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THE SOCIO-CULTURAL FEATURES OF THE ROMANI POPULATION

Romani culture is the topic of a number of studies, particularly today when cultural difference is a prime issue and majority/minority relations are considered to be a criterion of social relevancy. Collective identity and the culture of the Roma have been transmitted and preserved over the generations even though they are dynamic social constructions that are shaped in social contacts with other cultures and groups. In spite of the variations that appear and the specificity of a number of Romani subcultures, it is easy to observe a few stable markers. Nomadic life and the creation of the so-called *"imagined communities"* in the here and now regardless/despite of where they are at the forefront (Theodosiou, 2003). Do the Roma need some special place (territory, settlement) to construct a narrative about social identity? Do they develop a feeling of "dedication to a place" or the feeling of being domiciled and belonging to some region? Or is indifference towards spatial and physical frameworks of the community a durable component of their culture? As themes – Romani lifestyle and their socio-cultural profile undoubtedly exceed the scope of a few indicators obtained through empirical investigations of the Romani population in Croatia. Nevertheless, valuable empirical data about life in Romani settlements in Croatia, collected in a survey, make it possible for us, in one way, to gain insight into these aspects that are at the core of the research problem – state and perspective, especially the improvement and development of settlements inhabited by the Roma.

In light of the given objectives, an analysis of a few components of socio-cultural life aspects will be presented in this chapter: Romani identity features, assessment of Roma's social position, value profile of the respondents, some social characteristics of their lifestyle and everyday life in Romani settlements as well as the subjective evaluations of quality of life elements.

The components of Romani identity

In the empirical research that we conducted among the Roma population in Croatia, the respondents were asked to identify one feature out of the five listed that best described them as a special ethnic and social group. In other words, they were required to single out a feature that is central to Romani identity. Some recent research on Romani populations in Central and Eastern Europe, mainly in Hungary has shown that the Roma have a tendency to shape their identity by defining themselves in ways they differentiate from others through common elements of identity (or difference) "skin colour, descent, language and lifestyle/culture" (Szekelyi, Csepeli, & Orkeny, 2003). The features that were offered to respondents in this study were selected on the basis of traditional Romani culture (folklore, typical trades, customs, language). A dominant socio-economic feature, poverty, that designates them to the position of an economically marginalised group and as a group that is "excluded from the system of social stratification" (Šućur, 2000) was also included. Besides the mentioned features, the respondents were also given the opportunity to include some other feature, which according to their opinion, is typical for the Roma to the fullest extent.

In diagram 1, it is visible that the distribution of responses to this question above all point to the fact that the elements of socio-cultural Romani tradition (folklore, typical trades, customs, and language) are overshadowed by poverty in our study. In other words, the Roma, as a social group, see themselves primarily in the context of poverty. Thus, it can be said that this socio-economic aspect of identity has repressed the traditional socio-cultural components.

Diagram 1

What best describes the Roma according to the respondents (%)

Folklore — 13%
Typical trades — 4%
Customs — 17%
Poverty — 53%
Language — 11%
Other — 2%
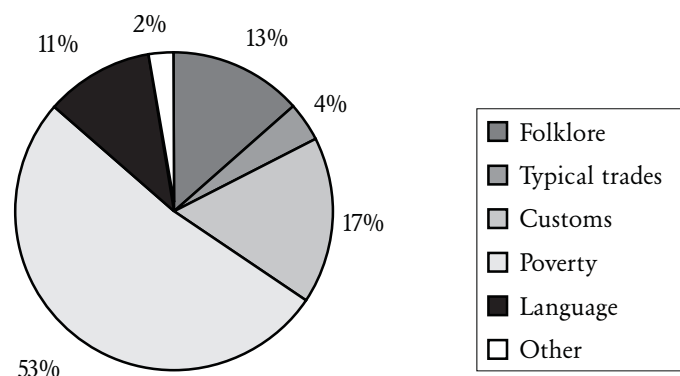
Source: Field study 2004

Following the majority of respondents who tend to describe the Roma in terms of "poverty", the second group of respondents claimed that specific Romani phenomena such as "customs and folklore" (in total 30.5%) best described the Roma. Thus, less than a third of the respondents link Romani identity to socio-cultural tradition. In other words, among this group of Roma, identity is determined, first of all, by traditional heritage which guarantees continuity with the past and in a symbolic way (what is characteristic for customs and folklore) makes it possible for them to join together as a community, to renew solidarity within the community and lastly, to revitalise their identity.

The special quality of language as a central determining feature of identity was identified by just over one tenth of the respondents. Interestingly, 82.2% of the respondents speak one of the Romani dialects and about half of the respondents stated that only Romani is spoken in their households (27.9%) or that everyday family communication is in Romani and Croatian (19.5%). Despite their minority position within the framework of Croatian society, in which they are required to use the Croatian language in public/social areas, it is evident that within everyday life frameworks, the symbolic shaping of the community is successfully first realised in the sphere of language. Moreover, this realisation is considerable (47.4% of families communicate in the Romani language and 82.2% of respondents speak one of the Romani dialects) and is more extensive than it is at a declarative level (11.1%). In this sense, language also successfully qualifies/is established as a determinant of Romani identity.

Traditional professions – especially trades are considered to be an important component of Romani identity. In recent times, a change of professions has taken place: "from traditional (horse traders, musicians, musical instrument makers, basket-makers, blacksmiths, broom-makers) towards new (sale of rugs, old metal, textiles and used cars, and similar) that are better adapted to the needs of the market..." (Posavec, 2000).

The disappearance of typical or traditional Romani trades (only 4% state that this is an important feature of their identity) not only had an impact on the identity framework of the Romani population but also on their overall socio-economic perspective. No other occupation successfully replaced the extinction of these activities mostly because of the extremely low levels of education among the Roma. Thus, as a result of their lack of qualifications, the Roma remain outside every socially acceptable chal-

345

lenge that is related to employment. The consequence of this, which can be read as poverty is so chronic that it is built into their social identity. This becomes a way of life.

The given data is related to the sample as a whole. However, it is worth noting that some differences are evident if the distribution of responses is considered at a county level (table 1).

Poverty as a dominant special quality of the Romani population is prominent in six of the eight counties that were part of the sample. This is stressed in the County of Varaždin (80%) and the County of Međimurje (75%) to the largest measure. Compared to the other counties in which poverty is in first place, the Counties of Istria and Primorje-Gorski kotar, for the most part, emphasise Romani customs as a component of Romani identity. Besides this, it is worth mentioning that typical trades in the County of Primorje-Gorski kotar (12.4%) and that language in the County of Slavonski Brod-Posavina (25%) were primarily identified and valued as components of Romani identity.

Table 1

What best describes the Roma according to the respondents (%)

	Zagreb	Sisak-Moslavina	Varaždin	Primorje-Gorski kotar	Brod-Posavina	Osijek-Baranja	Istria	Međimurje	Other	Total sample
Folklore	19.6	8.5	2.5	19.1	20.0	18.0	28.6	3.3	9.9	13.5
Typical trades	5.4	2.1	5.0	12.4	7.0	3.0	1.0	.9	2.8	4.0
Customs	24.1	9.6	7.5	41.6	11.0	8.0	46.9	6.5	7.0	17.0
Poverty	45.5	64.9	80.0	18.0	33.0	63.0	6.1	74.9	62.0	52.0
Language	3.6	13.8	5.0	3.4	25.0	6.0	17.3	11.6	12.7	11.1
Other	1.8	1.1	.0	5.6	4.0	2.0	.0	2.8	5.6	2.5

Source: Field study 2004

Survey responses were also compared according to sex, age, place of birth, employment status and Romani dialects.

In table 2, it is visible that there is a statistical significant difference between responses according to sex even though the range of responses is identical.

Table 2

What best describes the Roma according to the respondents (%) distribution by sex

	Folklore	Typical trades	Customs	Poverty	Language	Other	Total
Men	14.1	5.5	16.6	49.3	11.1	3.4	100
Women	12.8	2.2	17.5	55.3	10.6	1.5	100

Source: Field study 2004 $p < 0.05$

Even though both of these groups mention poverty as the feature that best describes Romani identity, the share of respondents within the female group is significantly larger than the share of males who think this way. It is also evident that the share of women who link Romani identity to typical trades is two times smaller than the share of men in this category. It can be assumed that a larger share of women mention poverty as a consequence of their position in the family in which they are constantly confronted with everyday concerns for food, clothes and other items that are required by large families with young children. Furthermore, even though links with old trades are disappearing, it seems that male members of the Romani community (who traditionally were the bearers of these trades and skills) are inclined to identify typical trades as a component of their culture to a larger extent.

Moreover, a statistical significant difference was also found among different age groups (table 3).

	Folklore	Typical Trades	Customs	Poverty	Language	Other	Total
18–29 yrs	16.0	4.0	12.6	53.2	13.4	0.8	100
30–39 yrs	9.5	3.2	19.8	51.9	12.7	2.8	100
40–49 yrs	13.7	6.2	18.6	49.1	6.8	5.6	100
50 and over	15.5	3.1	23.3	48.8	6.2	3.1	100

Source: Field study 2004 $p < 0.05$

Table 3

What best describes the Roma according to the respondents (%) distribution by age

Differences in the category of poverty can also be seen here; it is more stressed among the younger generations (the majority of respondents are under 39 years of age). This group is in its most crucial period; members are burdened by problems of parenting and welfare for younger as well as older members of the community. However, this table shows some interesting differences with regard to the other components of socio-cultural identity. If customs and folklore are regarded as a category that represents Romani traditional heritage, it can be seen that the tendency to single out this feature as the best descriptor of Romani identity, compared to identification with poverty, increases with age. The importance of language, as a component of Romani identity, is more stressed among the younger age groups. Namely, language was emphasised among the youngest age group two times more than among the oldest age group. Generally, it can be said that younger respondents are more inclined to identify the Romani ethnic group with the aid of language. They are also more inclined to describe their own ethnic group by

referring to poverty even though this is to a smaller extent while the older population characterise Romani identity by relying on traditions (customs and folklore). The stressed features of Roma, should be interpreted as a factor of difference compared to others here. The younger population as expected is a more open group that experiences difference compared to others in the field of communication, in language and through the dramatic experiences of poverty. It is a fact that older persons rely on traditional heritage to describe their ethnic group although it should be noted that customs and folklore also have a high rating among the younger Roma (2nd in the range).

Table 4

What best describes the Roma according to the respondents (%) distribution by place of birth

	Folklore	Typical trades	Customs	Poverty	Language	Other	Total
Born in place of living or somewhere else in county	10.4	3.4	11.8	60.8	11.1	2.6	100
Born somewhere else in Croatia or abroad	19.2	4.4	27.5	35.2	10.9	2.7	100

Source: Field study 2004 $p < 0.01$

Although nomadism is one of the most striking features of the Roma, it can be said that the Roma are less active in a migratory sense and that more Roma live in permanent settlements today (Štambuk, 2000). In line with these lifestyle changes, it can be expected that relations towards the places where they live will also change. In this case, data on place of birth serves as an indicator of "rootedness" to a place. We assumed that respondents who live in their place of birth or within the same county view their way of life and attitudes differently from those that are born elsewhere or have at least moved once. While it easier to imagine the development of "feeling at home" among the first group, for the other it can be said that they are more "mobile" and have a tendency to migrate. It should be noted that use of the concept "feeling at home" or "dedication to a place" has to be interpreted with caution in research of the Romani population. Research has shown that a place of living for the Roma "is a matter of convention after all; it does not contribute anything to their understanding of themselves" (Theodosiou, 2003). Moreover, it should be mentioned that it is difficult to clearly demarcate this type of division due to the special quality of Romani lifestyle. "Traditional, nomadic lifestyle still exists in a somewhat changed form. It is often difficult to speak about a sharp distinction between nomadic and a sedentary way of life because some nomads spend their winters in one place

while settled Roma often leave for longer periods to do seasonal work to earn a living." (Posavec, 2000). For this reason, this division of the Romani population – into indigenous inhabitants and newcomers has to be interpreted very carefully. Still, results show that there is reason to further investigate this theme. Namely, the two groups differ in the way they experience and describe the Romani population. Poverty overshadowed all the other features among those respondents for whom we assumed a strong "rootedness" to their home place. In comparison, respondents that we assumed are more mobile and less connected to a place appreciate customs and folklore as Romani features to a significantly larger measure. We can assume that this attitude among the latter is the result of frequent confrontations with other different social and cultural groups where precisely these socio-cultural elements of identity are expressed as elements of difference. This is especially probable among the Roma who live or lived in large (Croatian and European) towns where poverty is not an exclusive feature of one group and differentiation towards others unfolds in other features, especially those from the cultural sphere.

In response to this question on what feature best describes the Roma, there is no statistically significant difference with regard to level of education. However, a statistically significant difference was noted when the respondents were divided into the employed and unemployed (table 5). As expected, "poverty" is the dominant description among the unemployed of their own ethnic group, while customs are in first place and typical trades is mentioned two times more often among the employed.

	Folklore	Typical trades	Customs	Poverty	Language	Other	Total
Employed	15.7	7.2	33.7	28.9	12.0	2.4	100
Unemployed	13.2	3.7	15.5	54.3	10.9	2.5	100

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

Table 5

What best describes the Roma according to the respondents (%), unemployed and employed

Finally, between the two "dialect" groups there is also a statistically significant difference in response to this question.

In the first group of Roma that speak *Romani chib*, it is claimed that customs (together with folklore 59.7%) best describe the Roma to the largest extent. Poverty (65.2%) is identified in the second group that speaks *Ljimba d' bjaš* as a feature that best describes the Roma (table 6).

Table 6

What best describes the
Roma according to the
respondents (%) distribution
by dialect

	Folklore	Typical trades	Customs	Poverty	Language	Other	Total
Romani chib	22.1	3.3	37.6	24.9	11.3	0.9	100
Ljimba d' bjaš	8.4	3.5	7.9	65.2	13.0	2.1	100

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

While the responses of the first group of Romani respondents reflects a more specific socio-cultural community in which poverty is one of the components, it is evident from the responses of the other group that these Roma experience themselves as a socio-economic group characterised by poverty.

For a somewhat clearer picture of the compared groups, it is necessary to point out that the difference between these two groups extends beyond the "language sphere". The analysis shows that respondents who belong to a particular dialect group statistically significantly differ according to religion, migratory habits (measured on the basis of birthplace, that is, immigration to a place) as well as territorial dispersal.

	Catholic	Islam	Orthodox	Not a believer	Other
Romani chib	10.8	84.0	3.3	0.9	0.9
Ljimba d' bjaš	74.1	0.7	17.1	7.6	0.5

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

	All here from birth	Most are here from birth	Most have immigrated	All have immigrated
Romani chib	14.6	47.6	25.6	12.7
Ljimba d' bjaš	56.4	27.0	9.2	7.4

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

	Romani chib	Ljimba d' bjaš
Zagreb County/City	24.5	1.2
Sisak-Moslavina	3.3	10.6
Varaždin	1.4	16.1
Primorje-Gorski kotar	21.1	0.2
Brod-Posavina	3.8	9.0
Osijek-Baranja	2.8	14.5
Istria	39.9	–
Međimurje	2.3	38.7
Other	–	9.7

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

These language groups can be further differentiated on the basis of the data presented in tables 6a, 6b, and 6c. Members of the dialect group *Romani chib* are followers of the Islam religion and most often live in the Counties of Istria, Zagreb, and Primorje-Gorski kotar as well as the City of Zagreb. It can be said that they are more inclined to migrate and that they have richer migratory experiences. Members of the dialect group *Ljimba d' bjaš*, are mostly Christian (mainly Catholics, but there are Orthodox followers as well), and most often live in the County of Međimurje, generally in the continental part: in the Northwest area of Croatia as well as Eastern Croatia. Most of the respondents and members of their families in this group did not move but live permanently in their place of birth.

Personal experiences of social status: Are the Roma respected?

Social respect is certainly one of the indicators that we can use to analyse social integration or social exclusion of the Roma population in society. In this study, we were interested in the subjective evaluation of the Roma themselves about whether they, as Roma are respected in society. This question was asked directly and they had the possibility of responding in two ways: "yes" or "no". In spite of the fact that they are a marginal group, which in many respects (economically, politically, socially) is dangerously close to social exclusion, most of the respondents (84.7%) based on personal experience claimed that as members of the Romani minority they feel respected in society (table 7). Respondents in the County of Primorje-Gorski kotar felt that they were respected the most as a special ethnic group (95.6%) while respondents in the County of Međimurje (79%) and the City of Zagreb (79.3%) felt that the Roma were respected the least.

	Zagreb	Sisak-Moslavina	Varaždin	Primorje-Gorski kotar	Brod-Posavina	Osijek-Baranja	Istria	Međimurje	Other	Total sample
No	20.7	17.4	10.0	4.4	12.2	16.0	16.7	21.0	7.4	15.3
Yes	79.3	82.6	90.0	95.6	87.8	84.0	83.3	79.0	92.6	84.7

Source: Field study 2004

Table 7

Do they feel, as Roma, respected in society? (%)

Evaluation of respect that the Roma feel in society does not statistically significantly differ among respon-

dents with regard to sex, age, place of birth, employment or language (dialect) groups. However, the level of education variable showed a statistically significant difference (table 8).

	Yes	No	Total
no schooling	87.7	12.3	100
unfinished primary school	83.6	16.4	100
finished primary school	86.3	13.7	100
finished secondary school	71.7	28.3	100

Source: Field study 2004 $p<0.05$

Results show that respondents with a higher level of education feel less respected in society while those without schooling feel more respected. This is not entirely paradoxical. Namely, we can assume that respondents that have finished secondary school have more contact (at school or at work or of a private nature) with members of other social groups and that they are more exposed to eventual expressions of disrespect than the uneducated Roma whose social experience is limited to the same social and ethnic groups. Educated respondents, it can be assumed, more often and in many more different ways come into contact with members of the non-Roma group. Thus, in view of the total educational structure of the sample (17% finished primary school and 5.8% finished secondary school) this finding that optimistically expresses an attitude of respect that the respondents, as Roma, experience in society should be interpreted with caution.

Review of values

Generally speaking, values help us to behave properly. With their help, we determine what is good and what is bad, what is desirable and what is undesirable. Šućur (2000) considers that the cultural marginalisation of the Roma reflects in fact the level of a value system whose peaks have not broken through values of "western materialism". The respondents described the framework within which the shaping of their behaviour, as well as lifestyle can be expected by rating the importance of particular values of social and individual life. All together they rated 18 concepts (table 9) and consider that most of them are "important".

Namely, only one potential value (politics) in the total sample received an (average) negative rating ("mainly unimportant"). The respondents either answered positively

or negatively to all of the presented values and for this reason there are no responses in the category "I'm not sure" in the total sample. Even though, besides politics, it is useful to see how all values in the categories (mainly important" or "very important" are rated.

Results shown in table 9 point to a number of possible conclusions and they also indicate the desirable values of the Romani population.

	Rank	Total sample	Evaluation
Health	**1**	4.96	
Children	**2**	4.90	
Freedom	**3**	4.85	
Honesty	**3**	4.85	
Friendship	**5**	4.80	
Love	**6**	4.72	very important (5)
Marriage	**7**	4.71	
Work	**8**	4.70	
Money	**9**	4.69	
Knowledge and skill	**10**	4.52	
Protection of the environment	**11**	4.49	
Equality of the sexes	**12**	4.43	
Sex life	**13**	4.40	
Finished school	**13**	4.40	mainly important (4)
Leisure time	**15**	4.38	
Religion	**16**	4.26	
Nation	**17**	3.85	
Politics	**18**	2.14	mainly unimportant (2)

Answers that were offered included: *not at all important* (1), *mainly unimportant* (2), *I'm not sure* (3), *mainly important* (4) and *very important* (5)
Source: Field study 2004

The values were divided into three larger groups on the basis of the ratings. The concepts that were given the largest rating (5) are in the first group. There is consensus around elementary values and general existential conditions of life and the group: health and children are very important. This attitude is compatible to statements that there is "an emphasis on sociability in the family and close relatives" in Romani populations (Štambuk, 2000). Two highly rated concepts from the ethical sphere follow: "freedom" and "honesty". Even though "freedom" associatively points to the traditional nomadic life of the Roma, which uncoils outside and regardless of established social institutions and

structure, a more high-quality interpretation requires further research along with the operationalisation of these general concepts. Friendship, love and marriage follow – values that regulate interpersonal relations in a narrower social group. The next subgroup comprises conditions of economic survival – work, money, knowledge and skills. Even though "protection of the environment" is the last of the most important, this gives rise to optimism, especially in terms of improvement and development of settlements and locations of settled Roma.

Values are rated as "mainly important" in the second group of values. However, it would not be correct to interpret them as priorities in the range of values. The most significant finding is that "finished school" is at the bottom of the scale of importance. Even though this is not unexpected, this attitude draws attention to additional subjective (as well as those objective) barriers in solving one of the biggest Romani problem – an exceptionally uneducated population. In a separate group, politics is considered to be a "mainly unimportant" aspect of life; this follows "nation" which was also rated lowly and reflects their lack of interest in state institutions. In short, to be healthy, to be free and surrounded by a good family, to be able to work and have money – are the most important values of social and individual life among this Roma population. On the other hand, it was confirmed that inclusion in state institutions and systems like the "school system, employment, acceptance of rights and duties from existing laws regulated by rules of the game" is less important (Štambuk, 2000). In other words, social integration is less important.

In these ratings, application of the t-test showed that there is a statistically significant difference between women and men for some values. Children, leisure time and equality of the sexes received a higher rating among women while marriage, love and sex life are more important among men (table 10).

Table 10

The importance respondents give to particular values of social and individual life (average rating) – differences according to sex

	Women	Men
Children	4.95	4.86
Love	4.65	4.78
Marriage	4.64	4.77
Equality of the sexes	4.52	4.35
Sex life	4.11	4.67
Leisure time	4.47	4.30

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

In addition, a statistically significant difference was found when different age groups were compared. Generally, it can be said that younger respondents on average consider love and sex life as more important than older respondents. The latter give more importance to children, politics and equality of the sexes (table 11).

	18–29	30–39	40–49	50 and over	
Children	4.82	4.95	4.95	4.96	p<0.01
Love	4.78	4.74	4.73	4.50	p<0.05
Knowledge, Skills	4.56	4.49	4.63	4.38	p<0.01
Equality of the sexes	4.33	4.46	4.56	4.55	p<0.01
Sex life	4.56	4.41	4.45	3.87	p<0.01
Politics	2.01	2.08	2.48	2.24	p<0.05

Source: Field study 2004

Table 11

The importance respondents give to particular values of social and individual life (average rating) – differences according to age

Verification of the differences between groups that are tentatively called "rooted in home place" and "migrationally active" or "weakly connected to place" also showed some statistically significant differences. In table 12, it is clear which values show differences.

	Born in settlement or somewhere else in the county	Born somewhere else in Croatia or abroad
Freedom	4.82	4.90
Work	4.65	4.78
Friendship	4.77	4.86
Politics	2.05	2.27
Nation	3.78	3.98

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.05

Table 12

The importance respondents give to particular values of social and individual life (average rating) – difference according to "place of birth"

The data shows that the Roma who are "more mobile" and have lived in different spaces usually place more worth on those values that are linked to the social dimension of life. Even though this is only difference in intensity of importance, this points to possible deeper social differences in lifestyle as well as aims and aspirations between these two groups.

There were more values that showed statistically significant differences between the two language (dialect) groups (table 13).

This finding points to how this group, besides at the language level, separates value orientations even though it is only in intensity. The biggest difference was in the rating of politics where a neutral attitude was expressed in one group while the other expressed a negative attitude.

The Roma who speak the *Romani chib* dialect on average are indecisive in their ratings of politics while members of the dialect group *Ljimba d' bjaš* on average claim that politics is "mainly unimportant" in their lives. It can be generally said that members of the *Romani chib* language group place more importance on social values than those that speak the *Ljimba d' bjaš* dialect. In this sense, it is probable that they can be counted on more in terms of social commitments. They are more mobile and have varied life experiences in more spaces that could increase their social sensitivity. However, it is interesting that, on average, the Roma who speak *Ljimba d' bjaš* were more sensitive to "the protection of the environment" issue.

Table 13

The importance respondents give to particular values of social and individual life (average rating) – differences according to "language groups"

	Romani chib	Ljimba d' bjaš	
Freedom	4.94	4.78	p<0.01
Work	4.82	4.63	p<0.01
Friendship	4.86	4.73	p<0.01
Protection of the environment	4.30	4.51	p<0.01
Equality of the sexes	4.52	4.34	p<0.05
Leisure time	4.49	4.21	p<0.01
Politics	2.51	1.97	p<0.01
Religion	4.48	4.14	p<0.01
Nation	4.24	3.66	p<0.01

Answers that were offered included: *not at all important* (1), *mainly unimportant* (2), *I'm not sure* (3), *mainly important* (4) and *very important* (5)

Source: Field study 2004

Way of life

The Romani way of life is in many ways special; the most important is their differentiation and separation from other social groups. This special quality is partly the result of Romani customs/traditions, value systems mentioned in the previous section as well as objective circumstances and interpersonal relations of the Romani population and the wider society in which they live. The following section will cover the Romani way of life in Croatia on the basis of their evaluations. This includes: to what extent are particular features characteristic of lifestyle in a settlement as well as their self-evaluation of aspects of quality of life and readiness to migrate.

Table 14 shows that two thirds of the respondents are definitely aware of how their lives are threatened by the polluted environment. On the other hand, they experience their everyday life as safe so it can be assumed that this

polluted environment threat is anticipated more as a long-term consequence of life in an unacceptable environment. This unsuitable life framework is probably compensated by the relatively large "possibilities to live according to one's choice" that is line with the already mentioned desires for freedom and its high value among the Roma. As expected, the great role of tradition is claimed by a large share while the "the possibility of acquiring a good standard in a short time" is the only feature that they claim is not typical for their settlements.

Table 14

The characteristic features of lifestyle in the settlement (%)

	Total sample		
	Not at all	Somewhat	Definitely
Threatened by the polluted environment	15.0	21.7	**63.3**
Safe everyday life	17.9	33.6	**48.5**
The possibility of living according to one's own choice	21.0	31.7	**47.2**
Great role of tradition	23.6	37.2	**39.2**
The possibility of acquiring a good standard in a short time	55.2	22.4	**22.4**

Source: Field study 2004

Distribution by counties (tables in appendix) show that the life-threatening consequences of the polluted environment is particularly alarming in settlements that are in the Counties of Sisak-Moslavina, Varaždin, Slavonski Brod-Posavina where more than 80% of the respondents claimed that this is definitely a problem. Beyond doubt, these are places that require most urgent intervention to improve the quality of life in settlements. There is no statistically significant difference in the way these characteristics were evaluated with regard the respondents' age or level of education. Although a significant difference in evaluations was found between women and men in relation to "threatened by the polluted environment" where men to a larger degree (67.3% definitely) identified this problem compared to women (58.6% definitely). Besides, a difference was shown in the evaluation in the role of tradition among respondents who belong to the "indigenous population" or who were "born in settlement" as well as those who "immigrated" to the settlement. Namely, the indigenous population indicate the threatening polluted environment to a larger degree while the newcomers emphasise the role of tradition in the life of the settlement (table 15).

Table 15
The characteristic features of
lifestyle in the settlement (%),
according to place of birth

	Born in settlement or somewhere else in the county			Born somewhere else in Croatia or abroad		
	Not at all	Some-what	Defini-tely	Not at all	Some-what	Defini-tely
Great role of tradition	26.6	41.6	**31.8**	18.5	29.2	**52.3**
Threatened by a polluted environment	13.0	19.8	**67.2**	18.9	24.1	**57.0**

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

Evaluations of these settlement characteristics differ more substantially when the respondents are divided into two groups according to language criteria (table 16).

Table 16
The characteristic features of
lifestyle in the settlement (%),
according to dialect

	Romani chib			Ljimba d' bjaš		
	Not at all	Some-what	Defini-tely	Not at all	Some-what	Defini-tely
Great role of tradition	11.7	28.4	**59.9**	28.4	43.8	**27.9**
Threatened by a polluted environment	24.0	30.0	**46.0**	10.8	19.5	**69.7**
The possibility of acquiring a good standard in a short time	57.1	14.8	**28.1**	53.4	25.3	**21.4**

Source: Field study 2004   p<0.01

Like "place difference" among the Roma who speak different dialects the "possibility to acquire a good standard in a short time" is a little more promising, even though small, among the Roma who belong to the dialect group *Romani chib.* Nevertheless, twice as many respondents from this group indicate that life unfolds in a traditional way in their settlements while the threat of a polluted environment is expressed by a smaller share. The differences towards tradition are possible due to the connection of the language group with a religion, which in some segments, with more or less success determines a way of life.

A representation of life in Romani settlements certainly completes the ratings of the most important aspects of the quality of life (table 17).

Health, reputation, perspective and personal freedom – were best rated by the respondents. However, the items that are at the bottom of this list are of more interest than the ones at the top. Considering the worst components of a quality of life, (in this case: employment, material status, housing conditions and the general opportunities in the settlement) it can be seen that life in a Romani settlement was given a very low rating. This rating only changes in

Table 17

Average ratings of particular quality of life aspects

|	Zagreb	Sisak-Moslavina	Varaždin	Primorje-Gorski kotar	Brod-Posavina	Osijek-Baranja	Istria	Međimurje	Other	Total sample
Health of family members	3.7	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.9	4.1	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.8
Reputation among persons in the immediate environment (neighbours, work colleagues)	3.9	3.7	3.7	4.2	3.9	4.0	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.7
Diet	3.8	3.4	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.4	3.4	3.6
Personal health	3.3	3.5	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.5	3.5
Personal life perspective of young family members	3.5	3.7	3.8	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5
Personal life perspective	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.0	3.2	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.2
Possibility of choosing a lifestyle according to own desires and standards	3.1	2.9	3.6	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.2
Housing conditions	2.8	2.6	2.8	2.5	3.3	3.1	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.8
General life opportunities in the settlement	2.9	2.4	2.4	2.2	3.0	2.9	3.0	2.5	2.7	2.7
Material state of the household	2.4	2.2	2.6	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.1	2.2	2.3
Employment	1.6	1.6	1.8	2.3	1.7	1.8	2.5	1.6	1.3	1.7

The offered ratings were from 1 (inadequate) to 5 (excellent)

Source: Field study 2004

nuances in different counties. The general impression is that the life standard is low. The worst rated aspect of life (employment) is probably the key to exiting this described situation. Even though 92.3% of the respondents consider themselves to be local and not newcomers to the settlements they are prepared to move because of better life conditions and work. However, their readiness to change address decreases as the distance of their "new home" increases from their present place of living (diagram 2). This highlights the need to improve their current settlements and locations bringing them closer to an acceptable standard of life.

Despite the general pessimistic picture, the state of affairs is not evaluated as "equally bad" in all the subgroups of the sample. Statistically significant differences were shown in all tested groups. Grouped into two dialect groups statistical significant differences were obtained to two questions when the respondents were grouped according to dialect. Members of the *Romani chib* dialect group are more satisfied with employment and gave this on average a rating of 2 in comparison to members of the *Ljimba d' bjaš* dialect group who on average rated this as 1.7. Sec-

359

Diagram 2
Are the respondents prepared
to move away to improve
work and life conditions
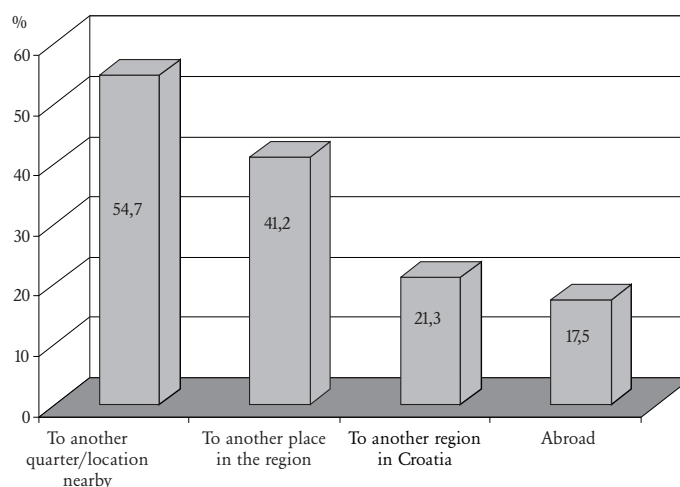
Source: Field study 2004

ondly, with regard to general opportunities within the settlement the first group rated this as 2.80 while the second gave this a rating of 2.55. The indigenous population compared to newcomers give higher ratings to the following: personal health (3.61 compared to 3.33); health of household members (3.89 compared to 3.57); and material status (2.34 compared to 2.28). Men compared to women gave higher ratings to the following: employment (1.81 compared to 1.61); personal health (3.64 compared to 3.35); personal life perspective (3.32 compared to 3.04); and the life perspectives of youth (3.60 compared to 3.41).

A larger number of items statistically differ when the ratings of the employed and unemployed are compared (table 18).

Table 18
Average ratings of particular
quality of life aspects

	Employed	Unemployed
Personal health	3.89	3.47
Life perspective of young family members	3.78	3.48
Personal life perspective	3.53	3.16
Housing conditions	3.21	2.76
Material state of the household	2.79	2.29
Employment	3.39	1.55

The offered ratings were from 1 (inadequate) to 5 (excellent)
Source: Field study 2004

As expected, employed respondents are satisfied with all the items that they rated and this is especially evident in those items that are more directly related to employment and material status. Statistically significant differ-

ences in ratings were shown for the largest number of items (shown in table 19 and 20) when respondents were compared according to different age groups and levels of education.

	18–29	30–39	40–49	50 and over
Health of family members	3.95	3.87	3.85	3.00
Possibility of choosing lifestyle according to own desires and standards	3.23	3.13	3.40	2.76
Diet	3.65	3.69	3.65	3.08
Personal health	4.06	3.48	3.25	2.27
Life perspectives of young family members	3.62	3.54	3.70	2.95
Personal life perspective	3.38	3.22	3.23	2.51
Housing conditions	2.79	2.90	2.98	2.42
Material state of household	2.38	2.36	2.51	1.86
Employment	1.65	1.75	2.00	1.50

Source: Field study 2004 $p < 0.01$

In most items, there is a larger degree of satisfaction in the younger age group but it is interesting that respondents in their forties are the most satisfied with employment while the youngest and oldest are the least satisfied. Related to this, the highest rating for material state of the household and employment is found in the 40-49 age group. It can be generally stated that this age group are more optimistic than others with regard to life perspectives of youth, housing conditions and the possibility to live according to one's own choice.

	no schooling	unfinished primary school	primary school	secondary school
Health of family members	3.51	3.89	3.90	4.00
Reputation among persons in the immediate environment (neighbours, work colleagues)	3.63	3.69	3.93	4.11
Diet	3.35	3.62	3.74	4.02
Personal health	3.02	3.66	3.79	4.04
Life perspective of young family members	3.31	3.54	3.73	3.65
Personal life perspective	2.88	3.25	3.40	3.70
Housing conditions	2.58	2.80	3.00	3.36
Material state of household	2.12	2.35	2.53	2.76
Employment	1.57	1.63	2.10	2.26

Source: Field study 2004 $p < 0.01$

In table 20 it is evident that educated members of the Romani population are, on average, the most satisfied with their own lives. However, since their total number is very small, the final evaluation about the quality of life is determined by less successful and less satisfied Roma to the largest degree.

Conclusion

The socio-cultural profile of the Romani population was analysed on the basis of a few indicators: identity, social position, values and quality of life. Beyond doubt, the Roma are a specific social group as indicated by many features and a lifestyle that are recognizable in society. However, it should be kept in mind that they are not a homogeneous group since within the Romani population multifarious stratification occurs. This study showed that this stratification occurs in the cultural sphere, shaping some subgroups with a special identity, lifestyle and values. Sometimes, they are not clearly defined; on the contrary, the Romani society shape and differentiate prevailing indispensable cultural specificities that distinguishes them from other societies. However, these analyses have "touched" below the surface, in which comparisons by sex, age, education, connection with place, belonging to a language/dialect circle – has shown that within the Romani population different groups are differentiated. Approaches to improvement and development of their settlements would surely need to take this into account.

There are a few substantial problems, which the Romani community faces and that consequently burden all aspects of life, including socio-cultural aspects. Objectively, a low level of education that diminishes chances for employment and improvement of their life standard is (not only among the Roma) recognised as a cause or key solution to their problems. Regardless, "finishing school" is at the bottom on the scale of values, while poverty is accepted as a feature of the group and is used as an identity marker that pushes other typical cultural features such as folklore, customs, language, trades, etc. into the background.

Along with poverty, they are more inclined to a larger degree to describe their lifestyle as "threatened by the polluted environment", which additionally reflects their low level of satisfaction with housing conditions, general life opportunities in the settlement, the material state of the household and especially employment.

Based on this analysis, the general evaluation is that the traditional socio-cultural identity of the Roma is fad-

ing away and that the Roma to a large degree are socially identified and represented through the negative features or deficiencies: poverty and threat. In a society that is oriented towards multiculturalism and encouragement of an equal *Other,* deficiencies and absences cannot over the long-term be the basis of identity differentiation and subjectivity.

For the shaping of a recognizable socio-cultural profile of the Roma like for the revitalisation of their social identity there is more perspective if the foothold of their own identification rests on the living components of cultural heritage. It should be remembered that nearly half of the respondents claim that Romani customs, folklore, language and traditional trades best describe the Roma. Whether this percentage is large or small is perhaps not the issue. However, it is certainly adequate to be the foothold of an optimistic scenario of development for the Romani population.