

**THE REPRESENTATION, RIGHTS,
AND IDENTITY OF CROATIA'S ROMA
COMMUNITY**
EXPLORING ARCHIVAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Roma are among twenty-two national minorities in Croatia. They have lived in Croatian lands since the fourteenth century, but there are few visible and certainly no comprehensive records either *about* or *from* them in Croatian cultural heritage institutions. The principles according to which records *about* Roma and *of* Roma are collected and preserved within heritage institutions are discussed in terms of their categorization, types of secondary sources and visibility; as well as results from interviews with members of the Roma community. The paper concludes that what is needed is a more inclusive and proactive documentary approach that takes advantage of all the possibilities supported by existing Croatian archival legislation.

KEYWORDS

Roma, archive, museum, archival legislation

Introduction

Historically, archives have predominantly preserved records of society's political elites. Numerous communities are missing from the archival record for reasons such as the repression and persecution of minority groups by the dominant group; reliance within a community on non-textual and non-tangible ways of remembering such as oral tradition; and characterization or misrepresentation of minority collective identity through the eyes of or by the dominant group.

One particular minority group for which this is the case is the Roma, who are widely and negatively referred to as Gypsies. The Roma are one among twenty-two national minorities in Croatia whose rights are constitutionally and legally regulated. The Roma people are one of the oldest minority groups in Croatia, with the earliest written traces of their presence in Croatian territories dating back to the fourteenth century.¹ In 2001, 9,643 persons identified themselves as Roma on the Croatian census.² Various Roma associations estimate, however, that there are nearly 40,000 Roma living in Croatia. Roma culture and life have been recorded by non-Roma and have been misrepresented in many different ways. When this community is described both in popular culture and also in the scholarly literature, a pattern of representations can be discerned. Certain terms are frequently used in association with characterizations of the Roma, including “migrations”,³ “transnational identity”⁴ and “discrimination and marginalization,”⁵ but often in a pejorative manner. For example Kanižaj’s research⁶ has shown that daily newspapers represent Roma people in negative ways by using stereotypes and sensationalism, often withholding actual facts, negatively concentrating on Roma ethnicity, and emphasizing events related to crime and misdemeanors. The results of one of the largest research studies about the Roma in Croatia, *How do Croatian Roma Live?* were published in 2005. The study concluded that “the traditional socio-cultural identity of the Roma is fading away and that the Roma, to a large degree, are socially identified and represented through negative features or deficiencies: poverty and threat.”⁷ Such misrepresentations have become a part of the wider Croatian collective memory and dominant historical narrative.

This paper argues that documenting the life, culture and history of Roma by Roma would be an important step in rectifying the often-

1 Hrvatić, Neven. Romi u Hrvatskoj: od migracija do interkulturalnih odnosa. // *Migracijske i etničke teme* 20, 4(2004), 367-385, 369.

2 Ibid, p. 373.

3 Ibid, p. 368.

4 McGarry, Aidan. The Roma voice in the European Union: between national belonging and transnational identity. // *Social movement studies* 10, 3(2011), 283-297, 283.

5 McGarry, Aidan. Ethnic group identity and the Roma social movement: transnational organizing structures of representation. // *Nationalities papers* 36, 3(2008), 449-470, 464.

6 Kanižaj, Igor. Manjine: između javnosti i stvarnosti. Opatija: ICEJ, 2006. Available at: http://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/284131.Manjine_između_javnosti_i_stvarnosti_Igor_Kanižaj.pdf [cited: 2014-12-02].

7 Mišetić, Anka. The socio-cultural features of the Romani population. // *How do Croatian Roma live?* / edited by Maja Štambuk. Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2005. Pp. 343-363, 363.

misrepresented archival and historical record as well as in changing long-held stereotypes. Such an approach might help to diminish the prevalent concentration on negative aspects and to improve the socio-cultural and historical status of Roma within Croatian society. In this respect, archives have great potential social value for communities, especially for groups that have been traditionally misrepresented or underrepresented. Minority groups could be empowered by creating their own archives in order to collect, preserve and disseminate their histories as they deem appropriate in order to correct inaccuracies in the archival record and overcome stereotypes that have been formed over centuries by the dominant culture. Documenting their reality in ways that are both culturally relevant and sensitive to the Roma, and that allow the wider society to view those records could help to dispel incorrect beliefs. Moreover, enabling different communities such as the Roma to preserve their own history and culture can only serve to strengthen the archival record and improve resources for scholarship and research. As Germanic and Gender Studies scholar Claudia Breger has asserted, “Self-representation is...of crucial...[human]... importance as both a prerequisite and a medium for political, social, and symbolic change”⁸ Diasporic communities and other groups that have experienced dispersion and exile are confronted not only with the difficulty of representing themselves but also with uniting the seemingly disparate groups within their own community. Widespread activism, self-representation, and remembering of pivotal events in the community’s history are a good way to start to unify under self-identity – not one externally imposed from the perspectives of a dominant culture. The intent of this paper is to begin a conversation on how some of these issues might be addressed from an archival perspective.

This paper focuses, therefore, on possible principles for collecting and preserving Romani records and records about the Roma. There are two main reasons for this. First, there are few records *about* or *of* the Roma in Croatia’s public heritage institutions that are clearly visible (i.e., easily locatable) in finding aids such as inventories and catalogues. There are individual cases where a few documents about

8 Breger, Claudia. Understanding the ‘Other’?: communication, history and narration in Margriet de Moor’s *Hertog van Egypte* (1996). // *The role of the Romanies: images and counter-images of ‘Gypsies’/Romanies in European cultures* / edited by Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004. Pp. 132-133. Available at: <http://liverpool.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.5949/UPO9781846313950/upso-9780853236795-chapter-10> [cited: 2014-12-02].

the Roma are preserved – for example, in bureaucratic records and ethnographic notes – but among those sources it is difficult to distinguish which records were created by Roma and which by others. Second, but no less important, is the fact that the Roma heavily rely on oral tradition as the primary means for transmitting their history, culture, and traditions within their communities. Traditional narratives are an example of the Roma oral tradition, with the mother as the primary storyteller in the family. Oral tradition is considered to be an integral part of Roma cultural identity. Đorđević observes that *romanity* itself is manifested in creations such as myths and legends, narratives and tales, songs and stories, riddles and fairies “memorized, and not written, always transferred from knee to knee”.⁹ But he also adds that it is necessary to write down all aspects of Roma oral literature.¹⁰ This is because the undue emphasis on textual records within the traditional archival paradigm leaves “little or no space ... for cultures with nontextual mechanisms for recording decisions, actions, relationships or memory, such as those embodied in oral, aural or kinetic traditions”.¹¹

Several different discussions about the Roma address issues of Roma identity, viewing it as a firm base that could serve as a starting point for improving their societal status. Culture is frequently seen as a crucial component of identity. Associated with culture are the phenomena of collective memory, forgetting, cultural transmission, and remembrance of historical events, but archival perspectives on these phenomena are often lacking. For example, have Croatian archives and other memory institutions collected and preserved records on which Croatian Roma history could be written? And more importantly, how do members of the Roma community conceptualize problems in their community that are or might be impossible to address historically without tangible archival records? This paper, therefore, is not about Roma history or its cultural richness and uniqueness, but instead is a consideration of the abilities of Croatian heritage institutions to represent Roma through different collections of archival

9 Đorđević, Dragoljub. Introduction. // *Rromanipe(n): o kulturnom identitetu Roma: promovisanje i zaštita kulturnih prava u Programu javnog zastupništva 2003-2005.* / edited by Barbara Davis. Beograd: CARE International, 2005. Pp. 13-20, 17.

10 Ibid., p.18.

11 Gilliland, Anne; Sue McKemish, Kelvin White Kelvin, Lu Yang and Lau Andrew. Pluralizing the archival paradigm: can archival education in Pacific Rim communities address the challenge? // *The American archivist* 71, 1(2008), 87-117, 90.

and other documentary materials with the understanding that "... archives have the power to privilege and to marginalize"¹² by means of their appraisal, acquisition, and description strategies.

Exploratory study

In 2013, Tamara Štefanac conducted an exploratory study focused on the Roma community in Zagreb, Croatia. The study sought to understand fundamental archival issues related to the Roma community in Zagreb and gain better insight into Roma traditions that are related to documents, records and oral tradition. The study consisted of three different but connected components:

1. Analyzing the Croatian archival legislation framework and sources on Roma history;
2. Identifying sources of Roma history in the Zagreb area through an analysis of finding aids of archives and museums in Zagreb; and,
3. Conducting semi-structured interviews with members of the Roma community on topics that included the importance of archives, records and recordkeeping traditions in Croatian Roma communities as well as of oral tradition.

The theoretical framework of this study was influenced by the following concepts drawn from different disciplinary discourses: 1) a representational view on records¹³ as characterized by Yeo: "To differentiate records from other kinds of representation, records can be characterized as persistent representations of activities, created by participants or observers of those activities or by their authorized proxies";¹⁴ 2) a broad and expanded definition of records;¹⁵ 3) the notion of archival power over memory: as Schwartz and Cook state, "Archives validate our experiences, our perceptions, our narratives, our stories. Archives are our memories. Yet what goes on in the archives remains remarkably unknown. Users of archives (historians and others) and shapers of archives (records creators, records managers, and archivists) add layers of meaning, layers which become naturalized, internalized

12 Schwartz, Joan; Terry Cook. Archives, records, and power: the making of modern memory. // *Archival science* 2(2002), 1-19, 13.

13 Yeo, Geoffrey. Concepts of records (1): Evidence, information and persistent representation. // *The American Archivist* 70, 2(2007), 315-343.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

15 White, Kelvin L. Meztizaje and remembering in Afro-Mexican communities of the Costa Chica: implications for archival education in Mexico. // *Archival science* 9(2009), 43-55.

and unquestioned.¹⁶ The study also drew on published research that affirms cultural heritage and orality as vital components of Roma identity.¹⁷ The paper acknowledges contemporary trends of thought that emphasize archival education as a foundation and agent of change that influences daily archival practice, and in particular the relevance of the framework emerging out of the PacRim Project¹⁸ and further developed by White¹⁹ and the Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group of the Archival Education and Research Initiative.²⁰ This framework proposed that conceptual expansion, embeddedness, collaboration, leadership, activism and ethics, reflexivity and sustainability should permeate both archival education and practice if these are to become more conscious of the plurality of communities and their practices.

Findings and discussion

Categorization and secondary sources

In his book about the Roma population in Europe, Jean Pierre Liégeois mentions issues of information and documentation work. Liégeois asserts that every institution has an obligation to insure equal access to information and knowledge.²¹ He continues that documentation is the key to information and that continuing work on documentation is a guarantee for mutual access to information. To document and to create records is part of business processes. Keeping and assuring access to these bureaucratic records is considered to be an important activity that supports business processes. In so many cases, people's lives surround these processes. The influences of business processes on personal life and, in a broader sense, on the life of a certain community, can be traced through records and documents.

The 1997 Croatian Act on Archives²² clearly defines rights, obligations and possibilities regarding the collection and preservation of records. Archival records, both public and private, are protected as cultural property. Archival materials are defined as records or documents

16 Schwartz, J.; T. Cook. Op.cit., p. 18.

17 See: Čvorović, Jelena. Gypsy narratives: from poverty to culture. Beograd: Srpska Akademija nauka i umetnosti Etnografski institut, 2004; Mišetić, A. Op. cit.

18 Gilliland, A. [et al.]. Op.cit., pp. 87-117.

19 White, K. L. Op. cit., pp. 43-55.

20 Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group, Archival Education and Research Institute. Educating for the archival multiverse. // The American archivist 74(2011), 68-102.

21 Liégeois, Jean-Pierre. Romi u Europi. Zagreb: Ibis grafika, 2009.

22 Zakon o arhivskom gradivu i arhivima (NN 105/97, NN 64/00, NN 65/09) [Act on archives].

created by corporate bodies or persons in pursuance of their activities, being of permanent significance for culture, history and science regardless of the place and time of their creation, or the form and medium in which they have been created or preserved. Archives are defined as institutions for preservation, protection, processing and use of archival material. Archival material can be public or private. Private archival materials are records produced through the actions of private legal entities or persons, unless they are generated by public authorities or in the conduct of public service, and if they are not in the state's ownership. Categorization as a process is defined within regulations on appraisal and the procedure of selection and disposal of archival material.²³ Within this process creators of records are classified into groups depending on the meaning of the totality of material created by their action (i.e., they are appraised at the macro level). State archives and regional archives identify and propose a list of creators of records in private ownership that are deemed to be of great importance for the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian Archival Council confirms these lists. Discussing private archival records in Croatia and mainly the example of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Hedbeli concludes that the, "Croatian archival service has not enough knowledge, understanding, and resources for adequate work with private records creators".²⁴ Hedbeli links this deficiency in knowledge and experience with the state's need to learn how to deal with private property, which she views as a remnant of Croatia's prior socialist era. However she also draws attention to the fact that most archive workers are trained on the job and are without formal archival education.

In some cases Roma NGOs are categorized as creators of archival records and they must manage their documentation according to the requirements of the Act on Archives. This documentation is considered valuable enough to preserve for future use. However, what is preserved and what will be preserved in the future greatly depends on the archivist who recognizes records of a private creator as being important and, following the regulations, suggests categorizing the creator as creator of archival material. How archives assign provenance (i.e., according to the creating institution, authority, or author) often

23 Pravilnik o vrednovanju te postupku odabiranja i izlučivanja arhivskog gradiva (NN 90/02) [Regulations on appraisal and procedure of selection and disposal of records].

24 Hedbeli, Živana. Private archival records in Croatia and non-governmental organizations' initiative. // *Atlanti* 17, 1-2(2007), 223-232, 226.

results in the subjects of the record (i.e., the Roma) being buried or ignored. Since state and regional archival services do not have a legal obligation to act proactively and do not have outreach programs of this nature, it is questionable how many records by and about the Roma community could be collected and preserved. It would, therefore, be necessary to engage Roma communities regarding how both their history and present-day activities are reflected in existing documentation they have created or collected.

Archive services in Croatia are centrally organized through the State Archives of Croatia, which also encompasses eighteen regional archives, and archival collection centers. A “categorization of creators of archival records” was published in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia No. 42* in 2007. Hedžbeli had previously noted that no clear methodology was applied by the State Archives of Croatia in selecting categories of private creators, but in this publication criteria were established for doing so.²⁵ She concludes that for unknown reasons categorization does not cover some private creators who are members of groups or communities that are abundantly present in Croatia. Members belonging to a range of underrepresented populations or organizations such as minority groups and and/or socially disadvantaged groups were also lacking.

As defined in the *Regulations on the Appraisal and Procedure for the Selection and Elimination of Archival Material*, there are three categories of creators of archival materials.²⁶ Creators that are recognized or, more accurately, are categorized as creators of archival materials are obligated to preserve their documentation, have inventories of documentation, and treat that documentation according to prescribed regulations that could ensure its preservation. Under the jurisdiction of the State Archives of Croatia, just one non-governmental organization that derives from Roma community, *Unija Roma Hrvatske* (the Union of Roma in Croatia) was categorized as a creator of archival material, among other minority associations and organizations.

The regional archives published their categorizations in 2008 in the *Official Gazette No. 126*. Regarding Roma organizations and associations, the State Archives in Zagreb and in Sisak did not categorize any Roma organization or association as a creator of archive material.

25 Ibid., p. 229.

26 Pravilnik o vrednovanju te postupku odabiranja i izlučivanja arhivskog gradiva. Op. cit., Article 5.

The State Archive in Rijeka categorized *Vijeće romske nacionalne manjine za Primorsko-goransku županiju* (Council of the Roma national minority of Primorje and Gorski Kotar County), *Udruga Zajednica Roma PGŽ* (NGO Community of Roma of Primorje and Gorski Kotar County), *Romsko jedinstvo PGŽ* (Roma unity Primorje and Gorski Kotar County), and *Udruženje Roma Hrvatske* (Affiliation of Croatian Roma). The State Archive in Pazin categorized *Udruga »Romi za Rome Hrvatske«*, *Podružnica Vodnjan* (NGO “Roma for Croatia Roma”, Vodnjan). In the *Official Gazette No.82* (2009) – under the jurisdiction of the State Archive for the Međimurje region – *Vijeće romske nacionalne manjine Međimurske županije Čakovec* (Council of Roma national minority, Međimurje county) is categorized as the creator of archive material. As stated earlier, being categorized as creator of archival records, the creator is supposed to conduct the records in a manner prescribed by regulations. This means that records must be arranged and described, physically protected, and made accessible by archivists.

Clearly categorization is not a fixed entity and it does not preclude that some entity or individual could not be categorized as creator of archival material in the future if the entity produces records that might be appraised as archival records by official archival services. It is often mentioned in the Croatian professional literature that there is a shortage of human resources in archives.²⁷ Lučić also asserts that the appraisal of records of non-governmental organizations should be balanced between those that function at the national and those at the regional level.²⁸ Such an approach would correspond with the jurisdiction of state and regional archives, but still there are no clear criteria for the categorization of private records creators. Categorization and appraisal of records in this form is a one-way process and is done from one perspective. Given how the regulations are defined, it is hard for the official Croatian archive services to support proactive archival outreach activities. From a certain perspective, categorization could be considered as an outreach activity, but not a comprehensive one since the model of categorization is not defined or conceptualized thoroughly – comprehensively it remains possible that most of Roma NGOs’ records would not be categorized as archival records and, therefore, would not be legally protected. In Croatia more generally, there have been many

27 See: Hedbeli, Ž. Op. cit.; Lučić, Melina. Arhiv i nevladine neprofitne organizacije: nadzor nad udrugama i akvizicijska politika. // Arhivski vjesnik 46(2004), 53-67.

28 Lučić, M. Op.cit., pp. 53-67.

NGOs with very important documentation that was simply thrown away when the organizations ceased to exist.

Public archives and the official archives service in Croatia support state and public institutions as well as their business processes. In implementing and adhering to the relevant laws and regulations, there remains a possibility for the preservation of private archival records. Formal entities in the form of special archives also exist. Besides categorized creators of records whose records presumably will be tended to, legal and private entities following regulations specified in the Act on Archives may found their own archives. Such “[s]pecialized and private archives (university archives, business archives, church archives, bank archives etc.) may collect and preserve archival and current records created through the activities of their founders and other domestic corporate bodies or persons”.²⁹ It is difficult to imagine, however, how an archival system designed mainly to preserve textual documentation and support the needs and demands of state and regional public authorities could also support demands that come from completely different paradigm. This would demand a fundamental change on both a conceptual and a paradigmatic level.

Besides the official archive service there are some independent initiatives for the documentation of different socio-cultural processes, although a small number of these could be, in terms of law, considered as specialized archives. None of these deals explicitly with the Roma community. Also dealing with heritage, but sometimes for the same purposes and sometimes for absolutely different ones, only the area of Zagreb was focused upon, since this is the most prominent region where Roma have lived since the fourteenth century.

The current state of museums in Zagreb is that there are no preserved sources that can document the lives of the Roma community in Zagreb. The curators of different documentary collections (including audio-visual collections) were contacted via e-mail during this study with questions about whether any sources relevant to the history of the Roma history in Zagreb are preserved within the collections for which they are responsible. The survey focused on original material that could be considered as valid primary sources for researchers. Only two photographs depicting Roma in Zagreb have been identified so far as that might be considered as primary sources (if we choose to believe the photographers’ perspectives and define photography as a primary source).

29 Zakon o arhivskom gradivu i arhivima. Op. cit.

Some additional sources are held by ethnology institutes, for example, ethnologists' notes. Dealing with such sources necessitates being aware that they are someone else's interpretation of events, persons, or objects. As Gilliland et al. note, "[t]he documentation created by anthropologists and others who observe and study communities and cultures also does not substitute for the materials a community generates for and about itself and upon which it relies".³⁰ These sources are not records of generated by the event itself, but certainly are records of someone observing that event – i.e., the ethnologist doing his/her research on the Roma.

Regarding library services, the Ministry of Culture has implemented a model of library activity through central libraries of national minorities within public and city libraries.³¹ On the Croatian Ministry of Culture's webpage there is a list of Central Libraries (status as of October 2013). There is no central library of Roma, but there are collections, often called the Roma collection, within some public libraries (such as Library Medveščak and Library Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević in Zagreb, and Library Fran Galović in Koprivnica). Croatian libraries have been collecting literature from and about different Croatian national minorities for several decades, so these endeavors to collect and give access to Roma library material found fertile ground and were much easier to implement than they might have been in archival or museum institutions.

Visibility in archival terms

Certainly some records about Roma exist in different fonds and collections in archives, but the question is this: as small components of much bigger records units, are those records just left to be unearthed through the diligence or serendipitous discovery of researchers or should they be visible in finding aids? Should the records be described just as any other records in descriptive systems – at the same level of aggregation and only reflecting a single provenance or one creator of records? Currently, the latter is the case and the existence of records related to Roma in most finding aids is not reflected. Shilton and Srinivasan suggested a "re-envisioning archival principles of appraisal, arrangement and description to actively incorporate participation from

30 Gilliland A. [et al.]. Op. cit., p. 90.

31 Tantalović, Siniša. Nacionalne manjine u Hrvatskoj. Split: Stina, 2005.

traditionally marginalized communities³². Croatian archival descriptive practices are standardized according to ISAD(G),³³ and acquisition policies are similar to those of many other European countries. In the State Archive in Zagreb one can identify materials relating to Roma in several finding aids, such as an inventory of the Fond DAZG 240 Bolnica Milosrdnih Sestara u Zagrebu (Hospital Sisters of Mercy in Zagreb) at the series level of Uprava (Administration), sub-series Ostali spisi (Other records): Dopisi u vezi dvojbene zavičajnosti i evidencije Roma 1907-1925 (Correspondence regarding doubtful homeland and lists of Roma).³⁴ Since these records were preserved in an amount that could be represented at the sub-series level, they are visible in the finding aid. The other fond is DAZG 1198 Upravna općina Sveta Klara (Administrative municipality Sveta Klara), Evidencije o stanovništvu - popisi Roma (Records on population – Lists of Roma). In both of these cases Roma from Zagreb are the subjects of records, and so that is the only perspective on Roma that is presented to researchers. There are no preserved records that were created by the Roma. This absence occurred because of large percentage of non-literate members of the Roma community who did not create records in tangible form. Instead they have transmitted them and their memories in non-tangible forms (e.g., through orality and ritual).

Opinions of members of the Roma community: a brief review

Any consideration of the availability of Roma historical sources in Zagreb would be incomplete without input from Roma community members. There are over hundred Roma NGOs in Croatia, but only a few are active. Although most NGOs have their headquarters registered in Zagreb, the Međimurje region, Rijeka, and Istria, but there are Roma NGOs in all regions of Croatia. Many of them are dedicated to preserving Roma heritage and traditions and are active in various economic, social, and cultural projects. Additionally, their web presence has in-

32 Shilton, Katie; Ramesh Srinivasan. Participatory appraisal and arrangement for multicultural archival collections. // *Archivaria* 63(2007), 87-101, 90.

33 ISAD(G): general international standard archival description: adopted by the Committee on Descriptive Standards, Stockholm, Sweden, 19-22 September 1999. Ottawa: International Council on Archives, 2000.

34 Evidences of Roma population in Croatia were required records that each county had to produce, but these regulations differed through history. For more on the topic of legal regulation of the Roma population see: Vojak, Danijel. Zakonsko reguliranje položaja romskog stanovništva na području banske Hrvatske: 1873-1918. // *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 37(2005), 147-162.

creased (for example, see www.romalen.com). Despite such online efforts, no community archive exists for the Roma. How do Roma value archives and records? Why is this? In what ways and how might Roma value archives and records (or not)? Are there any NGOs or private persons who collect material on the history of the Roma in Zagreb? Would the Roma community consider capturing some of their collective memory and recordkeeping in tangible formats, or should archival practice adapt to acknowledge and address non-tangible recordkeeping traditions? Seeking answers to these questions, Štefanac interviewed several members of the Roma community who are involved in Roma NGOs. Interviewees were initially contacted over the telephone to arrange in person meetings. A snowball technique was used to identify additional participants for an interview.

The primary purpose for the interviews was to obtain a better understanding of attitudes and opinions of members of the Roma community toward records and archives. The scope was not to establish firm statistics, but rather to understand Roma attitudes toward archives and also toward oral forms of remembering and transmission. When can oral narratives be considered a record and when are they simply a narrative without “record” value?

Originally the interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews, but during the process of interviewing all structure shattered and every interview took the form of an free-form conversation. During each of the interviews, interviewees emphasized conflicts and unresolved issues from Roma history in Croatian lands. Histories that were written on this topic as well as those that remained unwritten and unknown to the wider circle of people outside Roma community were the main focus of interest. The original plan for analyzing the data had to be replaced by a much simpler description of emerging themes and shared points of view. Each conversation was conducted with one interviewee at a time and lasted for about an hour and a half. Depending on the permission of each participant, some conversations were recorded. Due to all the unexpected situations these interviews cannot be considered as rigorous qualitative data that can be systematically analyzed. Nevertheless some common themes and perspectives emerged in all the interviews.

The first major theme that emerged from each conversation was that of the Roma experience in Croatia during WWII. The closest connections between Roma and archives were seen by members of Roma

community in the shapes of Holocaust /Porrajmos events.³⁵ The second major theme that emerged was about the responsibility and obligation of preserving records of Roma community. All of the interviewees indicated that they privately collect documentary material about their family members. None of NGOs possesses documentary material that is publicly accessible, but there is an awareness of the value of that material, mainly because of its evidential value for members of NGOs in their private business (in many cases value is connected to protecting human and civil rights). None of these NGOs was ever approached by an official archive to evaluate whether that particular NGO should be categorized as a creator of private archive material. Other opinions expressed in common by multiple interviewees were that official institutions, whether archives, museums or libraries have a responsibility to collect and preserve material about them and of them. The reason for this neglect by these institutions is described by one interviewee as the “invisibility [of the Roma] as a nation”.

The power of the archived record was particularly illustrated in one event narrated by an interviewee: Roma community representatives went to Washington, D.C. in 1998 together with Jewish community representatives in regards to rights to war reparations. The interviewee asserted that the Jewish delegation came with lot of paper material, and Roma representatives “had nothing” besides oral testimonies that were overlooked as evidence in many cases. Regarding verbal forms of transmission, opinions varied across interviewees. Each considered formal documents (such as personal documents and documentation of business of any kind) as only being valid when in written form, and thought they should be properly archived in order to be accessible. These opinions might emerge from the facts that in contemporary Croatian society, peoples’ legal requirements can be achieved only through submission of valid documentation.

Verbal form of historical facts and knowledge transmission is regarded as Roma cultural tradition. Some interviewees considered this oral tradition to be enough, without a necessity to record it on some media. Others recognized textual or recorded forms as effective methods of preserving Roma heritage. Oral culture was seen as imperative to community life and culture, but oral forms of preservation and transmission of heritage were considered to be unstable.

35 This term refers to the Roma genocide in Second World War.

The final emerging theme was the concern that the Roma are excluded from participating in any project that concerns them and that is conducted by non-Roma official institutions. The common opinion was that for projects that concern Roma community, the Roma must participate. Reputable support for the interviewees' attitudes about archiving was given by Ivan Rumbak, a researcher of Roma history, and himself of Roma origin, who noticed that "The Roma as nation were not all that interesting to historians, so in most cases they are mentioned in archival material only because they are involved in criminal charges and misdemeanors, etc. Some archives only mention the Roma in passing – Roma caravans arriving and going, divination, and thefts. Because of unconcern on the part of the broader community to document Roma history and their own non-literacy, the Roma remained deprived of material that would present them in positive terms within archival and historical material."³⁶

Conclusion

This exploratory study began with a contemplation of the kinds of records the Roma produce and in what form, beside textual, they keep evidence of their history. A representational view on records and a broad and expanded definition of records were used to help set up a perspective that allowed the questioning of the relevance of records being collected by heritage institutions for addressing the needs of the Roma community. The notion of archival power over memory³⁷ further directed the study to the problems of current archival and museum practice and its legal framework within the Croatian context in order to investigate how it responds to the records about Roma and to the records created by Roma.

A general lack of archival perspectives on preserved and accessible Roma records indicate important shortcomings of the Croatian archival legislation as well as of the conceptual paradigm being applied by the archival field. It is from this paradigm that everyday archival practice derives and exists in Croatia. According to this paradigm, the Roma have no records, despite the (interactive) ways in which text and oral traditions are both used in Roma culture to record important events intentionally as evidence of something. There are no records, broadly

36 Rumbak, Ivan. E-mail correspondence with Tamara Štefanac on November 3rd 2013.

37 Schwartz, J.; T. Cook. *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-19.

defined, by which Roma presence in the Zagreb area could be more widely documented. The museum community does not have inclusive collection development policies nor does it actively support diverse communities. Currently, official archival systems in Croatia have limited possibilities to be sensitive to local, cultural practices while working with archival systems supported by international standards. In the meantime, Roma history is being lost. The Roma community struggles with present societal marginalization. To counter this, change needs to come from Croatian cultural heritage institutions. This change could occur by taking parts of White's pluralization framework, which posited a set of pervasive actions – conceptual expansion, embeddedness, collaboration, leadership, activism and ethics, reflexivity and sustainability – as ways by which both archival education and practiced may be pluralized.³⁸ Some of the components, such as activism and ethics, have been theoretically and practically explored in Croatia through the activities of *Documenta: Center for Dealing with the Past*.³⁹ Such associations actively collect, preserve and create records (of all forms, including oral histories) related to war and war-related events in Croatia and its broader region. By broadening their mission and vision statements, Croatian cultural heritage institutions could move toward a conceptual expansion that is generated through reflexivity about their own cultural-business actions and providing guided collaboration on community-based projects that are generated through engagement with and close participation by members of minorities (in this case the Roma).

All these activities and shared responsibilities may assist the Roma community in achieving a better understanding of the value the records they produce. Archival and museum community projects, conceived in a sustainable manner with long-term focused activities and inclusion of minority members, should be welcomed and assisted by archival and museum professionals. It is also important to realize that these ideas do not necessarily determine the media in which these records should be preserved – the Roma community should decide that. Finally, further research on the Roma perhaps should deepen and concretize issues of orality and probe the ways in which Roma oral traditions should or might be considered as records.

38 Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group, Archival Education and Research Institute. Op. cit., pp. 68-102.

39 A link containing more information on this activity is available at: <http://www.documenta.hr/en/home.html>

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**ZASTUPLJENOST, PRAVA I IDENTITET
ROMA U HRVATSKOJ
ARHIVISTIČKA RAZMATRANJA**

Sažetak

Kao jedna od 22 nacionalne manjine, Romi su na području Hrvatske prisutni od 14. stoljeća. Unatoč tomu, prisutnost romske zajednice kroz povijest teško se može dokumentirati budući da nema sačuvane sveobuhvatne dokumentacije i arhivskog gradiva u hrvatskim baštinskim ustanovama. U ovom se radu razmatraju načela prema kojima se gradivo važno za romsku zajednicu prikuplja i čuva u baštinskim ustanovama. Razmatra se kategorizacija, vrste sekundarnih izvora i vidljivost dokumenata u obavijesnim pomagalicama te se donose rezultati intervjua provedenih s pripadnicima romske nacionalne manjine. U zaključnim razmatranjima iskazuje se potreba za aktivnim i uključivim dokumentarnim pristupom koji koristi sve prednosti unutar postojećeg arhivskog zakonodavnog okvira u Hrvatskoj.

Gljučne riječi: Romi, arhiv, muzej, arhivsko zakonodavstvo