

## Roma Ethnic Tourism: Could it Works in Slovakia?

Daniela Hutarova\*, Ivana Kozelova

Department of Ecology, Institute of Landscape Ecology of Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

### ABSTRACT

The study of the heritage of Roma culture offers a great wealth of resources for tourism development. Some alternative tourism products include, for example, Roma festivals, theatre, music, painting, fashion, gastronomy, and creative tourism. This would be particularly beneficial in the marginal and less-favored regions. Today, the Roma ethnic group in Slovakia is more internally divided culturally, socially, and sub-ethnically than in the days of socialism. The disintegration of the traditional Roma family has led to many negative effects and crisis phenomena. Building a positive relationship of Roma towards their ethnicity, could prevent the loss of Roma cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Pro-poor tourism; Ethnic tourism; Identity; Ethnicity

### INTRODUCTION

Within the territory of the Slovak Republic, there are currently so-called corners of extreme poverty, found mainly in isolated rural areas and in areas with a high proportion of Roma in the population [1]. Roma living segregated in a marginalized area form a closed community with a homogenized structure, which creates the phenomenon of so-called multiplied marginalization [2,3]. Other authors [4], refer to such areas as sites of "historical marginalization". Individual territories are characterized by their own specific makeup of the local population (locals, tourists, employees, managers responsible for their management and marketing, etc.) who dynamize the whole territorial system of services [5]. Ethically and beneficially, marginalized Roma people who inhabit this area should also be included in the creation and consumption of tourism, based on the so-called pro-poor tourism, which aims to strengthen the capacity to support declining communities, to revitalize and preserve their traditions, local or regional specificities. Another major challenge is to strengthen the environmental awareness of local poor communities and to stimulate the conservation activities of unique natural resources, which will ultimately serve as a differentiated basis for the tourist destination brand [6]. It can be seen that a series of tourism patterns (e.g., ethnic tourism, tribal tourism, and heritage tourism) exist that are based on cultural resources and contribute greatly to pro-poor growth and the development of regions in

terms of "pro-poor tourism" [7]. Ethnic tourism is motivated by the search for an ethnic group or indigenous group with an exotic or unique culture and is characterized by interaction and participation in living culture. The main elements of ethnic tourism include information (about traditional activities such as performances, dances, ceremonies, information about the history of the area, information about the current life of the inhabitants), activities (visiting indigenous dwellings, observing and participating in traditional activities, contact with local people) and consumption (consumption of traditional or simple products or souvenirs, consumption of traditional food and drinks) [8]. Competitive strategies for poor areas also include the promotion of forms of tourism that are largely based on available and specific local resources (cultural tourism, agritourism, rural tourism). Based on local characteristics, these forms of tourism are usually a great attraction for foreign tourists and can be implemented without large investments and extensive infrastructure construction [6]. The main conditions that explain the differences in community tourism in developing countries include socio-economic and cultural factors, politics, government and governance, land ownership, social cohesion, assimilation of external stakeholders and type of visitors. In order for initiatives for the development of pro-poor tourism and community tourism to be successful, its ethical issues need to be addressed. The way of doing tourism business with local communities needs to be reviewed and regulated through poverty reduction and community development programs. The principles of such tourism

**Correspondence to:** Daniela Hutarova, Department of Ecology, Institute of Landscape Ecology of Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia, E-mail: daniela.hutarova@savba.sk

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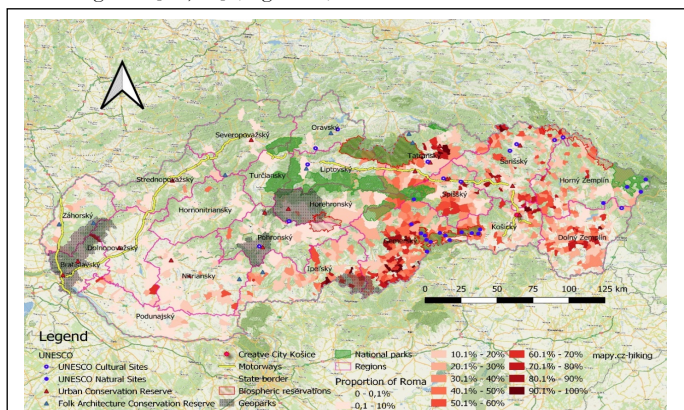
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must be applied sensitively and effectively and should not include the marketing rhetoric of the exploitative economic "development" of poor marginalized people [9]. Caring for poor people dependent on tourism should also be a priority in interventions and policies to revitalize tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic [10].

## ROMA IN SLOVAKIA

The name Roma, which originated from the name of the independent Indian ethnic Dome and which they themselves used for their designation, is from an etymological point of view very old, considerably older than the name Gypsy. Gypsies were named by the local population of a group of people who travelled in Europe in the 12th-13th centuries. They called themselves "princes of Little Egypt" in the Peloponnese. The name Gypsy was domesticated and officially used in the geographical conditions of Central and Eastern Europe until 1990 [11]. The terminological ambiguity in the issues of ethnic and nationality of the Roma is currently dealt with by the government's definition, which defines them as citizens whom the majority considers to be Roma [12]. From the middle ages to the present, the Roma have been the target of racial discrimination and outright genocide and are currently the most persecuted minority in Europe [13]. Nevertheless, the number and share of Roma in the Slovak population is constantly increasing and their migration to other districts increases the urgency of solving the so-called "Roma issue" in these regions [14,15] (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Proportion of the Roma population in the municipalities of Slovakia.

The first data on the number of Roma in Slovakia come from 1770, when approximately 18,000 to 20,000 Roma lived in our territory, a large part of whom lived a nomadic lifestyle. According to the Census of Population, Houses and Dwellings in the Slovak Republic, 76,000 inhabitants (1.4% of the total population of the Slovak Republic) declared themselves to be Roma in 1991, in 2001 it was 90,000 inhabitants (1.7% of the total population), and in 2011 already 106,000 inhabitants (1.96% of the total population of the Slovak Republic) [16]. As far as the use of the Romani language is concerned, the number of Roma is higher than 120,000. From a demographic point of view, the number of Roma is estimated at more than 400,000 [17], according to the latest data from 270,000 to 520,000 [18]. According to the middle most probable variant of the population development forecast, their number could reach

almost 590,000 in 2030, which is 10.6% of the total population of Slovakia [14]. 71% of Romani men and 75% of Romani women are long-term unemployed. Roma make up almost 30% of the volume of paid social benefits [12], but with each new child there is an obstacle to women's participation in the labour market, which in turn reduces the living standards of the family [19,20]. However, securing the main source of income through child allowances gives women control over the family budget, which is reflected in their more dominant position in the otherwise strongly patriarchal Roma community [21,22]. At present, there are three main groups of Roma living in Slovakia: The most numerous are Rumungers (90% of Slovak Roma), who have lived in our territory for at least 300 years. Wlachike Roma (5%-10%) are descendants of nomadic Roma from Romanian Wallachia and have a higher standard of living than Rumungers. Another group is the Hungarian Roma-Ungrike Roma. A small group consists of Sinti "German Roma" [23]. The vast majority of Roma profess the Catholic Church (75%-80% of the Roma joined it in 2001), but their current spiritual world is characterized by syncretism (merging of individual deities or entire religious systems), high adaptability (very flexible adaptation to new stimuli) and identity, (ethnic identity associated with humiliation and non-recognition are replaced by professional or denominational identity), resulting in a very specific form of religiosity-multi-layered confessionality [24]. After Velvet revolution in 1989, companies in construction, industry, state property and cooperatives in agriculture, in which Roma men and women also worked, disappeared. The high unemployment rate was reflected in an increase in economic migration to the Czech Republic and, after joining the EU, to England, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. Some unemployed Roma began to make a living from occasional, illegal work and petty theft [25]. The Roma ethnic group in Slovakia is currently more internally divided than in the days of socialism, culturally, socially and subethnically. The disintegration of the traditional Roma family brought many negative and crisis phenomena, such as an unusual form of parasitism and loss of values or disrespect for individual creativity [22]. The reasons can be found in the interruption of continuity in the (none) transmission of cultural values (language, traditions, history, specifics of culture, values, norms) from generation to generation and the overall position in society [23]. Until recently, the socialist state promoted the cultural settlement of the Roma with other societies until the final fusion of the "socially and culturally backward population characterized by the characteristics of the way of life" with a clear denial of their ethnicity. The possibilities of cultural enjoyment, capturing and developing Roma culture and talents were little used. The state's socio-charitable policy did not allow the Roma to become the subject of their socio-cultural integration [26]. This long period of violent assimilation policy has left negative traces on attitudes towards one's own ethnic cultural heritage, overcoming fears, reluctance and inability (de facto uneducated to illiterate ethnicities) to declare one's ethnicity. On the other hand, many Roma are interested in their own culture, maternal culture and address them as an important attribute of their ethnicity, roots and identity [23]. But ethnicity is not a static concept, it is something that can change over time [8]. The social decline of Roma-populated areas may cause an even more significant

spread of the so-called culture of poverty in the region [27]. Reliance on social (family and friends) and civic resources (state, organizations and support experts) appears to be one of the work strategies based on the availability of resources [28]. However, the financing of regions is an unsystematic step, an inefficient misconception and yields little results [29]. Likewise, disrespect for the socio-cultural characteristics of the Roma ethnic group and its heterogeneity is at the core of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of programs to help the Roma. An inclusive strategy based on territorial capital is needed, revealing regional potential and carefully and holistically conceived projects to use this potential [12]. The ability to build relationships with non-Roma is also considered an important skill [1]. However, only "part of the Roma population, not the whole, is the bearer of patterns of generational poverty" [25]. In principle, the situation of the Roma is more favorable in economically more developed regions compared to the Roma living in poorer areas. However, the high concentration of Roma has a direct retarding effect on the development of some areas [17,22]. A possible solution for such marginal regions is to create such development conditions that will enable the mobilization and use of their own human, social and cultural capital and allow them to integrate into the development stream together with the rest of the regions, which could enrich Slovakia by 7% to 11 % Of GDP per year [12].

## THE HERITAGE OF ROMA CULTURE

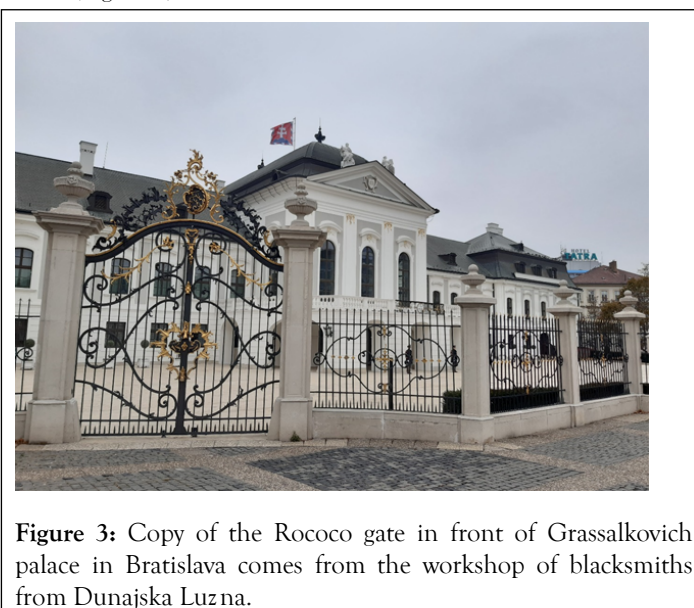
The gypsies visibly enriched the cultures of the nations with which they lived. They have achieved artistic careers and fame in traditional fields such as music, dance and singing. Their originality is based on creative interpretation [30]. Various elements of spiritual culture have been preserved in more archaic and conservative forms, as socio-cultural development in the Roma has generally been slower than in the majority population. But their own world is also original [24]. They conveyed their culture, language and identity socially on the basis of linguistic evidence, customs and superstitions. The Romani language has thirteen dialects in the Czechoslovak region [22]. It is richly illustrated by travels in Europe and has absorbed significantly more influences than their lifestyle, behavior and way of communication [31]. Slovak Roma is one of the three main dialects spoken by about 80%-85% of the Roma population. Roma in the south and southwest of Slovakia use the so-called ahi-dialect, sometimes also called Hungarian. The third dialect of Romani is the dialect of the so-called Wlachike Roma, which has preserved some ancient features and for other Roma-Rumungers is incomprehensible. The remnants of a group of German Sints are also protecting their language, and after tragic experiences during World War II, they will not allow it to be declassified from the majority. Due to insufficient research, an almost unknown group of Romanian troughs maker remains settled in some localities of eastern Slovakia and south of central Slovakia. The Romani language was standardized for the first time in the world in Slovakia in 2008. The Declaration of the Roma of the Slovak Republic on the standardization of the Romani language in the Slovak Republic states that it is an integral part of cultural heritage and its preservation is in the public interest. Most Roma in Slovakia actively use their

language and that is why its study, support of development and practical use is extremely necessary, at least as a supporting language to increase the cultural level of the Roma minority and the quality of school education of Roma pupils [23]. Despite the fact that language is one of the basic signs of ethnicity, many Romani children no longer speak Romani, but at the same time, they do not speak the teaching language well. With the growth of education, some Roma cease to declare their own ethnicity and consider themselves Slovaks or Hungarians. The parents of Romani children themselves do not recommend the use of the Romani language in kindergarten, nor do they agree with its teaching in primary schools, as Roma should try to live like other residents and should not be different from them [32]. Because of their ignorance of the official state language, some Roma also have limited employment. A phenomenon known as "secondary illiteracy" is also appearing in Slovakia. In addition, the Roma community does not accept educated Roma as "theirs" [33]. However, it is very important that such an important field of art as telling Roma fairy tales, stories from the lives of their ancestors based on the tradition of oral presentation is used in school, television or theatre before they are forgotten in today's conditions of uniformity of cultural consumption [30]. In the past, the musical talent of the Gypsies as well as their work with metals and other crafts were highly valued, especially by the nobility, and there was great interest in them [34]. Gypsy folk music has even become useful material for many works by European composers, such as F. Listz, J. Brahms, J. V. Hummel, F. Schubert, J. Haydn, L. v. Beethoven [35]. One of the first known Romani musicians was Cinka Panna (1711-1772), who reworked several songs of her grandfather, which she quickly became popular with (Song of Three Widows, Dance of the Dead, Songs-of the ancient fathers, etc.). As the only Romani woman, she entered the lexicons as early as the 18th century and is mentioned in contemporary foreign encyclopaedias of music. We meet her character in dozens of literary works, historical novels, poems and legends, in plays, and many folk songs are associated with her [35]. Jozko Piťo was an outstanding Romany violinist and conductor of a folk band who contributed significantly to the national consciousness of the Slovak nation in the second half of the 19th century. Many of his contemporary Slovak cultural figures (Andrej Sládkovič, Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, Martin Kukucín) greatly admired him and made prominent reference to him in their works [36]. Contemporary Romani music is presented and promoted by the Romani Internet Radio Gipsy.sk. The genre is varied, with csardas predominating, but they also play gospel music, hip-hop, fox, funk, rom pop, roma jazz, Wlachike music and Romani folk music. Among the most important Roma bands are the Sendrei family-Koka-vakèere Lavutár. They became famous for their collaboration with film music maker Hans Zimmer (Sher-lock Holmes Game of Shadows, Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Sendrei family at the premiere of Sherlock Holmes.

The uniqueness of the band also lies in the educational activities of its members, who strive to preserve the Roma cultural tradition for future generations. Through several projects (local Community Center, Balva fest), they are involved in the diverse work of the cultural and educational civic association Láčno Drom, for example by presenting their music and culture in poor Roma settlements. Gypsy devils are among the bands that have achieved success abroad as well. In addition to music, the most frequent occupation of the Roma was blacksmithing. Parish reports about Roma blacksmiths state that they were hardworking people. Common products included nails, chains, horseshoes, hinges and bars, rings and sealing rings, locks, two-handed knives and blades. According to the Census of Gypsies in Hungary from 1893, 4074 Roma blacksmiths worked in Slovakia, at that time mostly in Hungary. Roma blacksmiths differed from other Roma by a higher standard of living, and non-Roma respected them. They have become a cultural role model for other Roma. In the 20th century, Romani blacksmiths still worked in 166 villages in Slovakia. They saw the possibility of applying their craft in new conditions in the reorientation towards artistic blacksmithing. It prevailed most significantly in village of Dunajská Lužná-Nové Kosariska (Bratislava region) where Alexander Reindl and Viliam Sarkozy work (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Copy of the Rococo gate in front of Grassalkovich palace in Bratislava comes from the workshop of blacksmiths from Dunajská Lužná.

Setfan Racz and his successors work in Bolesov (Považie region). In the Gemer region, Igor Radic and his sons in the village of Klenovec are still engaged in this craft. The Museum of Roma Culture in Slovakia is currently located in the SNM-Museum of the Slovak Village in Jahodnícke háje in Martin. Within the regional museums, the Department of Roma Culture also operates regions with higher Roma population. The Museum of Romani Culture in Brno (Czech Republic) currently also has a large collection of preserved blacksmithing objects from Slovakia [37]. The material culture of the most backward Roma settlements is incredibly poor, so a photographic presentation of Roma culture should also include a photographic, music archive and video library [38]. An analysis of Karol Plicka's photographic collection also revealed black-and-white positives depicting Roma from the Gemer region, which he visited in 1924. Their life in the 1930s and 1950s is captured in the works of painter, graphic artist and illustrator Václav Fiala. Josef Polák also photographically documented the life of the Roma. Jozef Kolarčík-Fintický left the most comprehensive collection of documents on the Gypsy way of life.

## DISCUSSION

All communities must have real opportunities and tools that will allow them to effectively reflect their identity and aspirations in the creation and consumption of tourism [39]. However, different communities do not necessarily perceive their cultural heritage in the same way as professionals. It is also clear that part of the population, especially the Roma ethnic group, do not have a clear idea of their "heritage", as they are more busy living everyday life than thinking about cultural identity. Therefore, the perception and preservation of cultural heritage by Roma communities in rural and urban environments and the attitude of tourism authorities and operators to their inclusion in the official tourism development proposal should also be analysed. In this respect, too, the Roma are socially and economically disadvantaged, and many of the 'Roma neighbourhoods' have traditionally been considered forbidden 'no-go' areas for locals and tourists alike. At the same time, contact with the outside world is constructive for local communities. It should also be pointed out that until their socio-economic status is increased, many Slovak Roma will not publicly declare their Roma. At the same time, the higher the social capital of the Roma population and the better the activity of tourism, the lower the poverty in the region [40]. However, in supporting the development of ethnic tourism, it is important not to focus on the poverty of the Roma population, as this can create and strengthen the negative image of the Roma that prevails in the media and society. Marginalized Roma communities must be actively involved and benefit from the presentation of their cultural heritage, not in the form of a show of their poverty, dependence or some kind of "human zoo" environment [41]. Therefore, even for ethical reasons, the poor economic situation of these communities, which are most visible in the ghettoization and ostracism of the Roma, should not be considered as part of ethnic tourism. According to Zotori and Smith, local Roma are happy that tourists are interested in them, tourists perceive clean and authentic cultural and gastronomic experiences and contact with Roma very positively, although interest in this type of

tourism is only occasional. The promotion of ethnic tourism targeting the Roma minority must therefore focus on creating a positive attitude towards their culture and way of life. However, given the differences in the way of life of some Roma and non-Roma, this is not an easy task. This is evidenced by the Roma Cultural Route project, which was set up by the European Union in 2007 to support the study of European heritage and culture and which ended in 2013 [42]. The main achievements of the project are considered that the Roma Route has helped people in some European countries to overcome some prejudices against the Roma and has successfully opened a bridge of cultural exchange for Roma and non-Roma. However, tense relationships have developed between some of the project partners [43]. A positive example in the field of employment support as well as establishing cooperation with non-Roma can be seen in Slovakia, where an extremely successful innovative project took place, based on which the long-term unemployed participated in the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage monuments. In the context of the multi-layered religiosity of the Roma, the churches can play a significant role in their integration into the majority society [44]. Today, several churches, religious communities, but also many teachers, counsellors, coaches and superiors work with the Roma in Slovakia, who lead individuals, with systematic and long-term work, with respect and respect for their ethnic diversity, to internal personal change, which it is also manifested by social change in the community. However, social change in the family remains crucial, which is realized through the active use of free time, the development of knowledge, overcoming fear and inferiority, through the transformation of thinking and through the acquisition of artistic, communication and organizational skills [45]. Detailed documentation of the transformation of the culture and way of life of the Roma ethnic group in the dynamics of social development, which could also provide a source basis for understanding their current lives, could also affect the positive self-awareness process of Roma. According to Kovac [24], a shift in the social perception of integration to pluralistic multi-ethnic vision-from assimilation to emancipation-could contribute to a change in their self-identification. But the majority society allows only one possible way of integration into society-assimilation, and many Roma do not declare their ethnicity. There is also a complex system of continuous and secondary identities [46].

## CONCLUSION

Many factors contribute to the decline and extinction of Roma culture, which could be an important element in the development of tourism in marginalized regions. Support for ethnic tourism focused on Roma culture and the development of related tourism sectors could alleviate the high level of poverty of Roma families, which will continue to increase with the number of Roma and with it the economic backwardness of regions with a predominant Roma population.

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