

## Summary

The reason for initiating the project „*Monitoring of situation within Roma settlements<sup>1</sup> in Slovakia*“ was the fact that despite being one of the most striking and long-lasting problems in Slovakia, relevant information on the real situation within the Roma settlements was missing. One of the main project objectives was to acquire complex description of the situation within Roma settlements from the legislative, historical, economical, and social context. The project has been conceived broadly, in order to cover a wide area of expertise, and to be able to follow not only the mutual relationships between Roma settlements and the majority villages, but also natural bonds in between various Roma settlements creating „parallel structures“ not respecting administrative division by the state. Based on these facts, three neighboring districts of Prešov, Sabinov, and Bardejov with the total amount of 130 Roma settlements, were selected. This is the amount sufficient to record inter-settlement relations (partnerships, usury<sup>2</sup>, theft, family coalitions etc.) Nonetheless, an important factor in this sense is the fact that along with the urban/social formations, the basic social form is the complex family<sup>3</sup>, which due to inter-settlement exchange of partners and an often insensible policy of the former state uniting or dissipating Roma settlements regardless of its inner structures, became scattered in various settlements. For the same reason, the time period of the project had been set for a minimum of 1 year (the overall research took 16 months), in order to cover all the important specific periods of the year, both from the administrative point of view, as well as seasonal. From October 1999 to January 2001 the research was conducted in 52 settlements.

The methodology for monitoring was based on social and cultural anthropology. The reason for selecting this field was based on previous experience from other researches, even executed by specialized agencies or state administration bodies, concluded either as a complete research failure, or by vast amount of data gathered that did not serve any purpose of solving this problem. As seen by the authors, the advantage of socio-cultural anthropology for this project lies in methods for gathering data, as well as its *holistic*

<sup>1</sup> The term *Roma settlement* is being used to describe relatively autonomous social formations located in Slovak countryside inhabited primarily by the Roma population. The advantage of this term is based on its practicality and general use. Any attempts to introduce new terminology either by the Slovak Government (dwelling formations on low socio-cultural level) or scientific circles (cumulated /Roma/ settlements, by S. Kužel) ended up as a failure and were not accepted neither by the general public nor the specialists.

<sup>2</sup> Usury – lending money with the 100 % < interest. Wide spread phenomenon (not original) contributing towards the degradation of the social organization within Roma settlements. Persons under usury are unable to pay the “ever rising” dept, which creates unavoidable socio-economic differences within the settlements restraining any development or integration activities.

<sup>3</sup> Terminology in: Horský, J., Seligová, M. – Family of our ancestors, Prague 1996, p. 35 – 36.

*approach* reviewing *overall cultural configuration* that is not solely focused on specific cultural forms or institutions. Another advantage of social and cultural anthropology is the introduction of cultural relativism that became one of its defining concepts. This concept shows as being able to uncover and record differences in culture of various Roma settlements without ethnocentric deformation or simple failure to understand it. The sad reality is that (also but not only) the attitude of government is based on the implicit evolutionistic view, considering the Roma settlements as culturally backward or their culture as underdeveloped culture of the majority culture (in this respect the most developed culture and a goal of the nonlinear development of the mankind). Exactly this notion, degrading the peculiar culture of the Roma settlements to the poor caricature of the majority culture, social and cultural anthropology is trying to substitute with the concept of self-governed Roma settlements creating autonomous social formations within the socio-cultural sphere.

The other obstacle in this case is the culture of Roma settlements being constantly compared within categories of regulations and values of the majority culture that are for this comparison inadequate and inapplicable. In opposition to this ethnocentric view, the whole monitoring should be conceived in the spirit of the cultural relativism that would conduct research within the framework of their own values and norms. In this way, the principles of monitoring allow recording the true essence of the Roma settlement culture, and behind the negative expressions of *non* adaptable, *incapable*, *not* integrated to find the positive sphere of cultural reality of the Roma settlements containing original elements that could in many regards mean enrichment for the majority culture.

In accordance with the project principles, the methodological inventory of socio-cultural anthropology was adopted. Thus, the *participative observation* became the key-stone of the actual research, meaning direct involvement of research couples in the selected location during the period of 3 weeks with the following minimum of 1 week stay at the location during other important season of the year (especially during the school holidays as opposed to the school period), complemented with the *biographic and genealogic method*. Further on, the method of *guided interview* using *standardized forms* was used. Data gathered from the location had been complemented with the statistic, demographic, and cartographic data. The Cartography Authority, The Statistical Office, and the Office of Social Affaires served mostly as sources for the above mentioned data. Due to the fact of such data allowing mostly a *synchronic* view, the sources such as archives, chronicles, periodicals, publications etc. were used in order to obtain a *diachronic perspective*. It is important to say that the emphasis on *stationary field research* combining a proper and situation adequate attitude was a major break-through when compared to failures of the previous external visits complemented with the distribution of standardized printed forms.

The possibility of comparing research outcomes from the different settlements was ensured by introduction of thematic guidelines, upon which the 50 page report from each specific location was drawn. At the same time, the course for new research participants,

with the aim of uniting methodological standpoints and making participants aware of the historical, economic, legislative, and socio-cultural framework within this specific area was introduced.

Research was conducted as *team work*. Thanks to project coordinators, researchers from particular locations proceeded as one team of multiple research units; and thanks to the introductory courses, the outcomes were based on the same methodological and theoretical sources, which was consecutively monitored and consulted with the coordination center. Therefore, particular research activities worked together continuously and complementarily.

In 2005, to update the data from the 1999 – 2001 research in 20 Slovak villages with neighboring “Roma settlements”, and to improve the interpretation of the situation from the new theoretical perspectives, additional research visits were undertaken. The priority, which has in most cases been realized, was to conduct the research employing the same staff that worked already in the first phase of the project. From the 20 locations with the updated research reports mentioned, 16 are included in this anthology. Along with the case studies, the specialized studies dedicated to so called “cross-cutting” topics such as kinship in the “Roma settlements”, economical aspects of the interaction between Roma residents and the residents of the majority villages, and for example historical overview of the development of Roma settlements in Slovakia are presented.

Since several years from the research completion have passed, this material does not possess fully updated socio-demographic data. Nevertheless, the message of this anthology does not loose on quality, while its value is not based on the presentation of data, but on the ways of interpretation of the social and cultural background in life of particular “Roma settlements” from the perspective of current anthropological and sociological theories and methods.