

THE ROMANI (“GYPSIES”) IN THE SOCIAL SPACE OF POST-SOCIALIST COUNTRIES: THE EXAMPLE OF CROATIA

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ABSTRACT

The first part of this paper deals with the socioeconomic status of the Romani in post-socialist countries. Freedom of speech that came after the collapse of socialism enabled the arrival of extremist groups to the political scene. As a consequence, anti-Gypsy violence escalated. Post-socialist transition was accompanied by a decline in industrial production. Manual work provided by the Romani became unnecessary. A low level of education made the possibility of finding a new job quite unrealistic. Romani dependence on social welfare increased. At the same time, the tightening of state budgets limited their access to certain social services.

In the second part of the paper the Romani's demographic and socioeconomic traits in Croatia are analysed. The Romani minority in Croatia is characterised by a high fertility rate and expansive age structure, extremely high poverty and unemployment rates and a low level of education. In the post-socialist period, we can trace a clear increase in the tendency towards dependence on social welfare.

The third part of the paper attempts to answer the question whether or not the degree of (non) acceptance of Romani people by majority population depends on their spatial distance/proximity, i.e. on the frequency of contacts with them. The level of xenophobia was measured using by social the Bogardus distance scale. Research carried out in Međimurje, where the Romani are a highly represented minority group, showed that in areas where the physical distance between the Romani and the majority population is small and inter-ethnic contacts are frequent, social distances to some extent even increase.

KEYWORDS: Romani, Roma, socioeconomic status, social distance, xenophobia, Croatia, transition countries

THE ROMANI IN POST-SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

Issues regarding the status of the Romani people, their integration, employment, quality of life and education are placed high on the agenda of European politics, since the Romani make up the largest ethnic minority in the European Union today. The exact number of Romani in Europe today is unknown. Census data concerning the Romani are insufficient and usually far from the real situation. According to estimates by experts, which are considered more reliable, the European Romani population numbers over 11 million (Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division, September 2010).

Based on historical and linguistic sources, the Romani originate from north-western India. Rajko Đurić's research locates the territory of their origins in present-day Pakistan (Multan, Sindh, Lahore) and in parts of India (Punjab, Rājasthān, Gujarat, Delhi, etc.) (Đurić, 2007, 36-37). It is assumed that their exodus westward started at the time of the invasion of India by Mahmud of Ghazni at the beginning of 11th century (ibid. 33-37). The Romani migrated westward from India, through Afghanistan and Persia. A part of the southern group of tribes moved in the direction of Syria and Egypt. They continued through the north-west portion of Africa, probably crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, and arrived in Spain. However, most Romani tribes came to Europe via Turkey and the Bosphorus. Sources dating from the period between the 11th and 13th centuries confirm their entry into Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Wallachia and Moldova. Later, in the 14–16th centuries, the Romani gradually penetrated into other European countries (Clébert, 1967, Marushiakova and Popov, 2001, Hrvatić, 2000).

In the 16th and 17th centuries quite a significant number of the Romani had already settled on the Balkans and in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore it is not surprising that today, according to the data of the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division (2010), the largest number of European Romani live in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, mainly in post-socialist countries. They were undoubtedly affected by the collapse of socialism. The post socialist transformation of society caused a number of specific changes in the living conditions of Romani communities.

Before the advent of socialism, most Romani communities were nomadic, or semi-nomadic. During the centuries of nomadism the Romani developed ways of making a living which did not require fixed, large-scale and heavy equipment. Occupations such as horse trading, metal-smithing, copper-smithing, fortune telling, music and entertainment, became family professions (Hübschmanová, 2004, Guy, 2004, Vukanović, 1983, Yoors, 1987, Clébert, 1967, Hancock, 2002).

Later, however, in socialist countries, the Romani had to abandon nomadism, pressed by the politics of sedentarisation. In the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania the sedentarisation of the nomadic Romani was enforced through specific government acts. In Hungary, Albania and Yugoslavia sedentarisation was regulated by general legislation, which required a fixed place of residence and a fixed work place (Fonseca, 2005, Marushakova and Popov, /www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/FS/6.1_communism.pdf, Guy, 2004, Posavec, 2000).

The Romani were also pressed into sedentarisation by the processes of modernisation and industrialisation, which made their occupations superfluous. They abandoned their traditional occupations revolving around the nomadic way of life, but failed to find a new adequate role in modernised society and in the new economic system (Štambuk, 2005). Forced sedentarisation led to the invention of new ways of survival. First, good international connections with Romani communities abroad stimulated them to engage in smuggling and street trade. The Romani began trading in unavailable imported goods – from old cars to chewing gum. Second, the so-called "culture of dependency" on state-run social welfare gradually developed (Fonseca, 1995; Rogić, 2005). Having lost the opportunity to make a living from traditional occupations, the Romani relied more and more on state social benefits, such as social welfare and child support.

Third, due to the efforts of socialist governments to reduce unemployment rates (unemployment was regarded as unacceptable in socialism), a large proportion of the Romani was actually employed. However, they mainly obtained a low status, in physically demanding and poorly paid occupations (Šučur, 2005, Posavec, 2000)

In the post-socialist period the situation worsened in many ways for the Romani. Freedom of speech and the expression of ethnic and cultural identity that came with the collapse of socialism enabled extremist groups to enter onto the political scene. As a consequence, anti-Gypsy violence escalated in almost all transitional countries (Guy, 2004, Pavel, 2004, Hübshmanová, 2004, Binder, 2010, Fonseca, 1995). The Romani are subjected to racially motivated attacks by groups such as skinheads and the Ku Klux Klan. From 2008 the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) registered forty eight violent attacks on the Romani in Hungary, nineteen in the Czech Republic and ten in Slovakia – with a total of eleven fatal outcomes.⁹⁶ Anti-Romani rhetoric also escalated, as is clearly shown through graffiti such as in the text: "All Gypsies into gas-chambers" (Hübshmanová, 2004, 245). Sometimes anti-Gypsy sentiments were expressed on the highest level. For example, Slovak prime-minister Vladimir Mečiar claimed in his speech in 1993 concerning the Romani that it

⁹⁶ <http://www.errc.org/article/violence-against-roma/3835>.

was "necessary to curtail the extended reproduction of [this] socially unadoptable and mentally backward population" (cited by Fonseca, 1995, 293).

The post-socialist transition was accompanied by a decline in industrial production. Manual work provided by the Romani became unnecessary. Their low level of education made the possibility of finding new employment quite unrealistic. The Romani, who in socialist countries had been more or less given employment in low-skilled jobs in industry and construction, moved into the most vulnerable categories after the fall of industrial production. Their low level of education and low qualifications reduced their prospects of adjustment to the new conditions (Ladányi and Szélényi, 2003; Gedlu, 1998; Binder, 2010; Guy, 2004; Šučur, 2005).

As stated in the 2007 report by ENAR (the European Network against Racism), the majority of the Romani in Europe experience discrimination and anti-Gypsyism in the area of employment (Halázs, 2007). According to UNDP data, unemployment among the Romani is, as a rule, much higher than the majority population's unemployment rate.⁹⁷

The post-socialist transition pushed the Romani beyond the boundaries of society and intensified the process of their social exclusion. Their poverty has been growing faster than the national averages. As a result, on the one hand their dependence on social welfare has increased, on the other hand – the tightening of state budgets in the transitional period limited their access to certain social services. The growing dependence on social welfare services only contributed to negative stereotypes, and thus the Romani have been accused of refusing to work or to live "honestly" (Binder, 2010, 324-325), of earning at the expense of others (Pavel, 2004, 79), and have been reproached for being illegal traders on the black market (Fonseca, 1995, 173).

SOCIAL TRAITS OF THE ROMANI POPULATION IN CROATIA

Let us now turn to Croatia. In the following part of our paper we shall present certain demographic and social properties of the Romani population in Croatia, and then deal with the social distance of the dominant population towards the Romani. In this, we shall use official statistical data, the research results of other authors and the results of our own research in settlements in Međimurje County – a region in which the Roma make up the largest minority community (fig. 1). The Romani in Međimurje County live mostly in separate, ethnically homogeneous areas of settlements that are inhabited only by the Romani. As a rule, these Romani areas are spatially separated (by a railway line, canal, forest) from the Croatian majority areas of the settlements to which they administratively belong (Štambuk,

97 "At risk: Roma and the Displaced in Southeast Europe", United Nations Development Program, Bratislava, 2006

2000; Šlezak, 2009), however incorporation into the same administrative territory of the settlement nonetheless ensures more frequent mutual contacts between the two communities.



Fig. 1 - The Geographical Location of Međimurje County.

Based on official data (the 2001 census), the number of Romani in Croatia was recorded as 9,463, yet experts believe that their actual number is significantly higher: about 30,000 to 40,000 people.

According to both census data and a field study carried out in 2009 in the Romani area of the settlement of Kuršanec, in Međimurje, Romani demographic and socioeconomic traits differ significantly from those of the majority population. In contrast to the dominant society, the Romani minority is characterized by a very high fertility rate and an expansive age structure (tab. 1). For example, every second Romani is younger than 20 years, whereas only every fourth non-Romani in Croatia is in that age category (the 2001 census). On the average, Romani women give birth to four children, whereas all other fem

les in the Croatian population have on the average only two children (Pokos, 2005, 272).

Table 1 - Age Structure of Romani and Total Population

Age group	Relative share of population (%)		
	The Romani		Total population of Croatia
	Total Romani population in Croatia	Romani population in Kuršanec	
0–19	55.4	64.0	23.7
20–59	40.2	34.5	54.8
60 and over	3.0	1.5	21.5

Sources: Population census 2001, Case study in Kuršanec 2009.

The size of Romani families has certain social implications. Having a large family with many children ensures state-run social benefits. It is possible to trace a clear increase in the tendency towards depending on social welfare (tab. 2). Among the sources of income for the Romani, the proportion derived from social welfare grew from 47 to 74% in only 6 years between 1998 and 2004. The case study in Kuršanec revealed that as much as 90% of all Romani households were receiving social welfare, and 81% of all households additionally received child support benefits.

Table 2 - Sources of Income of Romani Households (in %)

SOURCES OF INCOME	1998 SURVEY, Croatia*	2004 SURVEY, Croatia*	2009 CASE STUDY, Kuršanec**
Agriculture	4.8	1.1	-
Livestock raising	2.4	0.2	0.57
Employment	23.0	17.6	8.57
Work abroad	-	1.3	-
Cottage industry	-	3.6	-
Temporary, seasonal work	31.00	26.9	70.86
Collection of raw materials	20.6	19.7	8.00
Odd jobs (washing windscreens, selling door-to-door, etc.)	2.4	6.4	-
Pension	15.9	4.8	4.00
Social welfare	46.8	74.2	90.86
Maternity compensation	n.a	n.a	10.86
Child support	n.a	n.a	81.14
Help from relatives	6.3	2.9	-
Begging	11.1	4.1	4.00
Fortune telling	-	0.5	-
Other	-	4.7	2.86

Source: *Conducted by Ivo Pilar Institute. It was possible to specify two sources, ** Conducted by H. Šlezak. It was possible to specify two and more sources

Romani living conditions in Croatia do not differ much from those in other post-socialist countries. A large number of the Romani live in conditions of poverty. The UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) data indicate that the poverty rate of the Romani people in Croatia is lower than that of other countries in South-East Europe (tab. 3).

Table 3 - Share of the Population below the Internationally Comparable Poverty Line, 2011

Country	Majority population in close proximity to Romani (%)	Romani population (%)
Croatia	2	11
Albania	14	72
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3	26
Bulgaria	6	49
Hungary	5	8
Kosovo	42	79
Macedonia	11	52
Montenegro	4	33
Romania	20	67
Serbia	9	58

An income based 4.30 US\$ per day PPP (purchasing power parity) poverty line

Source: UNDP Vulnerable Groups Dataset, United Nations Development Program, <http://vulnerability.undp.sk>

At the same time, however, the poverty rate of the Romani population in Croatia is about five times higher than that of non-Romani population. Their living conditions are far worse than those of their Croatian neighbours: most Romani households do not have sewage facilities; almost half of them do not have running water (tab. 4). Every third household has no washing machine. About two thirds of the Romani have no automobile. Not having an automobile presents a special problem for the Romani, because without a car they cannot carry out their regular activities, for example collecting secondary raw materials.

These data correspond to an extremely high unemployment rate among the Romani in Croatia. According to the 2006 UNDP report, it is the second highest in South-East Europe and more than two times above the unemployment rate of the majority population.⁹⁸ This high unemployment rate is the result of diverse factors. It is certainly a consequence of certain forms of discrimination in employment. On the other hand, in the families with several children the Romani find it economically more sensible to live on social welfare, then to find low paid jobs, which are the only ones available to them, due to their lack of qualifications.

⁹⁸ "At risk: Roma and the Displaced in Southeast Europe", United Nations Development Program, Bratislava, 2006.

Table 4 - The Living Conditions of the Romani and Majority Population

Life standard indicators	Total population of Croatia	Population of Kuršanec (Croatian part of the settlement)	Total Romani population in Croatia	Population of Kuršanec (Romani part of the settlement)
No electricity	0.3	0.00	26.0	9.71
No running water	5.7	0.00	48.9	48.57
No sewage facilities	24.00	9.89	78.8	91.43
No telephone	10.7	6.06	61.1	63.43
No washing machine	8.9	0.00	32.6	36.57
No automobile	37.00	3.03	67.5	72.00

Sources: Population census 2001, Case study in Kuršanec 2009.

One of the main barriers to employment of the Romani is their low level of education. In Croatia, one in every three Romani over the age of 15 has never attended school, and nearly three-quarters of them have not finished primary school (tab. 5). This could be explained by several factors. The first reason is their lack of knowledge of the Croatian language. Romani communities are generally spatially isolated, and contacts with the dominant population are very limited. Therefore, when Romani children go to elementary school they usually know only a few sentences in the Croatian language. The second reason for the low education level is premature marriage. The fertility rate in the age group 15–19 is still very high. Another important reason is also the lack of an education incentive supported by adults. Romani often ask: "Did you ever see Romani lawyers or doctors? Why waste time?" Many parents send their children to school only because they fear receiving fines.

It seems that they continue to see more benefits in the children learning from older members of the community, and in their taking part in the community's economic life very early, rather than in formal education. Yet as most Romanologists agree, this low education level is a crucial factor in maintaining the social deprivation of Romani societies.

Undoubtedly the path towards the integration of the Romani into European societies lies in education. For the Romani, who are isolated in closed communities and in an inflexible solidarity, independent interaction with the contemporary world of high technology and complicated social structures is not an easy task. However, integrating the Romani is also not an easy process for dominant societies that have yet to overcome their xenophobia and learn to understand a culture that has existed for centuries in contiguity with European cultures, without mixing with them.

Table 5 - Education Structure of the Romani, aged 15 and over

Education level	Highest education attainment of the Romani in Croatia, 2001 (%)	Highest education attainment of the Romani in Kuršanec, 2009 (%)
No schooling	32.6	23.5
Unfinished primary school (1–7 grades)	41.7	56.5
Primary school	18.8	15.9
Secondary school	5.9	4.1
Two-year college	0.1	0.0
University	0.2	0.0
Unknown	0.7	0.0
Total	100	100

Sources: Population census 2001, Case study Kuršanec 2009.

SOCIAL DISTANCE TOWARDS THE ROMANI

In Croatia prejudices towards the Romani manifested themselves in the transition decades on numerous levels – from hate speeches in online blogs⁹⁹ to refusing service in cafés¹⁰⁰, from protests of parent groups against integrated schooling¹⁰¹ to physical assaults. The Roma Rights Centre documented attacks on the Romani in Eastern Slavonia in 1998 and 2006¹⁰², in Rijeka in 1999¹⁰³ and in Zagreb in 2000¹⁰⁴, 2001¹⁰⁵ and 2002¹⁰⁶.

The xenophobic attitude towards the Romani undeniably presents an obstacle to their integration into the majority society. In order to check to what degree the majority population's attitude towards the Romani is xenophobic, we used an instrument for analysing ethnic relations that is typical in social research – i.e. we measured the majority population's social distance towards the Romani population. In this were used the methodology of E. Bogardus.

The American sociologist R. E. Park defined social distance as encompassing different levels of understanding and feelings of intimacy that appear in different personal and broader

⁹⁹ <http://www.errc.org/article/racist-hate-speech-in-reaction-to-roma-winning-big-brother-croatia-tv-contest/2554>.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.errc.org/article/croatian-cafe-refuses-to-serve-roma/2669>.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.errc.org/article/croatian-parents-refuse-integrated-schooling/1654>.

¹⁰² <http://www.errc.org/article/anti-romani-civilian-violence-in-eastern-slavonia-croatia/58>.

¹⁰³ <http://www.errc.org/article/croatia-non-roma-beat-romani-men-in-rijeka-and-zagreb/829>.

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.errc.org/article/skinheads-attack-roma-in-croatia/885>.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.errc.org/article/numerous-racially-motivated-attacks-against-roma-in-croatia/1705>;

<http://www.errc.org/article/more-skinhead-attacks-against-roma-in-croatia/1278>.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.errc.org/article/police-beat-pregnant-romani-woman-in-croatia/1582>.

social relations (Park, 1924). The concept was developed by E. Bogardus, who emphasized that social distance towards members of different ethnic groups depends mostly on existing prejudices and generalizations, and only afterwards on one's own possible experiences (Bogardus, 1925a). In Bogardus' definition, social distance "refers to the degrees and grades of understanding and feeling that persons experience regarding each other" (Bogardus 1925b, 299). Social distance, according to Bogardus, explains many of the interactions between persons, and determines the character of social relations.

Bogardus also developed a scale of social relations, with which it is possible to measure levels of understanding, feelings of intimacy, or levels of acceptance of different social groups, and he provided instructions on techniques for measuring social distance (Bogardus, 1933). The Bogardus scale, despite later criticisms pertaining primarily to differences in the intervals between the proposed social relations, nevertheless still today represents the foremost instrument for measuring ethnic distances.

Previous research works, conducted in Croatia, dealing with social distances towards ethnic groups, showed that the level of social distance towards the Romani is exceptionally high (Katunarić, 1991; Šiber, 1997; Malešević and Uzelac, 1997; Previšić, 1996; Čorkalo and Kamenov, 2003; Banovac and Boneta, 2006; Hrvatić, 1996, 2004, 2005). The same results appear in research carried out in neighbouring countries of South-East Europe. In Serbia and Montenegro, the Romani, along with Albanians, make up the ethnic group towards which the majority population expresses maximum social distance (Djurović, 2002; Mihić and Mihić, 2003, CEDEM, 2007). In Bosnia and Herzegovina the highest level of social distance is also expressed towards the Romani. Moreover, all the three constituent nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, rigorously confronted during the relatively recent armed conflicts, expressed much smaller social distances between one another, than towards the Romani (Puhalo, 2009).

Stereotypes and prejudices are produced by generalisations and simplifications. They are overall attitudes that do not take into consideration individual differences, and are formed "before and aside of having objective data on the subject of the attitude" (Petz, 1992, 330), or rather, before or aside of true experiences. Proceeding from this notion, and in accordance with the contact hypothesis, which suggests that direct contacts play a role in overcoming hostilities (Colman, 2006, 167), we assumed that in circumstances of reduced physical/spatial distances between two groups, which would ensure more frequent and more continuous contacts between groups of the Romani and the majority population, the social distance would also be reduced.

Therefore we set as our goal linking social distance to physical distance, and attempting to answer the question whether the level of (non)acceptance of the Romani

depends on their spatial distance or proximity. Do daily contacts with the Romani have an effect on attitudes towards them? This question becomes particularly interesting due to the fact that the Romani are both a negatively perceived ethnic group and in general (in Croatia) a spatially clearly segregated group (Rogić, 2005; Šlezak, 2009). We formulated the hypothesis that in areas of daily contacts, communications and direct personal relations, cultural stereotypes and prejudices would be corrected through practical experience and social distance towards the Romani would be reduced. We included in the study the adult and child population, and compared their levels of xenophobic attitudes towards the Romani.

The study was conducted in the mixed Croat-Romani settlement Kuršanec and in the settlements Strahoninec and Savska Ves, which do not have Romani populations, and are located 8 km from the nearest Romani settlement. In the mixed locality Kuršanec, most of the Romani live in a separate area, about 1 km in distance from the part of the settlement with a majority (Croat) population. According to the data from the 2001 census¹⁰⁷, the settlements Kuršanec, Strahoninec and Savska Ves had 1,314, 2,728 and 1.238 inhabitants. The Romani population of Kuršanec, according to field work from 2009, included 960 persons (Šlezak, 2010). Investigation of the social distance in the adult population was carried out on a sample of N=162 (N=57 for the majority population in Kuršanec, N=55 for the majority population in Strahoninec and Savska Ves, N=50 for the Romani in Kuršanec).

The sample of the majority society's pupil population that had the possibility of daily contacts with the Romani was made up of pupils from Kuršanec Elementary School. The sample of pupils that did not have daily contacts with the Romani was made up of pupils from Strahoninec Elementary School, which is attended by children from the settlements Strahoninec and Savska Ves. All pupils in grades 5-8 who attended school, and were in class on the day of the research, entered into the total sample, N=233: (N=73 was the sample number for the majority population children in Kuršanec Elementary School, N=77 for the Romani children in Kuršanec Elementary School and N=83 for the majority population children in Strahoninec Elementary School).

As expected, the social distance towards the Romani shown by the majority population, both the adults and the children, was very high (tab. 6). In order to more easily compare the distance towards different social groups, a derivative indicator was used that provides a clearer picture of differences in the willingness to accept social contacts with different ethnic groups – i.e. the social contact distance index (SCD).¹⁰⁸ By comparing this index (Fig. 2), one

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.dzs.hr/>

¹⁰⁸ The SCD (social contact distance index) includes the first six proposed social contacts. Respondents receive one point for each non-acceptance of one of the first six relations in the Bogardus scale. Thus the value of indicator moves in a range from 0.00, which shows the absence of social distances, to 6.00 which indicates a maximum social distance towards certain ethnic or social groups. If marriage is accepted then the index of social distance is 0, if entry into the country is not accepted then the index of social distance is 6.

can see that the ethnic groups with which the pupils and adults in the selected samples least accept social contacts are the Romani and Albanians.

Table 6 - Distribution of Answers by the Majority Population as to Accepting Proposed Social Contacts, in regard to Selected Ethnic Groups, in %

SOCIAL CONTACTS	Slovenians		Hungarians		Serbs		Romani		Albanians		Chinese	
	ADULT POPULATION IN THE SETTLEMENTS KURŠANEC (1) N=57, STRAHONINEC AND SAVSKA VES (2) N=55											
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Close relative	57.89	77.36	42.11	73.58	31.58	54.72	21.05	11.32	24.56	18.87	28.07	32.08
Personal friend	66.67	90.57	63.16	86.79	59.65	83.02	47.37	37.74	49.12	62.26	45.61	54.72
Neighbour	63.16	84.91	68.42	86.79	57.89	84.91	36.84	41.51	42.11	67.92	45.61	66.04
Colleague at work	59.65	90.57	59.65	77.36	56.14	81.13	35.09	62.26	43.86	69.81	45.61	75.47
Citizen of the R. of Croatia	57.89	86.79	64.91	77.36	56.14	77.36	52.63	67.92	52.63	73.58	47.37	69.81
Visitor to Croatia	78.95	90.57	82.46	88.68	75.44	81.13	66.67	75.47	70.18	86.79	73.68	84.91
Excluded from Croatia	17.54	3.77	14.04	0.00	19.30	0.00	42.11	26.42	15.79	3.77	19.30	5.66
PUPILS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN KURŠANEC (3) N=73 AND STRAHONINEC (4) N=83												
	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4
To be my best friend	72.60	68.67	42.47	59.04	49.32	54.22	24.66	21.69	36.99	59.04	65.75	78.31
To sit with me at my desk	73.97	68.67	52.05	60.24	50.68	57.83	27.40	16.87	50.68	55.42	63.01	78.31
To be a pupil in my class	83.56	84.34	72.60	75.90	68.49	66.27	49.32	32.53	60.27	73.49	79.45	85.54
To be a pupil in my school	95.89	87.95	78.08	83.13	69.86	72.29	53.42	48.19	63.01	80.72	79.45	89.16
To be a neighbour in the street where I live	69.86	81.93	53.42	79.52	43.84	63.86	26.03	28.92	36.99	71.08	63.01	85.54
To be an inhabitant of my village	68.49	81.93	56.16	78.31	52.05	67.47	41.10	42.17	50.68	72.29	68.49	87.95
To be excluded from Croatia	15.07	8.43	23.29	8.43	36.99	24.10	50.68	34.94	28.77	12.05	20.55	7.23

As opposed to what was expected, i.e. contrary to the postulated hypothesis, it can be seen that in the spheres of daily contacts, communications and direct personal relations with the Romani, a decrease in xenophobic feelings does not occur. Among children, however, the social distance is slightly less in the mixed school attended also by the Romani, than in the school that does not have any Romani pupils. Yet the difference between these groups is

too small, and not statistically significant, so that it is not possible to come to a conclusion regarding the positive "anti-xenophobic" effects of daily contacts at school.

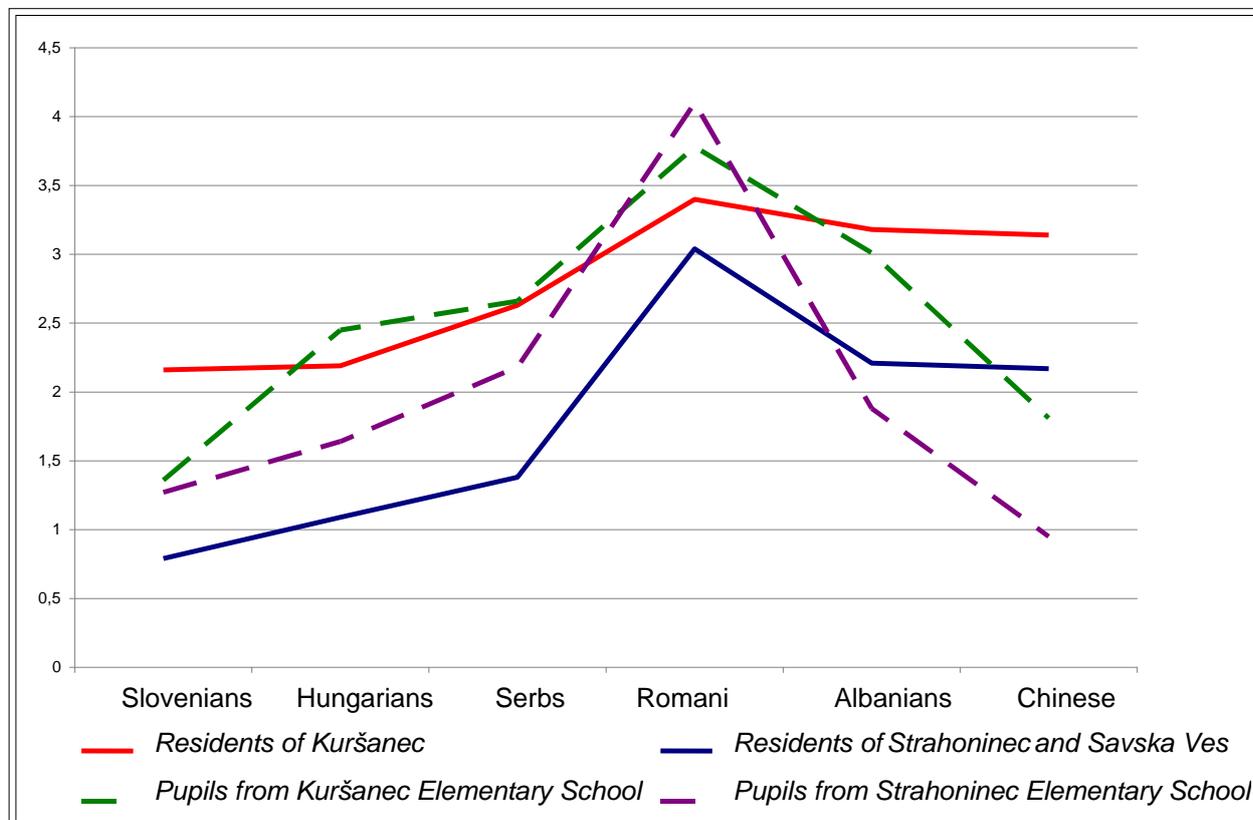


Fig. 2 - Majority population's social contact distance index (SCD)

The general trend which can be noticed by comparing the social contact distance indices of adults and pupils from Kuršanec with those from Strahoninec and Savska Ves is that the population of the mixed settlement Kuršanec has a greater social distance in regard to all the proposed ethnic groups. This data leads us to a possible conclusion that the presence of the Romani in the settlement transfers over into a general rejection of "others", and affects the growth of xenophobia in the majority population towards "foreigners" in general. It would certainly be interestingly to test this tendency on a larger and spatially more differentiated sample.

It is interesting to note that among pupils who attend school daily together with the Romani the social distance towards them is greater than among adults who do not communicate as much with the Romani within their own administrative settlement. Namely, as is seen from data, elementary school pupils from Kuršanec, for the most part, accept social relations with the Romani less than do the adults from their settlement. Franceško,

Mihić and Kajon (2005) explain the highly xenophobic attitude of co-pupils towards the Romani, as their study also showed, by the poorer school results of the Romani and their lack of developed hygienic habits. During Babić's study (2004) in a mixed school in the Zagreb neighbourhood of Kozari Bok, interviewed teachers explained, in a similar way, why children from the majority population did not desire to share desks with the Romani: the Romani "often come to school dirty, uncombed, smelling badly, they have parasites in their hair more often than other pupils" (Babić, 2004, 323). In conditions involving different ways and qualities of life, close physical proximity, as shown likewise by our study, cannot be a factor in reducing the social distance of majority population children from their Romani peers.

In the data regarding the ethnically mixed Kuršanec settlement, the existence of a strong conflict potential can be recognised. In the sample of adult respondents from Kuršanec, more than half of the respondents were prepared to accept only two levels of social contact: the Romani as citizens of the Republic of Croatia and the Romani as visitors to Croatia. It is interesting that despite the fact that all surveyed children in Kuršanec had also Romani in their classes: only about 50% accepted the Romani as pupils in their class and school. As much as 42% of the adult respondents and as much as 50% of the children in Kuršanec would most like to expel the Romani from their country! For adults in Kuršanec the most unacceptable relationship with the Romani, as expected, was a close family relationship, yet about two third of the respondents would not accept the Romani as neighbours or as colleagues at work (Fig. 3). For children the most unacceptably relations were a close friendship, sitting in the same desk and being neighbours in the same street (Fig. 4). It should be said that studies by other authors (Banovac and Boneta, 2006; Previšić, 1996; Hrvatić, 1996, 2004, 2005), in which the Romani also appeared at the very bottom of the social distance scale, nonetheless did not show such a high level of xenophobic disposition by the majority population in regard to the Romani as could be seen in a location of direct daily contacts with the Romani!

Despite expectations and contrary to the postulated hypothesis, the differences in the acceptance of individual social relations between inhabitants of mixed Croat–Romani settlements and settlements without a Romani presence for the most part did not turn out to be statistically significant. We can seek an explanation in the exceptional high level of social distance in both compared populations. Only the following results were statistically significant: in the adult population, the difference in accepting the Romani as colleagues at work ($X^2 = 6,98$, $df=1$, $p < 0,01$); in the child population, the difference in accepting the Romani as pupils in class ($X^2 = 3,87$, $df=1$, $p < 0,05$) and the differences in the attitude that the Romani should be excluded from the Republic of Croatia ($X^2 = 3,33$, $df=1$, $p < 0,10$). Persons who in their settlement live with the Romani are less likely to accept them as

colleagues at work. Children who attend school together with the Romani to a greater degree accept the Romani as pupils in class (which is actually for them a default), but at the same time, however, part of them are more radical in relation to the Romani, and do not accept them even as legitimate citizens of their country. In summary, based on the conducted study, it may be concluded that a smaller physical distance in regard to the Romani, in as much as it changes the relationship towards them, unfortunately changes it only in the direction of increasing social distance, or in the direction of greater xenophobia.

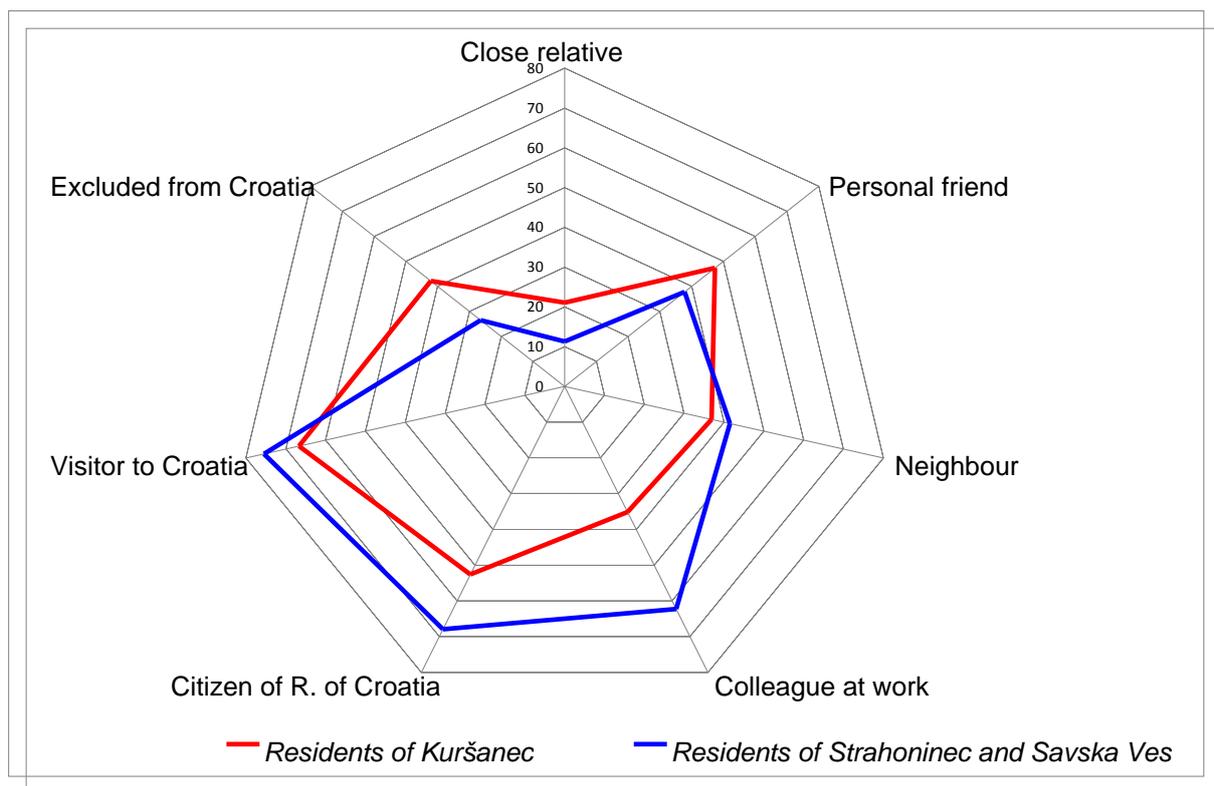


Fig. 3. Majority population adults' acceptance of social contacts (in %)

Examination of the data shows an interesting trend. On the social distance scale of the population that does not live in same settlement with the Romani a regular gradation of values appears: the closer the type of social relation, that more difficult it is to accept. Contrary to this, on the distance scale of the population that lives in the same settlement with the Romani, the gradation of the acceptance values of the proposed social contacts is irregular (Fig. 5). Namely, adult co-villagers of the Romani are more inclined to accept them as friends, than as neighbours! Similarly, children are more inclined to accept the Romani as co-pupils in their class and school, than as neighbours in their street. As much as 63% of the

adults and 74% of the children do not wish to have the Romani as neighbours. Undoubtedly, the non-acceptance by the majority population of continuous spatial contacts with the Romani makes it quite likely that a high level of spatial segregation of the Romani will be maintained.

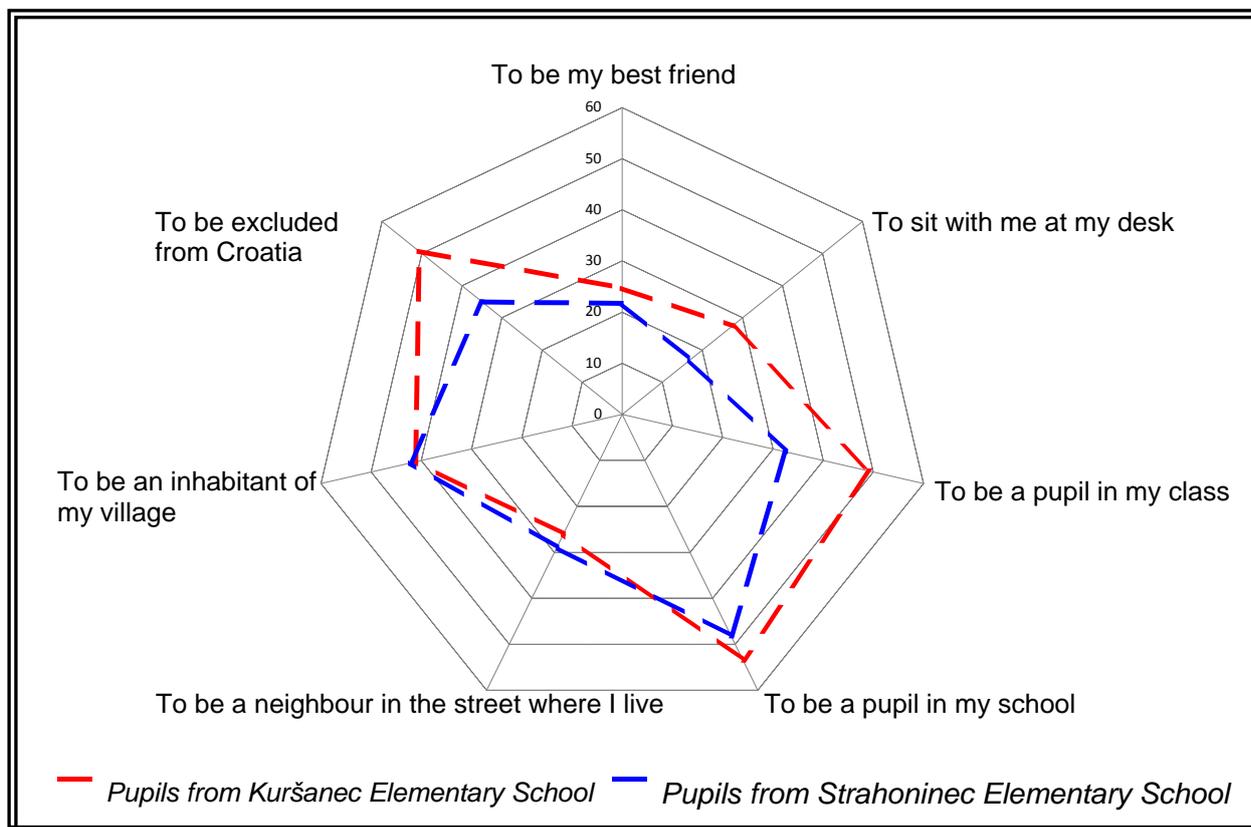


Fig. 4. Majority population children's acceptance of social contacts (in %)

In concluding this chapter we can state that, as our study shows, the presence of the Romani in the population structure does not reduce the ethnic distance towards them, but rather increases it in certain social relations. The perception of the Romani in the mental map of the investigated population of Međimurje, unfortunately, somewhat corresponds to the sarcastic and vivid comment of a Slovak Romani, cited by the Romanologist Milena Hübschmanová (2004, 219): "... as soon as a Romani comes nearer, he becomes a 'Gipsy'".

We should seek a way to overcome the social distance towards the Romani obviously not in spatial, but in social relations – in the improvement of their social, economic and educational status.

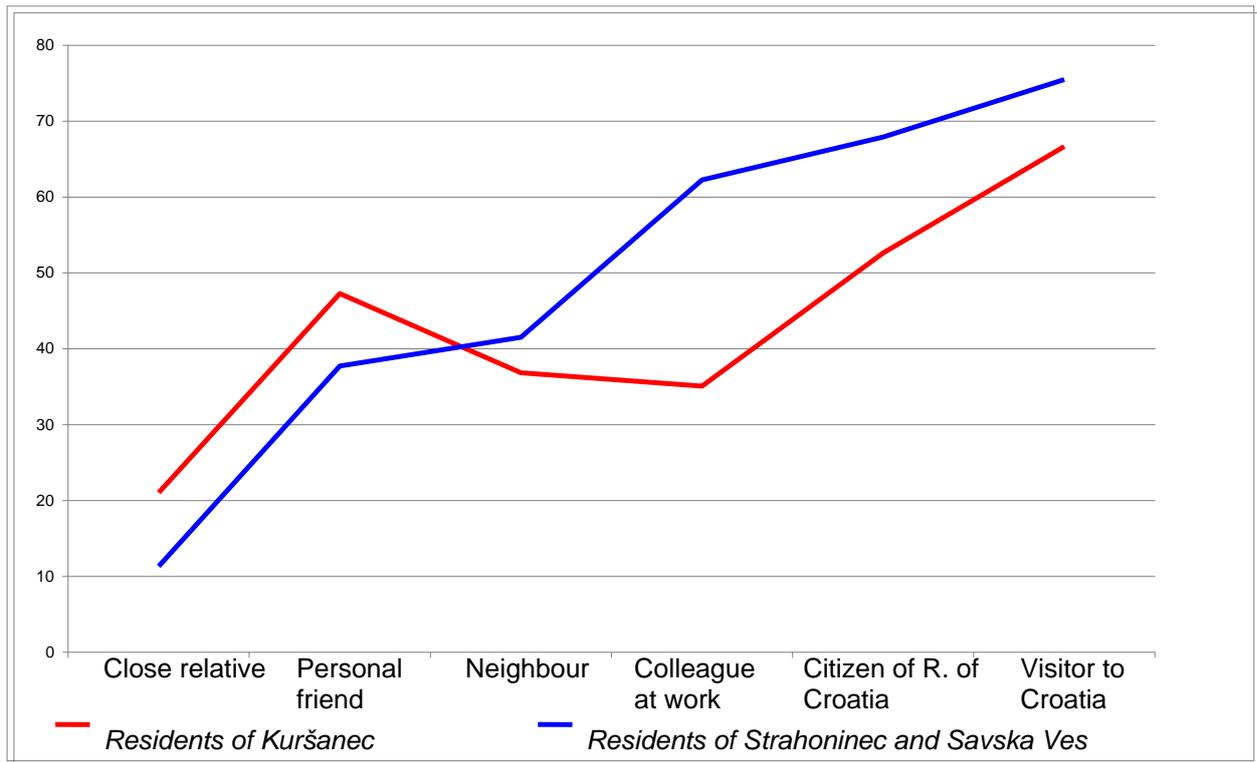


Fig. 5. Majority populations adults' acceptance of social contacts (in %)

CONCLUSIONS

We will agree with Éva Blénesi (2003, 203), who believes that if an ethnic group is generally linked to a low status, its culture is stigmatised, and the group becomes a target of discrimination and harassing. The example of the Romani is especially relevant in this respect. Today we speak of a "new poverty" among the Romani. Modernisation and industrialization have made their products and services superfluous, deindustrialization and economic restructuring have destroyed prospects for their employment as an unqualified and poorly educated work force. Having failed in time and skilfully to "requalify" themselves (Štambuk, 2005, 18), the Romani are becoming increasingly dependent on social welfare. Although the close connection between the Romani and poverty has lasted for centuries, today the Romani are the group with the highest poverty risk in societies in which they live (Šučur, 2005, 135). Nowadays some researchers speak of the Romani as an underclass – as a class under (or, more precisely, outside of) the class structure (Ladányi and Szelényi, 2003; Šučur, 2005).

In such conditions direct contacts with the Romani, in contradiction to the well-known contact hypothesis, have not encouraged a more positive attitude of majority population towards them. Overcoming xenophobia towards the Romani is difficult to achieve without a change in their socio-economic and educational status.

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