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Differentiated effects brought by locally implemented solutions to the Roma issue in municipalities Pečovská Nová Ves, Lipany and Ostrovany

Slovakia is one of the countries with the highest representation of the Roma minority in Europe. According to the results from the latest Population and Housing Census (Statistical Office, 2012), in 2011, 105 738 Roma lived in Slovakia and their share in the total number of population increased from 1.7 (2001) to 2.0% (2011). Objectivity of these data is often questioned because census monitors only declared ethnicity. Many Roma declare other ethnicity than Roma. To make these data objective, qualified estimates are used, according to which in 2010, the group of people considered as Roma by majority formed more than 350 000 members community (352 924 in Matlovičová et al. 2012), which is deployed throughout the whole Slovakia. The highest proportion is, however, in the east and southeast of the country where, according to the latest estimates, the largest number of Roma concentrations is situated (nearly 900-940) (Atlas 2010).

The urgency of solving the problems of the Roma communities in Slovakia is determined not only by their ever-worsening conditions for life, but also escalating tension in relation to the majority population, fed by often very one-sided negative media coverage creating an image of desolation and impossibility to solve the situation at the national level. In this regard, it is necessary to note that the positive examples that have been proven and that could bring more optimism and mainly serve as an inspiration for possible procedures at local government level are still not able to attract enough attention of broad public.¹ Increasing pessimism stems from the statement that universal respectively complete systematic solution probably does not exist. In practice, in the relatively small area, we meet with the communities at very different social and cultural level. In other words, just a few kilometres from the neglected and derelict segregated Roma settlements with wooden shacks without elementary utilities, there are communities that are fully integrated and in which Roma live at least a comparable level as the surrounding majority. In such cases, we often ask the question: Why? Why are there such big differences in the same region and often in relatively small areas? With the great regret, we have to say that for this question we have no relevant answer.

We suppose that one reason of this unawareness is the long-term absence of quality and systematic researches that would provide sufficient data necessary for an objective interpretation of the reality especially at the local level. This absence can be considered as the main reason why we are not able to answer the fundamental questions.

In the last two decades, many projects and activities that had the ambition to partially fill this gap were made, but in most cases, the activities were either very general or highly specialized and often short-timed. Rarely, comprehensive studies of supra-national or all-state character, mapping Roma issues in depth, appeared.

¹ In this year, Alexander Mušinka published: *The Things That Worked, Examples of Successful Activities on the Level of Local Administration Aimed at Improving the Situation of the Roma* (in Slovak: *Podarilo sa*, which can be identified as a unique achievement in the Slovak conditions and which despite the effort of the author has not already got more media coverage (Mušinka, 2012).

The first complex change in researches aimed at the Roma communities occurred in 2003, when for the first time in the post-revolutionary period, (at least) quantitative research was conducted on the whole territory of the Slovak Republic. It was Socio-graphic research of the Roma communities in Slovakia², which resulted in the publication: Atlas of Roma communities in Slovakia in 2004 (Radičová, 2004). For the first time since 1989, this study provided at least some complex data of the quantitative nature that could be fully used for the planning of state policies in relation to the Roma communities. Although from a methodological point of view, the data based on a qualified estimate can be regarded as soft data, this research was breakthrough in the Slovak conditions. The use of the obtained data is mightily limited for further analyses of the existing state. This Atlas, however, has served as the basis for a number of analytical studies focused on the description of the existing state (unfortunately with no satisfactory explanations of its reasons).

The activities of UNDP in Slovakia (United Nations Development Programme) led by Daniel Škobla and Jaroslav Kling have specific place in this context. The most important research project of UNDP is Report on the Living Conditions of Roma Households in Slovakia in 2006, together with its actualised version from 2010.

Currently in Slovakia, we can find enough books about Roma communities which describe Roma problems in general terms or in a broader context. Detailed monographs about the local Roma communities, which would provide enough in depth redesigned view of the history, development and transformation processes in the individual community, significantly absent. Several studies and scientific articles are the exception in this respect. Unfortunately, the only monograph in the (Czech) Slovak academic environment is the work of Canadian author David Z. Scheffel about the Roma community in the municipality Svinia (Scheffel, 2009).

Another reason for the absence of such data is the specificity of the research in Roma communities, which often requires different methodological approaches than in the majority case. One of the possibilities is a methods combination of the involved observation, i.e. long stay directly in the community (often used method in cultural anthropology), with other social scientific research methods. In this culturally different environment, standard research methods seem to be inappropriate, due to low reliability and validity of the obtained results.

The Roma community show a high level of internal as well as spatial heterogeneity. The problem is that no basic research entities such as existing forms, categories or characteristics of Roma communities, which would differentiate them for the purpose of subsequent research, have not been clearly defined, yet. An exception in this regard is the typology of Roma concentration in terms of their spatial integration in the urban area of municipality³, where we distinguish integrated semi-integrated and segregated Roma communities (for example, Atlas of Roma communities in Slovakia distinguishes concentration inside the municipality, on the outskirts of the municipality and outside the municipality). This kind of typology, however, often seems to be insufficient for the needs of many other approaches in the research. For example, the rate of spatial segregation does not need to correlate with social segregation and social status of the community. At the same time, the social level of Roma communities often does not reflect the level of economic development of individual regions of Slovakia. This means that the east-west gradient of regional development is not reflected across Roma communities in Slovakia. Social weakest communities can also be found in the east and west of Slovakia and vice versa.

The problem of using standard methods of quantitative research (various selection surveys) is that with decreasing of social level of community, reliability and validity of these methods is significantly decreasing. In some communities, it is often difficult to define the apparently obvious categories such as family, household, house, income, ethnicity, etc. Assisted data collection, respectively replacement of standardized forms of questioning for semi-structured can be a solution.

² Customer of this research was the Office of Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma communities and its aim was to get as much information as possible for the needs of the state administration. Consortium of three organizations conducted this research: S.P.A.C.E - Centre for the analysis of social policy, IVO - Institute for Public Affairs and KCPRO - Regional Centre for Roma issues in Prešov

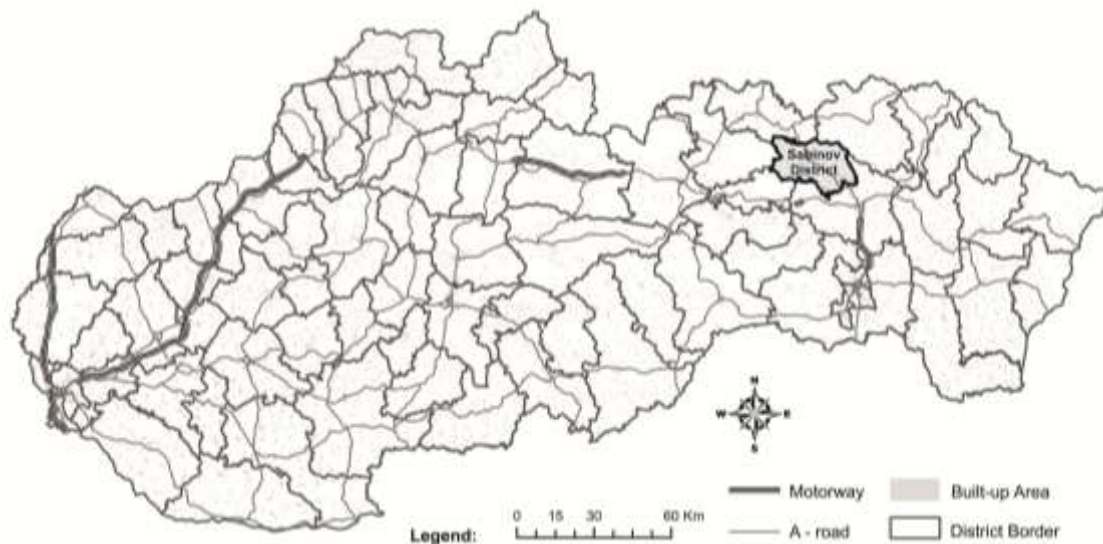
³ In this case, we abstract from categorization by size in terms of inhabitants number who live there

But in this case, significant distortions may occur, not only due to cultural but also linguistic differences (i.e. an incorrect translation from/to Roma language and subsequently erroneous interpretation of the answers). In this case, distortions caused by research stimuli can also occur very often (for example, when respondent purposely adapt the answer accordingly to what the interviewer wants to hear, respectively what he/she considers to be appropriate and correct). In many cases, neither well-established set of questions nor training of interviewers, can replace the experience of the researcher obtained by a long-term contact with the local community.

Quality and systematic studies are crucial to detect the causes of such big differences within the Roma community. To show the level of differences in results by using almost identical approach in practice, we chose three Roma communities with the presence of the culture of poverty, which we will describe in more details (within the range that this type of study allows): Lipany, Ostrovany and Pečovská Nová Ves (map 1, 2).

All three selected municipalities are located in the district of Sabinov (the Prešov self-governing region) in the upper river basin of Torysa. In terms of location, they are situated⁴ in an important railway (track Kysak-Muszyna) and road junction to Poland (first class road no. 68) and in the historically strategic royal road (via regia), which connected the central and eastern Slovakia. They are situated just a few kilometres from each other (see map) and the Roma communities have the character of segregated settlements on the outskirts of the municipality.

Map 1: Location of the district of Sabinov



Prepared by: K. Matlovičová

⁴ The municipality Ostrovany is located 2,7km away from the above mentioned north-south line connection

Map 2: Location of selected municipalities within the district of Sabinov



Proceed by: K. Matlovičová

Pečovská Nová Ves

According to the latest population and housing census in 2011 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2012), together 2 546 inhabitants lived in Pečovská Nová Ves. From the total number of population, less than 18% (i.e. 453) registered for the Roma nationality. According to unofficial data, their number in the municipality is approximately 600 (24%; Atlas 2010 in Matlovičová et al. 2012). For the last 20 years, their number has doubled. More than half of them are under the age of 18. The highest level of education achieved in the Roma community is secondary education without graduation.

From a spatial perspective, the local Roma community is segregated from the majority population, concentrated in two concentrations in the northern part of the urban area of the municipality along the creek Ľutinka (picture 1). The character of the built-up area is very diverse - from shacks to brick houses. There are also two blocks of flats. One contains 12 flats (from 1990), and the second contains 11 flats of lower standard (from 2007).

Picture 1: Location of the Roma settlement in Pečovská Nová Ves



Based on: www.openstreetmap.org, proceed by: K. Matlovičová

The municipality is fully electrified, has its own water supply, sewerage and gas supply. There is a nursery and primary school, pediatrician, a general practitioner and dentist, pharmacy, 4 retail grocery shops, two shops of consumer goods and 5 bars and pubs.

Although the attitude of the local government to solve problems in this area can definitely be described as very active and long-term (over 17 years), visible results are not at the level that competent people would wish. The good news is that despite the little success, the mayor considers this approach as the only possible, arguing that inaction would the whole situation only worsen.

The concept of the local government in relation to the local Roma community is based on two priorities: a) improve housing conditions and b) job creation.

a)

In order to improve the Roma standards of living, Pečovská Nová Ves has realised perhaps each of the possible forms of help. In 1990, in the municipality, two multi-storey apartment buildings were built. The following period showed that just the building followed by a passive approach the problem of housing in the local community did not solve. For 14 years, not only was the municipality in a large debt because of not paying for the rental, water and energy, but also the buildings were devastated to the extent that one of them was necessary to demolish for security reasons. After this experience, the municipality has changed the approach.

In 2004 - 2007 with the help of grants from the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic in the amount of more than 130 thousand €, the municipality built apartment building with 11 flats of lower standard. When people wanted to get a new flat in this apartment building, they had to work 20% of its construction. Three tenants disagreed with this condition, so the municipality found other candidates in the local community who after meeting the condition got a new flat. To avoid the problem of re-indebtedness, the municipality used the institute

of special recipient of social benefits⁵ (IOP) in payments for rents. Families, where IOP was used, were no longer indebted. With the help of a local community worker, they began to teach how to manage money, which they received from the state, more effectively. The activity of community worker proved to be very useful not only in solving common problems in the Roma community, but also in improving the communication between government and the people from the community.

Although it might seem that the municipality has found the way how to solve the issue of housing, the opposite is true. The construction of rental apartments in the mentioned way was evaluated as a good solution but only in the case that it would reduce the amount of red tape and obstacles from the government and other institutions. One example of incomprehensible attitude of the companies involved in the construction was uncompromising attitude of the Eastern-Slovak waterworks and sewerage in question of measuring water supply, when they forced municipality to accept, in that way, wrong solution of installation only one single water meter for the whole apartment complex and their reluctance to accede to the individual measurement through water meters for each apartment unit separately. The result of the complex similar problems was that the municipality government rejected further rental housing construction for its inefficiency. High financial burden, demand for human capital as well as its time consuming, caused by the extent of necessary administration of the state, its agencies and public institutions (land settlement, documentation, utilities etc.), the municipality evaluated to be ineffective with regard to the achieved results. In the words of the mayor: "... I figured that if all this I " invest "in land settlement and help to Roma to build their own housing, this activity will be much cheaper, I will have much less troubles with it, and especially I will not burden the municipality for the next 30 years. "

The above mentioned reasons and experience led to the strategy change in improving the quality of the Roma housing and redirecting the efforts to property rights settlement of land as well as technical training for individual housing construction (the slope sanitation, the soil reinforcement, construction of protective walls etc.). The advantage for the municipality is not only reduction of the administrative burden of the municipality, but mostly greater involvement of the Roma in the process of creation and recovery of housing according to their own ideas. This solution has also the potential to stimulate into greater responsibility for follow-up care and maintenance of their houses, and not least also provides the opportunity for clever Roma, who will serve as an excellent example for others. Roma have shown a great interest for such type of administrative and technical support that exceeds even the current possibilities of government and gives the hope for positive results.

In the area of improving Roma housing in Pečovská Nová Ves, at the same time, the municipality realizes the process of legalization of existing dwellings (other than wooden shacks) built without a planning permission, which allows Roma to get housing allowance from the state. So far, local government has managed to legalize more than half of the brick houses in the municipality.

One of the extremely negatively perceived problems in the Roma settlements is their cleanness. In Pečovská Nová Ves, they found a very simple solution of this problem. In the past, uncontrolled and unregulated construction of houses in the municipality led to the deterioration of access for trucks. Current composition of the houses in the municipality does not allow vehicles for garbage collection to enter the municipality. Irregular waste disposal from capacity container situated on the outskirts of the settlement the situation did not solve and the problem with the accumulated waste was getting worse. In this situation, it was also very difficult to explain and recover money from the Roma by statutory fee for municipal waste exports. The municipality, therefore, deployed dozens of small litter bins for the municipal waste so that they are easily accessible from every house. In the small municipal services, three Roma are chosen whose job is every day on specially adapted carriage remove the waste from the settlement and the content dump into capacity container. Mayor describes the result: *"I do not remember the time when the settlement was so clean."* The local Roma got used to the fact that waste is exported regularly, waste containers are close and, therefore, they have no reason to throw it elsewhere.

b)

⁵ Law no. 599/2003 on assistance in material need - § 28 Special recipient

The second strategic goal of life improving of the Roma community in Pečovská Nová Ves is to increase their employment. This is a problem that cannot be solved for a long time and the situation is getting worse. The Roma lose work habits, work discipline is missing. Today, many Roma are unable to work full eight hours per day and in no way able to travel to work outside the settlement.

About 40 years ago, the situation was completely different. In 1968, brickyard, which employed about 100 people, of whom more than half were Roma, was established. Until 1990, there was no unemployed Roma in the village. But at that time (the first period of Mečiar government) generous payment system of financial support to unemployed was introduced so the Roma started to leave their jobs. In 1995, the factory was finally closed.

To maintain employment and because of the reason for people not losing their work habits, the municipality began to use different forms of employment. Municipal company, carpentry workshop, building production, restaurant, tailoring workshop were established, municipality applied for various grants etc. Mayor notes: at the time, *"... I started to be more businessman than the mayor,"* for this reason, the municipality finally decided to sell its company in 2000.

The mayor does not give up his fight with the current discouraging welfare system. Currently, he offers the opportunity for the local Roma to engage in the municipality regeneration in small municipal services and activation activities. On average, the offer is used by 50 to 100 Roma. This kind of work is welcome but it does not solve the problem of the Roma employment complexly. Therefore, the municipality tries to raise funds to restore the production in the former brickyard, which would allow employing a larger number of the Roma who have already expressed their interest.

From above mentioned activities, Pečovská Nová Ves organizes the number of other activities that cannot be described in detail because of the extent of the study. As this example shows, even if the achievement of positive results does not occur immediately, hope still remains. It can be concluded that the only way is a long-term intensive cooperation with marginalized groups and creating the real opportunities that could help to change the unfavourable social situation by their own effort.

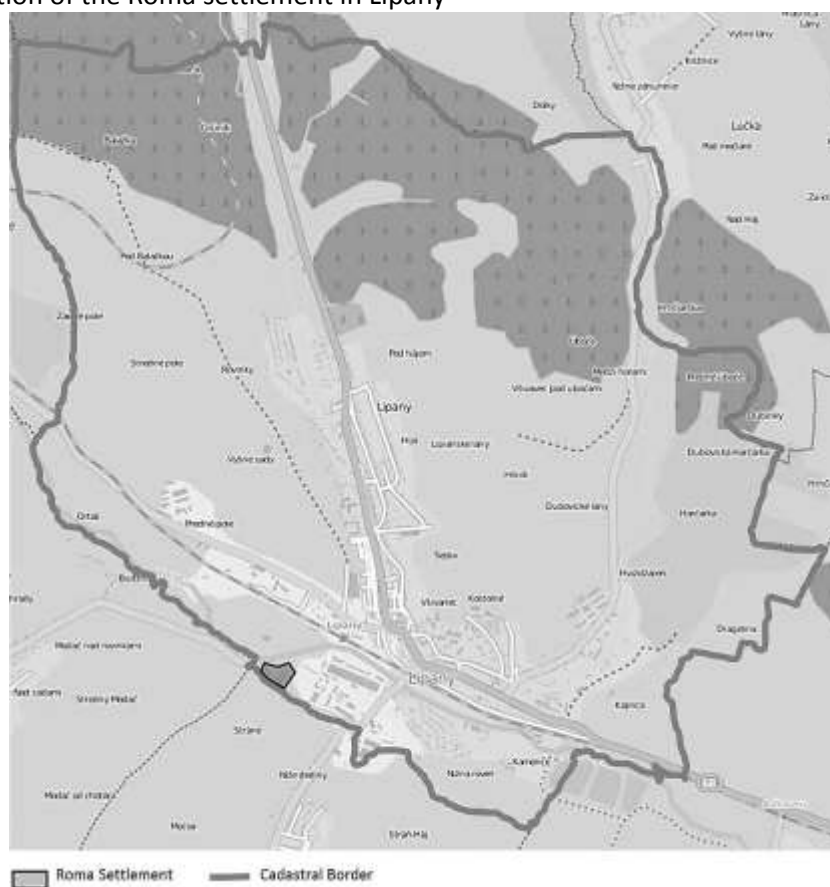
Lipany

Approximately 7 kilometres northwest from Pečovská Nová Ves (not even 10 minutes by car), the town Lipany is located. It is the largest municipality from three described examples in this study. From among of selected municipalities in this study, Lipany is outermost (13 km) from the district town of Sabinov.

With a population of 6 427 inhabitants (2011; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2010), Lipany is the second largest municipality in the district of Sabinov. With regard to the long-term unfavourable economic situation in the region, the number of unemployed (especially among graduates, single mothers and marginalized groups) and the number of dysfunctional or single-parent families is increasing. For this reason, under the Town Office, independent Commission for Social issues and the Roma community was established.

The Roma community in Lipany has spatially compact character. With the exception of a few families who are integrated into the majority, the major part of the Roma community live in the part of the city termed as "behind the railway line" nearby the river Torysa, railway line and industrial area that is 1 km away from the city centre (picture 2). The total number of population is 630 inhabitants (Atlas 2010, in Matlovičová et al. 2012), where 52% (i.e. 327) of them are children under the age of 15. According to official statistics, in Lipany, just 592 Roma registered as the Roma nationality (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2012).

Picture 2: Location of the Roma settlement in Lipany



Based on: www.openstreetmap.org, proceed by: K. Matlovičová

Documented history of the Roma in Lipany goes back to period of the Slovak state, when it consisted of about 205 people. After their expatriating from the city centre, they built around 40 shacks in the part of town called Kamence. Until 1948, they used to produce adobe bricks and did casual works in agriculture (hoeing, harvesting, etc.). During the socialism, 4 blocks of flats were built for them (8 housing units were in each block of flat) in two locations (Jarkova street and "behind the railway line") and shacks were demolished. The condition of these blocks of flats, after 1989, necessitated the construction of new buildings and additional movement, but this time only in one location. The situation did not improve as debts for rental and payments for services and energy continued to grow, flats were in a bad hygienic state and relationships with the majority population were continuously getting worse.

The situation improved in the late 1990's, when the city established the Institute of special recipient (1998) and the Roma Community Centre (2002).

The solution for non-payment of rental in Lipany was very similar as in Pečovská Nová Ves. In collaboration with the Central Office of Labour, Social affairs and Family, Lipany also took the advantage of the institute of special recipient of social benefits⁶ (IOP). With an agreement of regular deductions from housing allowance, the original amount of owed money for rental in excess of € 19 000 to € 3 000 has been reduced. The town uses IOP (the institute of special recipient of social benefits) every time the problem occurs again. IOP has achieved a significant reduction in the Roma indebtedness not just in rental but also for other charges (such as removal and disposal of domestic waste).

⁶ Law no. 599/2003 on assistance in material need - § 28 Special recipient

These optimistic results helped local governments to further improvement of the Roma housing. Therefore, they bought necessary building material and with renter of flats of lower standard, organized self-help treatment of the house facade followed by construction work of the surrounding under the supervision of an expert. From 2005 to 2006, with the public support, the town implemented the construction of 24 flats of lower standard in the area "behind the railway line" and like in Pečovská Nová Ves, competent allowed the Roma to participate in this construction. Then according to the degree of involvement of renters during the construction, the town determined the amount of rental (from 20 to 33 € per month). Compared with Pečovská Nová Ves, in this community in Lipany, individual housing almost absent, which means that the local Roma rely on local government in the issue of the provision of housing. The establishment of the Roma community centre that concentrate mainly on leisure activities (especially for children who parents did not take care of them) or services related to employment advice is considered as very positive. Intensive work with the community helped the Centre to identify the main problems in the local Roma community. These included:

- The unpreparedness of the Roma to go to work because of strong family ties (they could not imagine a seclusion or life outside their community);
- The absence of elementary skills to manage financial resources;
- The failure to comply with work discipline;
- The unawareness of the basic principles of labour market and social system (they thought that it is possible to simultaneously receive social support and salary, after unveiling the reality, they refused to work), etc.

Mainly field social work has a great merit for the success which was achieved in Lipany. Field social work was mainly concentrated in a few problematic families with the lowest social skills which were perceived negatively even within the Roma community.

We provide an example of the work with the family that lived in very humble circumstances. 17 people lived in one room with only one bed and stove. Father was an aggressive alcoholic and family suffered the most. The town allocated the family the flat of lower standard and started to work intensively with this family. From the social benefits which family received, gradually, IOP arranged furniture for this family. The rest of money was allocated to four weeks. Social investigation revealed the usury in the family and inappropriate use of money. Field social workers, therefore, began to assist the family regularly in purchasing food. They found out that the mother of the family does not know the value of money and, therefore, she was buying the most expensive goods. They taught her that buying basic or semi-finished products are cheaper than finished products (for example pudding, etc.). Thanks to field social workers, the mother gradually learned to cook, take care of the household and provide hygiene care for her children. The father of the family was still a big problem. Field social workers decided that the money was paid only to mother in cash, thus, gradually, they achieved that their father did not spend money for alcohol. With the help of IOP, not only did the family pay the whole debt for the rental but also the family have money for regular meals for children in school and kindergarten, and so their overall standard of living was improved. Children's school attendance improved, children have appropriate clothing, regularly cooked meal, clean apartment furnished not only with basic furniture. The best information was that the father of the family is no longer completely addicted to alcohol and became an exemplary father. Today, both parents are involved in the activation work and the cooperation with them is very good.

As it can be seen in this example of socially weaker families within the Roma community, we face many problems that arise from a lack of personal hygiene. This is particularly the incidence of various diseases (e.g. scabies) and parasites (e.g. lice, fleas). The situation in this regard improved after the opening of Hygienic Centre on 1st July 2005. There are separate showers for men and women, toilets and laundry with two baths, washing machines and one spin-dryer. The flat of administrator is also a part of this Centre who is from the local community. The use of the centre is charged only symbolically (€ 0.33 per washing and € 0.10 for showering). Thank to field social workers, who teach mothers the basics of personal hygiene and assist them in bathing their children, respectively in lice removing etc., it was achieved that the centre is currently used by about 20% of

the families of the Roma community from "behind the railway line" area. During weekends, the centre is used mainly by children and young people attending secondary boarding schools outside the city, so they are getting to the level of their classmates in school. The work of field social workers is also indispensable in this case. Not only did field social workers teach the Roma personal hygiene, but they also taught the Roma women that it is more efficient to wash dirty clothes than throw them away or burn and in local second hand buy new one (it was the standard practice before). Regular buying of so called hygiene packet (including washing powder) for the families, which are the part of IOP, met with a very positive response.

A very common problem in the Roma communities is shoplifting. Many of the lower standard flats are heated only by stoves on solid fuel, so especially in the winter months, problems with theft of wood or wood material often occur (Roma often heated their flats with waste, clothing, shoes and pieces of their own furniture). The town came with a clever solution. It started selling licenses for collection of waste wood from urban forests for € 5, while collection days are Friday and Saturday. This helped to reduce the thefts and the town found a solution for the use of wood waste from logging. The town coffer was filled.

Already outlined problem of criminality and maintenance of the order in the Roma community from "behind the railway line" area was partly eliminated by the so-called Roma patrols. In the activation work, the town employed six Roma patrols, who closely cooperate with the state police. In addition, during various events, the town uses so called volunteer guardians of public order without any financial reward. They try to detect crime, cooperate with officers during the social benefits receiving or help to protect crops of local farmers. The role of the local patrols with the assistance of local police is the control of local game rooms and rooms with gaming machines. When they detect the ineffective use of the social benefits at the expense of ensuring the family, the family is immediately integrated into IOP. Although in this case, it is not possible to withdraw social benefits completely (for example: parental allowance or pension are excluded from IOP), this will usually take remedial action.

As in other communities, also in this community, a major problem is employment. Officially, the unemployment rate among the Roma in Lipany is almost 100%, most Roma are registered at Central office of labour in the long-term (over 48 months). Currently, the town provides for unemployed the opportunity to participate in small municipal services, which are used by 86 Roma from the local community. Representatives of the town see the solution of this unflattering situation in increasing the level of education, because most of Roma finished just primary education in a special school. The positive is that thanks to the work of field social workers, first three students from the local community went to boarding school in town Prešov which is the capital of the Prešov self-governing region. Representatives of the town put the biggest hope into pre-school preparation, which is attended approximately by 60 children. It also includes the establishment of the zero grade of primary school, which is directly in the local community centre under the methodological supervision of local elementary school. The advantage is that there are two Roma woman assistants from the community who can speak the Romany language and who gained the respect of the locals. With the help of the police and other participants, the town is uncompromising in the question of truancy solution (two parents have already been sentenced). It has a very positive warning impact on other troublesome families.

Town Lipany has been realizing an active policy in relation to the local Roma community for many years. It has already tried a number of activities, many of which were successful. Definitely, no one of them is judged negatively. They are aware that inaction would bring only deterioration of the situation and further social decline in already greatly impoverished Roma community in their city. Therefore, they are determined to continue in these activities so first positive changes could become permanent.

Ostrovany

The smallest municipality, which we chose for an example, is Ostrovany (1803 inhabitants in 2011; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2010). The municipality is connected to all utilities. It has private wastewater treatment plant, municipal office, grocery shop, pub, kindergarten, community centre, and agricultural cooperative company can be found here.

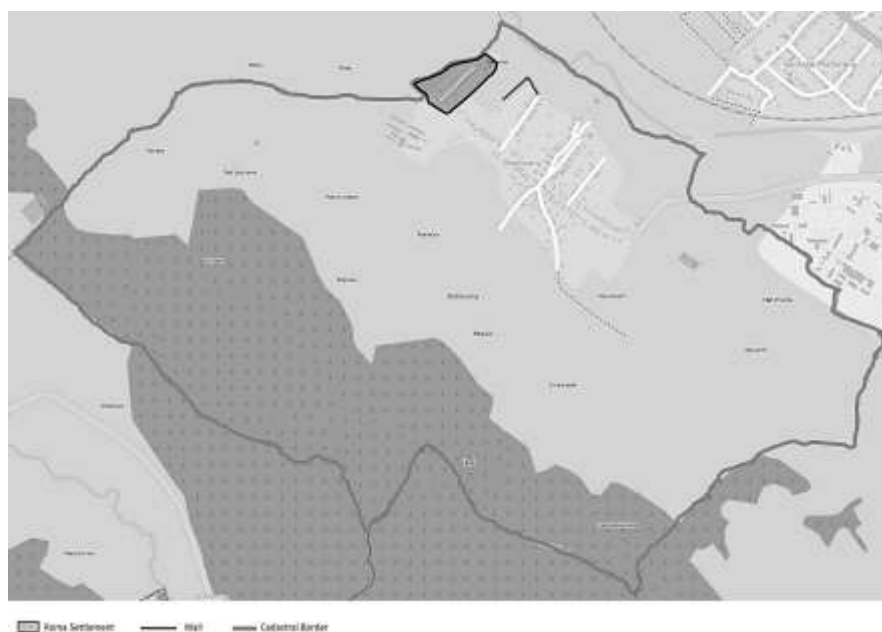
The Roma community is the most numerous among the above characterized municipalities. According to estimate, 1 279 Roma live in this municipality (Atlas 2010, in Matlovičová et al. 2012) what is 71% of the total number of population. According to official statistics, although only 977 Roma registered for the Roma nationality, their share in the total number of population is still majority (in this case 54%). A specific feature of this municipality is its very negative media image as "anti-Roma" village, which is famous for cause called "wall"⁷. The reality is quite different from this form.

The mayor thinks that the roots of gradually increasing tension can be found in history. Until 1950's, there was no Roma community in Ostrovany. According to a decision of the former regime, first Roma were moved there from neighbouring municipality Šarišské Michaľany when in the place where they originally had a settlement, pharmaceutical company Imuna began with the construction of its factory. In his view, people still did not acquiesce to this "injustice" and still live with the prejudices and sense of injustice of the decision of this time. In spite of the effort on a consistent and in relation to both sides balanced approach, the mayor like any other mayors considers the biggest barrier *"... the social system, which is not extremely generous, but it is extremely de-motivating."* Despite many positive changes, relationships between the majority and the local Roma community in this municipality are not very good compared to the other two communities. In Ostrovany, social distance is probably the greatest.

From spatial term, the community is situated in the northern part of the urban area of the municipality (picture 3). In terms of representation of social classes, this community is very heterogeneous (almost all social classes can be found there), what is obviously reflected in the variety of the local dwellings (brick houses, blocks of flats and shacks). Even in this municipality, representatives decided to use the options of legalization of illegal constructions. As part of the land, where these building were built, belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, who cannot sell the land, representatives agreed to exchange it for other land, owned by the municipality. These lands were then offered for sale to the local Roma. Price, which was set by experts and increased by administrative expenses of municipality, was half times lower than in other areas and, therefore, it reached a level that the Roma were able to pay. The motivation to buy land and start a rather difficult bureaucratic process of legalization was also the possibility to get public housing allowance. The municipality, of course, will benefit from it in the form of the promise of better care for houses by the Roma owners. The often recommended solution by media to demolish illegal buildings in the municipality, the municipality considers as movement of the problem to another place and not as solution.

⁷ In October 2009, the municipality built a concrete wall that separates the local settlement from the nearby gardens of the majority population. The investment for 13-thousand € should have prevented stealing of agricultural products, but in no way limit the availability of members of the Roma community to the general civic institutions and community facilities. The construction brought a great media response and relationships worsening between the Roma community and other inhabitants of the municipality.

Picture 3: Location of the Roma settlement in Ostrovany



Based on: www.openstreetmap.org, proceed by: K. Matlovičová

The high representation of the Roma in the municipality, together with the quite often presented fact of a low level of education and generally small range of job opportunities in the municipality and in the surroundings, shows a high percentage of unemployment in the community, which reaches almost 100%. The biggest obstacle in this case is the first mentioned reason. Most of the long-term unemployed Roma in Ostrovany did not complete primary education. The problem is that there is only a special primary school in the municipality, which is attended only by the Roma from the local community. The nearest primary school are about 3 km away in Šarišské Michaľany, Medzany or 6 km away in Sabinov. The problem of the segregation of the Roma children (especially in Šarišské Michaľany), and limiting bus linkages to surrounding municipalities (children have to travel to school earlier, sometimes 2 hours before the start of classes because of crowded later buses), forced competent to consider a new project of primary school in Ostrovany. Secondary schools are currently attended by 8 students and 25 completed secondary education without graduation. A positive example for others can be one of Roma who finished secondary education with graduation and with the indenture, as well as one university graduate.

Increasing the educational level of the Roma led municipality to increase activities in the area of field social work, which is long-term realized with the help of two field social workers and two assistants. Since 2008, a community centre that focuses on working with children in pre-school age (to 5 years) has been opened. It is pre-school education, focused on children preparation for successful attendance of primary school (children learn colours, fruits and vegetables, geometric shapes, they learn basic hygiene habits, etc.). Like in the other mentioned municipalities also in Ostrovany, centre focused its activities on legal advice and training for parents, different courses (e.g. sewing, which was also attended by man) etc.

An interesting activity in the field of adult education is a savings and loan program, which is organized by civic association ETP⁸ in selected municipalities in Slovakia. A condition for receiving financial bonus for housing improvement is attending a training course on family financial management and making a saving plan and then using the amount of saved money. When all conditions are fulfilled, participants can receive favourable loan for that purpose. A curiosity compared to other municipalities is that about 30% of people from socially disadvantaged groups from majority population in Ostrovany participated in this program. In spite of different media image

⁸ Civic Association ETP Slovakia - Centre for Sustainable Development

of the municipality, the mayor considers this fact as an important step towards convergence of both communities.

Conclusion

Described examples of municipalities Lipany, Pečovská Nová Ves and Ostrovany are on many levels very similar. All three municipalities are located in the same district and are only a few kilometres away from each other. Despite some local differences, they have similar starting points and approaches to work with the Roma community, what is quite unique in Slovakia.

What is in these three communities, in our view, very interesting is that despite its geographical proximity and very similar complex of realized activities, they are very different in the quality of life and social conditions.

Probably the worst situation in relation to the majority population is in Ostrovany. The Roma are concentrated in segregated settlements on the outskirts of the village, which based on the level and type of housing is internally very heterogeneous - from brick family home to the very poor one-room shacks. Mutual coexistence of both communities is marked by unaccepted sense of injustice from more than 60 years ago, when there was displaced the local community of the Roma from the neighbouring municipality. Although the local government tries to convergent both communities by intensive activities, tension is further increased by the negative media coverage which mostly signed to creation of a negative image of the municipality.

The situation is completely different in Pečovská Nová Ves, where the community compared to Ostrovany is more homogeneous. Almost all houses have utilities and wooden shacks occur minimally. Living with a local majority is much better than in Ostrovany and it is getting better thanks to the activities and work in the Roma community.

Probably the highest degree of homogeneity has the town Lipany. Most of the local Roma, with the exception of a few integrated Roma, live in one location - in the rental flats of lower standard. Lipany has been working with the Roma community for several years and have tried all available activities. Many of them were successful, many have not been completed yet, but many activities have brought positive results. Despite intensive work, the standard of living of the local Roma is low and coexistence with the surrounding majority is very difficult.

All competent agree that stronger support from the state and its organizations is necessary. At least change of the current de-motivating system of social support, which has a devastating impact on shaping the way of life of marginalized groups in Slovakia, as well as providing continuous support of employment in these communities. The positive is that even small progress, the attitude of all above mentioned authorities in relation to other activities in the Roma communities is equally positive. They are sure that patience, equality of approach and further effort of the Roma integration into society is vital. In other words, they believe that if they did not work with the communities, this would most likely lead to their further social decline and uncontrolled growth of problems.

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