. She went to America and became extraordinarily successful. In the Fine Arts Theatre of Mexico, she was awarded the most important trophy, El Azteca de Oro. After returning from her exile she appeared on the Andalusian television as well. She never ceased to deal with art, and interestingly, at the end of her life she turned to painting and writing. She died in 1995 and was buried in Sevilla.

Sonia Carmona Tapia wrote the play together with Jaime E. Vicent Bohórquez and the story highlights what sacrifices it takes to fight the oppressing authorities – whatever political colours they have.

The Scottish writer, Jess Smith also fought the authorities, but in a different way...

## **Travellers in Europe**

For some Roma communities in Europe, nomadic life is still very much alive. Traveller people live in Ireland, Scotland, and on the roads of many European countries. They are the least accepted of all the European GRT communities, as it is problematic for the public administration to deal with these constantly moving people. Many of them do not have a permanent address, thus, just a few of them can benefit from the education and the health care system. Storytelling has a long tradition in Traveller culture, and three Traveller stories were presented by two artists at the 1st and 2nd International Storytelling Festival

Richard R. O'Neill: The Hardest Word

„But of course, we were only Tinks, scum we didn't matter, we hardly existed until harvest and picking and wars of course.”

Jess Smith, a Traveller writer is so outraged at the mistreatment of the Travellers that she writes a letter to the new prime minister in which she insists on an apology for the inhuman treatment of her people. The prime minister's office contacts her after the letter arrives but the prime minister refuses to apologize at their personal meeting. Jess turns to the public in the frame of a carefully planned

media campaign. Jess' sister does not support the campaign at all, as she is afraid that if their Traveller origin gets revealed, it might endanger her position. Despite this, the writer undertakes to appear in a life TV show where the Prime Minister is also invited. However, he does not apologize, so Jess Smith gives him a piece of her mind and throws a glass of water into his face. First, she is arrested, then her case is taken to court. After Jess Smith is plead guilty she is instructed to apologize to the prime minister but she refuses it, saying: „I will if he will!“

The main character, Jess Smith is a real-life person, but the story itself is partly fiction. However, the circumstances of writing and presenting the play are real and of historical significance. Richard R. O'Neill wrote this monodrama personally for Jess Smith. She performed it in Edinburgh. As a result of the play, the Church of Scotland apologized to the Traveller community for the inhuman treatment and infringement of their civil rights, a lot of organizations offered help to the minority providing health care and community building services. A lot of Traveller women started to write and Scottish Travellers became an officially acknowledged ethnic minority in Scotland in 2017, so they can act upon discrimination legally.

When discussing this play, we often encounter the question: Is it possible that art has an immediate impact on decision-makers? There are many different opinions on this issue, of course, but the process that started after the play had been presented clearly indicates the awareness-raising effect of art.

The next story from Ireland leaves an important question to decide to us:

## Michael Collins: It's a Cultural Thing. Or Is It?

„Like racism everywhere, it is only when its victims start writing their own history and celebrating their uniqueness that they can truly stand as equals. An old saying says that until the tiger writes its history it will always be hunted.“

Michael is struck one day when his daughter tells him that she wants to drop out of school. She would rather like having a family, just like her cousins. The father believes that his daughter shall keep on going to school and studying. In order to make her understand the importance of education, he revokes his childhood memories which are mostly cheerful and humorous episodes that are not so laughable, though. In the old times Traveller children studied in a segregated, separate part of the school. They could only play in a separate playground and could only go to the big yard to pick up rubbish and clean the playground when the other children were not there. At the very beginning, the family lived a nomadic life but later they moved to Dublin as Travellers became entitled to welfare aid from the 1960ies, which required a permanent residence. In the big city, there were lots of bars and restaurants where they were not served or let in. Later, a civil rights training was organized and as a result, the process of empowering Travellers has begun.

After long fights of several groups for equal treatment, the Equality Act got finally accepted in Ireland in 2000. This act forbids the discrimination of nine different groups, among others the discrimination of Roma people. It was a real breakthrough and it meant that Travellers must be served in shops, bars and everywhere from where they were previously expelled from. The Irish Traveller population is estimated to be about 30 000 people, based on a 2016 census, and 40 000 people

according to the community itself. In Ireland, Travellers are recognized as an ethnic minority since 2017. A lot of Irish Travellers breed dogs or horses and many people earn their living by recycling metal scrap.

The workshop participants with Roma origin are happy to work with this story. They put their school experiences in the spotlight, so they can relate to the play easily. The same phenomenon is presented from the viewpoint of a teacher in the play *Today's Lesson*, but it raises completely different questions.

Richard R. O'Neill: *Today's Lesson*

„At the town hall they had received a planning application from a Roma family to build some caravan homes on a piece of land they owned. Unfortunately, this piece of land was next to a large hotel and golf course part owned by Councillor Curtiss.“

Robert is a teacher at a primary school. He is very enthusiastic and devoted as he works for a school that is famous for diversity and openness. Robert feels that he has reached to a very important stage of his life, he can exploit his knowledge and has the possibility to make his students learn about Traveller Gypsy culture. He knows a lot about it, as he himself comes from this community, too. Robert comes to the job interview with excellent references and extensive professional knowledge where the headmaster, Mrs. Bainbridge asks every important question but one: Robert, are you Roma? She did not ask – as Robert does not peak or look like a Roma and in such a diverse institution it is not a question to ask, this is the place where discrimination is just an abstract idea. Unfortunately, this unasked question causes a lot of trouble. Robert is busy preparing for the Gypsy-Roma-Traveller History month in the school, but the headmaster and the city council

try to cancel the program. The reason is that a Gypsy family would like to settle down in town and the city council intends to reject their application. The caravans next to the councillor's golf course would destroy the politician's investment. Robert's story unfolds from the speech of one of his colleagues who is giving a talk at a pedagogy conference. But instead of his planned speech, he tells this story to the audience, shows solidarity, and encourages the participants to do the same.

Richard R. O'Neill was invited to the Roma Heroes Storytelling Festival for the second time and the play was written for this occasion. The story is fictional, but clearly mirrors the everyday battle of the British Travellers against discrimination. The writer works as a professional storyteller and drama teacher. He is widely known in his home country for his children's books and other works and he is proud of his origin. However, his fame is sometimes a disadvantage as there are still schools where he is never invited because of his origin.

The play brings up the issue whether we should claim our identity and fight for it at our workplace, too? The question of identity is also relevant in other plays.

## **Bulgaria**

However, claiming your own identity is not so self-evident for everyone. The story of a Bulgarian girl focuses on this dilemma, too.

Zdrava Kamenova and Kalin Angelov: Gypsy Wheels

„Daddy does not juggle with wallets though, he says it is not right, he says he does grand acrobatics to make ends meet, but he would never go touching anyone's pockets.“

The monologue of a Bulgarian Roma girl presents the inherited family patterns and traditions. It unfolds the knowledge and miraculous, mysterious life of the nomadic circus ancestors that haunt throughout the play in the form of an imaginary elephant. It is there when the family is so poor that the children collect garbage around bins, and it is there when her cousin juggles wallets on the bus. The question of assimilation is also present in the play: the girl wants to blend into the environment so that no one can recognize that she is a Roma. She wants to resemble her aunt who „passed for white” and works in a bank keeping her origin in secret for her whole life. But the presence of the elephant does not let the protagonist forget where she comes from, and by the end of the play, she is able to be proud of her origin.

The discrimination of Roma people is a problem in Bulgaria, too. Crime and unemployment rates are higher among the Roma population, just as birth and mortality rates. More people live in poverty and less Roma children finish school than non-Roma.

Natalia Tsekova graduated from the Bulgarian Academy of Dramatic Arts. Her first monodrama is the play *Gypsy Wheels* which tells the story of the protagonist in first person singular. The play is not about the life of the actress, as she says that she has never been discriminated against.

When discussing the story, we do not only talk about Gypsy identity or do not only speak openly about one’s origin but we also reflect on identity crisis within the Roma communities.

## **Hungary**

In Hungary, one of the early dates of Gypsy theatrical self-representation is 1995, when Judit Jónás founded Duende Theatre Company. At

the same time, theatre artist Géza Csemer founded Renaissance Roma Workshop and in 2000 Oszkár Nyári founded Karaván Art Foundation, a theatre company. Karaván Theatre works with both professional and amateur artists, focuses on improving disadvantaged youngsters' chances to study, and at the same time it supports their theatrical ambitions. In 2000 Verso Aver Company presented the play Blood Wedding with the participation of the most significant Gypsy actors of the time. The company went through several transformations later, it is no longer a Gypsy theatre, it is now known as Maladype Theatre led by Zoltán Balázs. Independent Theatre Hungary was founded in 2004 led by Rodrigó Balogh. Franciska Farkas and Emília Lovas also started their career at the theatre. Both actresses are founding members of Tudás6alom (Knowledge6Power) slam poetry group, created by Kristóf Horváth with the help of Peer Gynt scholarship students of Independent Theatre and the students of Karaván Art Foundation. The next two plays present a series of decisions made by two young Gypsy girls. We also focus on these decisions makings when discussing the stories.

Franciska Farkas: Letter to Brad Pitt

„That’s why I wanted to be the only Gypsy in my high school. I wanted to be excluded. I wanted to have my nose broken. I wanted to be discriminated against.”

Franciska Farkas wrote this monodrama on her own life after a call from Independent Theatre. Her heroism is in the decisions that she makes and in her reactions to difficulties. An imaginary letter to Brad Pitt stands in the centre of her autobiographical play. In this letter she writes with irony that all the bad things that had happened to her was here own choice: discrimination at school, drug addiction, sexual violence, her dysfunctional family and her human relationships. Just as it

was also her own decision that she wanted some change and finally was able to change these things. She does not only share the experience of humiliation caused by discrimination and its consequences in her life but also highlights the importance of being active. The letter is written by an actress who has been to Hollywood, has played in several movies and has received critical acclaim. It is full of irony and the story can only end well if Brad Pitt - whom she once talked to at a shooting - adopts her.

The young actress, Franciska Farkas studied to become a social worker. She is a self-taught actress, she learnt film acting in practice. She started her theatrical career as a Peer Gynt scholarship student of Independent Theatre Hungary. Presently, she plays in several theatre productions, as a founding member of Knowledge6Power group she runs school programs and motivation trainings for disadvantaged youngsters, and she is an acclaimed character of the Hungarian slam poetry scene.

Márton Illés: Chameleon Girl

„For a chameleon can join any queue and can fulfil any expectations. But sometimes she has to decide for herself, otherwise she'll never live her own life.”

Chameleon Girl is a seemingly average teenager but she is not like her mates: she has a superpower. Her chameleonic nature which is not about hiding, it is rather the skill to read the mind and the heart of her loved ones. She is being questioned by an educational counsellor, so we learn a lot about her and her family, her great-grandparents, and the death of her great-grandmother or her own kindergarten anti-hero story. We gradually get closer and closer to the soul of the

'chameleon girl' and finally we learn about her great decision: one year before her final exams she is expecting a baby and has to decide whether to keep it. Interrupted high school studies versus an eternal painful memory and loss related her first love. How would you decide?

Independent Theater Hungary organized the first international Roma theatre festival in the world in 2017: this was the Roma Heroes Storytelling Festival where 4 monodramas were presented on stage and recorded on video. Based on these plays, the educational team of Independent Theatre created an educational methodology and run more than 10 workshops in Hungary and Gent, Belgium before the play was written.

The majority of the workshop participants were Roma youngsters who not only analysed the plays, the protagonists and discussed the social background of the topics, but also shared and presented hero stories from their own environment and their own lives with creative means. The play were written based on these stories.

Emília Lovas, the actress playing the 'chameleon girl' started her theatrical career as the protagonist of the play Feather Picking by Independent Theater in 2010. Later she studied theatre and film acting at the Hungarian Drama School in Pest. After the graduation, she worked as an actress at Ida Turay Theatre for six years. Presently she is a free-lancer actress.

## **Italy**

In Italy, as far as we know, theatrical self-representation is quite weak yet. Most theatre artists create performances that fulfil the expectations of the spectators from the social majority. The next two artists

live and work in Italy but their plays are not only about Italian Roma people.

### Sebastian Spinella: Children of The Wind

„The perfect professional entertainer, I pictured myself as a Romantic Bohemian Gypsy Artist. But felt a void, a lack of depth and meaning that success did not satisfy. I had chosen theatre for the sake of freedom, but freedom without a purpose did not have a meaning in itself.“

Little Neddu was born in a Sicilian family. His role model is his grandmother who one day reads his palm and says that he is the child of the wind. This means that he will travel the world. And so he does! After his parents' divorce, his father moves to Denmark and he follows him at the age of 17. He travels across Europe joining travelling companies as a pantomime artist or a musical clown and at the same time, he also studies ancient Gypsy trades. In twenty years, he becomes a professional actor but after perfecting the profession he gets disillusioned. The child of the wind moves on. He is invited to join a social project in Rome, to teach music to disadvantaged Roma children. He gets to know 12-year-old Svonko there, and he teaches him playing the accordion. After the difficult start they make good friends. Later, the program ends but Sebastian, once little Neddu, continues the work. Svonko grows older and is aware that when he turns 18, he will be expelled to Serbia, to his country of origin unless he gets his stateless travel documents. Rumour says that the Interior Minister intends to visit the camp where Svonko and his family live to size up public safety. Svonko waits at the gate of the camp in suits for the official car to come every morning. One day it arrives. Svonko is the first to greet the minister, they shake hands and tells him what will happen to him soon unless he gets his papers. The politician gets

embarrassed because of the presence of the press and he says he will see what could be done.. Later Svonko gets transferred to a centre for illegal immigrants but due to the huge media attention, he gets the necessary documents and can stay in Rome with his family and friends.

Sebastian Spinella was born in Sicily, currently he lives in Rome. In his play *Children of the Wind* he tells the story of his European journey as a travelling actor and musician and how he returned to Italy. He is a social worker teaching youngsters and lives in near the refugee camp. He tries to improve their chances of entering the labour market by teaching English and the basics of simple trades. They also founded a music band, a Roma rock band called *Sára Bándá*. Most Roma in Italy are assimilated, and most probably so did the family of Sebastiano, too. It is only his typically Roma family name and the strikingly Gypsy character of his grandmother that suggest his Roma origin.

A lot of young people can relate to the story of Svonko, especially those who were born in Italy but are not Italian citizens. If they applied for official documents to their country of origin, they would be expelled, so the only solution is to obtain stateless travel documents. This story is about two different lives. One is the life of a young man standing up for himself and leading the way for others with his success, the other one is the way of the artist who takes on community service and finds meaning in freedom.

The next story also presents an extraordinary personal path; however, the struggle of the protagonist is of historical importance and does not have such a significant effect on her own life.

Dijana Pavlovic: *Speak, My Life*

„Today the doctors have rallied round to show a Gypsy specimen to the visitors. I was lying on that bed, and all those men in white coats stared at me.“

In her book *Mariella Mehr*, Yenish writer tells about the inhuman treatment and the biological genocide of the Yenish people in Switzerland. Dijana Pavlovic, Roma actress of Yugoslavian origin at living in Italy wrote a play based on this book.

The story faithfully portrays the state of mind of the powerless, oppressed people and the cruelty of those who serve the system. Based on historical facts, we gain insight into the process of how the Swiss state and the church exposed the members of the nomadic community to forced treatments and sterilization. The Children of the Road program regarded these people inferior. The children were separated from their families and placed out into institutions or got foster families where they were subject to further psychological harassment and physical violence. The writer Mariella Mehr also experienced these horrendous things and her works contributed to preserve the historical memory of these events.

The Children of the Road program was run by Pro Juventute, a child protection organization between 1926 and 1973. The program ended due to the media campaign that Mariella Mehr was also involved. Ten years later the Swiss Confederation apologized for the past but at the same time, made the documents confidential for 100 years.

## 8. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS OF THE ROMA HEROES PILOT WORKSHOPS

Independent Theater Hungary has realized two international Roma theatre festivals in Budapest, Hungary in 2017 and 2018. Altogether 12 performances have been recorded, together with one focus scenes of each performance, and interviews made with the artists of the given plays. Based on the recorded materials, together with the artists and the trainers' team of the theatre, a methodology have been created.

Our educational material focuses on Roma and non-Roma secondary school or university students. We paid particular attention to the following criteria when created methodology:

- The hero concept in general, its connection to active citizens, dramatic heroes, and everyday heroes around the participants or even themselves
- Highlighting the challenges the different Roma communities face in various parts of Europe, pointing out the similarities and the differences between the issues of different Roma people and that of the majority
- Highlighting different values, decisions, conflicts, results and impact the dramatic heroes have and opening discussion about the opinions and experiences of the participants regarding these phenomena
- Create a safe space where every participant can share their thoughts, questions, opinions meanwhile respecting the each-other's difference of values and opinions

- Inspiring the participants to share their own hero stories and their own heroic acts with the others, which develops their self-esteem and their relationship with the other group members.
- Inspiring the participants to realize cooperative creative work (such as short scenes, videos, writings) focusing on the stories and topics that were the most relevant to them, and about which they want to communicate some messages towards their group members, or to the wider society (sharing some of the creations on our blog).
- The participants get information about the values and challenges of Roma communities, theatres and dramatic heroes, they find their own heroes and the potential of becoming an everyday hero themselves. Gaining experience of open discussion, cooperation, and creative work - a common success. The empowering experiences develop the self-esteem of the participants, and improve their attitude towards the Roma communities, cooperative, creative activities, and active citizenship in general.

The workshops held based on these methods have reached hundreds of young people in Hungary and Belgium and most of the participants found it remarkably interesting and inspirational. Every workshop is held by two trainers – one of them is preferably Roma, the other one is non-Roma, one is a woman, and the other one is a man – in order to show an inspiring example of interethnic and intergender cooperation. The trainers participated in a trainer training programme in order to have rich knowledge regarding the background of the focused plays, and to facilitate the workshops as partners of the group, who involve them in discussions, creation and self-reflection. The length of the workshops was between 2\*90 till 2\*180 minutes, sometimes the two parts were held together, sometimes 1-2 weeks passed between

the two occasions. The number of the participants was sometimes under 10, sometimes over 20, meanwhile the ideal number of participants is between 12 and 18.

Below, you can see the structure of the basic workshops designed for 2\*90-120 minutes.

## I. PART

1. Introduction – the trainers introduce themselves and the focus of the workshop, they fix the frames of the workshop together with the participants, which is accepted by all the participants, and ensures the base that the workshops would be successful and enjoyable.

2. Heroes' brain storming – all participants receive a post it, on which they should write maximum 2-3 words, which they think are true for the heroes (what they are like, how their surroundings is, what they do etc). Every participant tells his/her name, what he/she wrote on the post it related to the hero, and puts the post it on a common flipchart. Afterwards, the trainers start a discussion about the approaches, common points or different views and ask some other questions in order to see the hero's line – problem/decision/action/result/impact – which is universal for all the heroes.

3. We say some words about Roma theatre, make sure what the participants know about it (usually hardly anything) and highlight that we will present some short videos of Roma dramas.

4. 3-4 short videos are projected each related to different plays; the videos are in original languages with subtitles.

5. Every participant should choose one of the projected videos, and those who chose the same should work together when reading some excerpts of the given play. They summarize the story of the dramatic hero, they discuss if s/he is a real hero or not, and formulate any dilemma, question, or wider aspect that came up in connection with the play. After the group works, all the groups have to present the play, the dramatic hero(es) and their related thoughts to the other ones.

6. After the presentation, discussion, and reflection on each performance, in a closing round everyone can share what the most interesting and thought-provoking element was for them in connection with the examined dramas.

## II. PART

1. Introduction – summarizing the main points, thoughts that came up in the first part. After the stories of the dramatic heroes we focus on the participants' own stories. The trainers share some of their personal stories – one of about their heroes, the other one about their own heroic act and ask the participants to share stories with each other, too.

2. Sharing stories – depending on the size of the group, in pair work or in smaller groups they share their stories with each-other, sometimes we can do it in a big circle, too. After sharing the stories the participants can decide with which story, topic, they would like to work later. Here we form small groups according to the stories and topics the participants want to work on.

3. Creative work – each small group creates a video/writing/theatrical scene related to the chosen story or topic. They can also put more stories and topics together.

4. Finally they present their creative work to each-other, reflect on them, and celebrate the common success.

5. In the final round everybody shares his/her thoughts, feelings etc. he/she can bring home from the workshop.

## 9. THE POTENTIAL OF GAMES IN THE METHOD

Since the earliest recorded history, people of all ages and cultures have been attracted by different types of creative plays. From the Olympics of ancient Greece to today's multi-player online games, plays remain important means of connecting with one another and the world around us. Human beings consistently return to plays through which we are confronted with challenging situations that make us want to know our odds and overcome them by rational actions or we defy them by unleashing our imagination and rewriting new paths of thinking.

Many endeavours started to borrow elements and structures found in modern games. This way, the power of play is to be found in many different domains and spheres of interest, like education, entertainment, art, socialization, activism, science and more.

Many studies show, especially when talking about the effects play has on children, or young people, that play has the role of enabling children to experience a sense of autonomy deriving power that helps them explore their awareness of personal and social relationships, and get a clearer idea of the position they want to take in a group.

Playing has many positive outcomes, among which we can mention investigating new ways of doing things, developing imaginative competence and problem-solving skills. It can be seen entirely as a creative process, yet to the players involved it makes absolute sense and every 'move' is based on grounded reasoning. It also provides a base for enabling (self)understanding through action and allows testing social and emotional relationships. It is a catalyst for self-choice when the play has flexible rules and/or is based on creative or artistic practices.

In a play situation it is easier to realize and state likes and dislikes, too, draw boundaries or sharing spaces consciously. The fact that decision making in the playground does not have immediate consequences has the effect of empowering players to develop a sense of who they are. These type of experiences support players to be proactive in developing and strengthening their character, finding and expressing their own voice in relation to others or in getting their play ideas realized. This autonomy over the play can also encourage participants to try out new roles that they are not accustomed to, and this is one of the most empowering experiences that play can facilitate.

Play also involves an ego-building function, which helps in the development of self-esteem. The participants can validate their personalities within the grounds of the play and the boundaries they have set. This provides a fertile basis on which the participants can explore and understand the ways they re/act and position themselves in the group or team. If the game implies self-referential tasks, it can also influence the participants to consciously choose how they want to appear before the other members, find patterns in the ways they see and describe themselves, realize if they tend to minimize or inflate their personas. Helping participants exercising their empathy is another beneficial factor of plays.

Play and socialization are interdependent, so self-awareness always comes as a relational formation. In large groups, self-referential games can provide the perfect ground for breaking stereotypes and preconceived ideas or attitudes by building on the things that participants have in common.

The flexibility and freedom granted by play situations open participants up for investigating, understanding and testing their own ideas

of who they are and who they would like to be, therefore, empowering them to reflect and restructure their reality and recreate certain situations which are serious and meaningful to them.





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