

Alexander Muřinka

THE THINGS THAT WORKED



Examples of successful activities on the level of
local administration aimed at improving
the situation of the Roma

University of Prešov in Prešov
Institute of Roma Studies

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List of some abbreviations used

IOP	– institute of special recipients
KC	– community centre
KSP	– community and social work
MPSVaR SR	– Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic
MRK	– marginalised Roma communities
MŠ	– nursery school
MŠ SR	– Ministry of Education
MVO	– non-governmental organisation
MVRR SR	– Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic
OSF	– Open Society Fund
OZ	– civic association
PHaSR	– programme of economic and social development
TSP	– field social work
ÚP	– territorial plan
ÚPSVaR	– Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
USVRK	– Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities
VÚC	– higher territorial unit
ZŠ	– primary school

Note: In the text we use the expression non-Roma in this form intentionally. We are of the opinion that this form (despite the fact that it violates the official rules of Slovak grammar) most exactly expresses its meaning. In the Slovak language the names of nationalities and ethnicities are written with a capital letter (Roma, Slovak, etc.). In the Romani language there is the concept of a “gádžo”, which means the denoting of all people who are not Roma; this means that it involves members of all nationalities and ethnicities. Therefore, we intentionally translate the concept “gádžo” as non-Roma.

Introduction

Dear readers, you have in your hands a book about activities in an area which has been presented relatively extensively in society and in the media: from the area regarding the situation of the Roma in Slovakia and the area of resolving their problems.

According to the latest information there are in Slovakia nearly 900 concentrations of Roma in which the living situation is partly (but not always) considerably insufficient. In many cases these concentrations are in overly dense urban areas, often lacking basic utility networks, and the civic facilities in them can be said to be only very marginal. They are often built on property that is unsettled in terms of legal property ownership or on property with known owners but without their consent (“black” or “illegally”), in shacks or other non-standard dwellings and the like. A high measure of unemployment predominates in these concentrations, as do unsuitable hygienic conditions, a low educational level and apathy. We think that there is no reason to further describe and detail this situation – we are saturated with it almost daily in the media.

In fact it is the media that very often paints the worst picture in this field and does so very often without having any elementary knowledge of the state of affairs, using inappropriate snapshots, half-truths, inaccuracy and distortions, the result of which is the conviction today in the wider public that this situation is not being resolved or ultimately cannot be resolved. This conviction in the majority society rests on an unbelievable number of prejudices, generalities taken out of context, mistaken ideas and stereotypes. The result of this is in many cases growing tension, frustration, resignation or aggression.

We intentionally speak in relatively plain and not in absolute terms; i.e. we frequently use words like “in many cases”, “often” or “many times”. The reason is pragmatic. Even the first studies (for example, with the preparation of the Atlas of Roma Communities in the Year 2004 or research of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) from 2006 Report on the Living Conditions of Roma Households in Slovakia) have clearly shown that such a negatively described situation is not present in all Roma concentrations. From the total number of Roma “only” (or up to?) perhaps 14% live in shacks, “only” 4.6% did not have any utility networks (i.e. they did not even have an electricity connection). Nearly half of all Roma in Slovakia live outside of concentrations, i.e. diffused among majority residents, and “classical” settlements divided from a mother village by a certain distance or barrier only make up approximately 18%. Illegal dwellings in Roma

concentrations in Slovakia make up “only” about one-third, and the like.

In no way do we wish to state here that the situation of the Roma, and especially of Roma in such concentrations, is satisfactory and without problems. We want to emphasise, however, that it is not as is presented in the public. The reason for this negative perception, aside from the mentioned media pressures (which to a certain measure is possible to perceive also in the public), is the absence of elementary quality data about this community. A gigantic “blank spot” still exists on the imaginary map of knowledge of this society. The small amount of quality data that has thus far been produced can in no case fill in this gigantic information chasm. In Slovakia there are still an insufficient number of capable experts who would dedicate themselves preferentially to this subject. We could “count on the fingers of one hand” the number of quality historians, sociologists, cultural anthropologists and the like who devote themselves long-term to Roma themes. Unfortunately, this disadvantageous state cannot be “saved” by even the high number of active lay public who base their opinions on their own experiences or researchers who devote themselves to this subject only marginally/haphazardly or the active Roma themselves who devote themselves to this subject from the position of members of this ethnicity; however, quality scientific “technical skill” (I’m not thinking here of formal education) is often lacking.

As we have already mentioned the situation in many Roma concentrations suggests the idea that this situation is irresolvable (and is constantly getting worse). However, the opposite is true. The professional public has clearly been saying for a long time that a solution to what in general is called the “Roma problem” exists; however, it is essential to be aware of a number of principle premises and limitations.

First of all, it is necessary to keep in mind that no universal solution exists. Thus, since Slovak society is not homogeneous (monolithic) and is divided into many social layers (religious, political and regional groups and the like), so the Roma community is also not homogeneous. Allow us to say that this community is in many cases a good way more stratified than the surrounding majority population. In nearly every Roma community you’ll find specifics and a distinctness which are often a limiting factor for how this community operates externally, how it lives, and the kind of relations it has with the majority and the Roma around it. Therefore, it is not possible to create a single functional model which would apply everywhere. Such a model simply will not work effectively everywhere.

Secondly, it is essential to take into consideration that no rapid solutions exist. The not very satisfactory mutual relationship between the Roma and the majority is the result long-lasting processes, the roots of

which are necessary to look for at least ten years in the past. At the same time this often involved the implementation of bad solutions derived from mistaken ideas and a misunderstanding of the nature of the situation and the reasons for it.

The last limitation is the fact that in the present situation no inexpensive solutions exist. In one breath, however, we can add that not resolving the problems between the Roma and the majority will cost us significantly more.

We could compare the above-described situation to a badly built house. If during its construction (although unwittingly or in good faith) the builders make mistakes, sooner or later these will show up in the building. Its reconstruction is not fast, or cheap, but it certainly is essential, and at the same time it is not possible to demolish the house, because people are living in it. In fact, we live in it – the majority and all minorities.

This publication is focused on just such examples of the “reconstruction of past mistakes”. In it we deal with 21 examples of good work in relation to Roma communities which were or are being carried out and in which specific villages or towns or their residents are taking part in. It involves a total of 18 villages and towns (Čičava, Drienovec, Hanušovce nad Topľou, Kokava nad Rimavicou, Lipany, Liptovský Mikuláš, Nitra nad Ipľom, Nižný Komárnik, Ostrovany, Pečovská Nová Ves, Podbrezová, Rudľov, Rudňany, Spišský Hrhov, Sveržov, Šimonovce, Turňa nad Bodvou and Žalobín), in which activities were carried out which could be inspirational, instructional or motivational for others. In no case, however, does it involve “singing the praises” of a certain specific activity, its implementers or a particular grant scheme. This involves a patchwork of activities which are carried out in a patchwork of environments with different intensities and with different results. Certainly it is not possible to perceive this publication as a report on the state of the Roma in Slovakia.

With the selection of individual positive examples we tried first of all to point out the diverse approaches, the common denominator of which is the fact that it can be done and that positive change is possible. At the same time we tried to select such cases which could also be applied in other communities and in other villages. You will find here such villages which approach work with the Roma community complexly, but also those which focus on only one area. There are villages here where they have a small community with at most some tens of Roma, but also those with more than one-thousand, villages with integrated Roma, as well as villages with a segregated settlement. Territorially we tried to at least partially cover all regions of Slovakia.

During preparation of this publication we ran across a number of

interesting findings. First of all, we wish to apologise to all of those (Roma and non-Roma) who work with Roma and have positive results for the fact that we did not include them in this overview. The original intention was to select only 10 good examples, but reality proved to be significantly richer. In the end, we selected more than twice the original number for this publication. We must state that this is only a fraction of what is being done in Slovakia. There are an unbelievable number of positive examples in the field, and it is a great shame that the public only learns about them sporadically. And the description of the activities in selected villages which we present in this publication is incomplete. We want to emphasise that the presented examples do not automatically mean that in the relevant community everything is headed in the right direction. Somewhere incorrect decisions were made, too. These are not all examples in which a village is participating to a full measure. Some examples are also those which are carried out without significant support of a village and in the end there are those in which a village and its representatives are not taking part at all. This doesn't mean, however, that in other villages it could not be done better. Again, we repeat, that the intent here is to inspire readers, to motivate villages, mayors, local councillors and activists in regard to working with this target group.

This publication attempts to be as practical as possible. It was not in its power to sufficiently describe in detail all of the selected examples, and therefore we expect that all those interested will contact the relevant village or town, organisations or activists and will communicate with them directly.

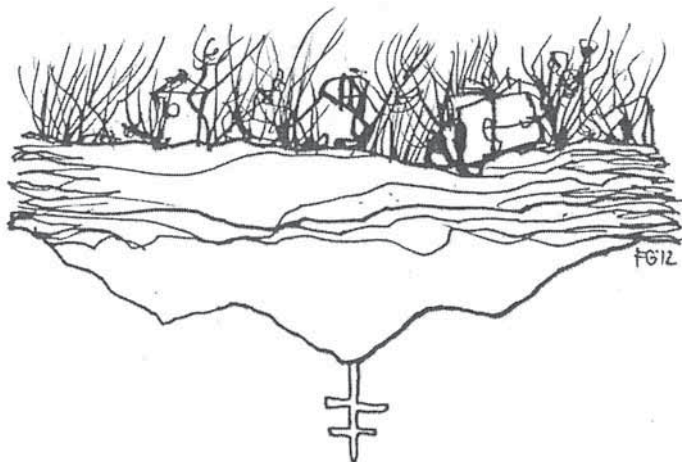
It is true, however, that it is useful to see the mentioned positive examples and to learn to distinguish them more closely. In many cases (ultimately even in those which are presented in this publication), the administrators themselves are not always aware to a full extent of their positive impact. We often find burned out and frustrated people with a lack of inspiration behind very quality work. Nearly always these are people devoted to their work, doing it as best they can, as only they know how, or how the circumstances around them (financial, human, locally and the like) allow. Not a lot of positive things can be done without the willingness to do them.

One large deficiency is the often missing, or rarely practiced, consistent evaluation of activities directly by their individual administrators or more extensive evaluation work. We don't mean here formally and financially – this is often pointlessly detailed (in many cases it is a brake on the work itself), but we are thinking about the evaluation of the impacts and of real results. Just such an evaluation could be an instrument for the

actual evaluation of work, for awareness of progress, correction of possible failures and at the same time a motivation for others. In some cases where regular professional evaluations do take place, they achieve a much higher effectiveness and in other cases they involve more a system of trial and error or their activities are directed a lot less intuitively. People in the field very often call afterwards so that they have the possibility to learn elsewhere, to present their own results to others, to gain experience but also social acknowledgement. And this is the one thing that they very often do not get. We believe that this publication will be the beginning of a systematic mapping of good examples throughout all of Slovakia and at the same time we would like to at least symbolically thank all those who shared in the work directly in the field. The first attempts at a broader evaluation of at least some specific activities already exist (e.g. Marek Hojsík's Evaluation of the program of village rental flats in Roma settlements or Tomáš Hrustič's The carrying out of field social work in marginalised Roma communities), but their number is absolutely insufficient and frequently unsystematic.

So, as the villages are varied and activities are varied, thus individual parts of this publication are also varied – some are more personal, while others have more of a general (theoretical) character. All of the sections have approximately the same structure, in the scope of which we wanted to present the relevant village (town), the local Roma community, activities which are being carried out for this community and a specific example of good practice. The reason is not only an attempt to present this village to the uninitiated reader, but to try to also explain the context (without regard to whether it is positive or negative) in which the activity being carried out is presented to us. And here we would very much like to thank for their help all of our colleagues who shared in the preparation of this publication. Some helped with advice; others processed entire sections or provided extensive documentation. In every case, without their help this publication would not have been possible. With its archives, collections, advice, contributions and documented materials the civic association (OZ) Centre of Anthropological Research from Prešov helped very much, as did many individuals – Jaroslav Baňas (mayor of Pečovská Nová Ves); Ladislav Bartók (OZ Pro Tornensis from Turňa nad Bodvou); Monika Benková (Regional Development Partnership – activist from Čierny Balog – who for years has worked in central Slovakia); Tivadar Berky (mayor of Nitra nad Ipľom); Pavol Ceľuch (mayor of Sveržov); Ján Dunda (TSP Hanušovce n/ Topľou); Mária Fečkovičová (mayor of Žalobín); Anna Ferkaninová (mayor of Nižný Komárnik); Martina Hrušková (PSI – Partnership for Social Inclusion Liptovský Mikuláš); Ladislav Kardhodó (mayor of Podbrezová); Viera Kočtúchová (KC Liptovský Mikuláš); Ernest Lakatoš (mayor of Šimonovce);

Martin Mekeľ (Greek-Catholic priest from Čičava); Mária Milková (USVRK Bratislava); Daniela Obšasníková (journalist from Romano Nevo Ľil); Miroslav Pollák (plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities); Dana Pustulková (community worker in Rudňany); Mária Reistetterová (social worker in Lipany); Jozef Repaský (representative of the mayor of Liptovský Mikuláš); Cyril Revák (mayor of Ostrovany); Erika Sabová (MŠ Rudňany); Vladimír Sendrei (activist from Kokava nad Rimavicou); Michal Smetánka (Regiona Development Partnership – an activist who for many years worked in Spišský Hrhov); Lenka Špiriaková (OZ Klások from Podbrezová); Ľudmila Stašáková (KC Stará Ľubovňa); Štefan Straka (activist from Rudľov); Peter Strážik (director of the ZŠ in Spišský Hrhov); Sylvia Tomková (KC Liptovský Mikuláš); Eduard Vokál (mayor of Lipany); and Jana Zitová (Artfarm Drienovec).



Ten years of community development in Spišský Hrhov – possible inspiration for others who are serious

One of the villages which decided to approach work with the Roma community in a thorough way is Spišský Hrhov in the Levoča District (Prešov Region). To a certain measure this village is exceptional in that it approached the mentioned activities with planning and with a broad spectrum. At the start there was obviously the willingness, but first of all this was the implementation of the strategic plan of the village which not only analysed the situation, but worked up a solution, a time schedule and the resources. At the same time the entire process of planning was carried out thanks to the involvement of people from the village, including the Roma themselves, the village council, professional facilitators from the academic sphere and the like. And they are still maintaining this plan in the village. At the same time, no rigid document is involved here, but living material which is regularly updated on the basis of evaluations already made and according to needs which currently arise. But the basic principle or direction isn't changing – an attempt at the largest integration possible of the Roma community into the village and the overall development of the village as such.

The village of Spišský Hrhov lies in the basin of the River Hornád in the vicinity of the district town of Levoča. It has 1,300 residents, nearly 300 of whom are Roma. For the past ten years it has experienced a period of unprecedented development and growth in the number of residents. While the number of Roma has not significantly changed, the number of majority residents has grown by nearly 30%. Individual residential construction has begun on 600 building properties, or is beginning or will begin in the near future, and thanks to this it is possible to assume additional growth in the number of residents by at least 100%.

The Roma community lives predominately at Generál Svoboda Street. This is not a segregated part of the village, let alone what could be called an "osada" ("settlement"). The street is part of the natural urban axis of the village; majority residents inhabit its lower section and the dwellings of Roma naturally blend in with the dwellings of the others, which furthermore do not differ in any special way in terms of types of buildings. At this street are found flats of a lower standard in a housing block whose exterior and interior are still, six years after being built, in a very good technical and aesthetic state. Four Roma families live in the flats directly in the village and some Roma families have property purchased for the construction of family houses among the majority residents.

We can broadly label Spišský Hrhov as the most dynamically developing village in the Spiš region over the past 10 years. It has devoted itself long-term to improving the living conditions of the local Roma community and approaches this community as an equal group of citizens. The Roma community in Spišský Hrhov is equipped with technical infrastructure of an equal measure of the other part of the village, and all services of social infrastructure are available to it without exception.

In addition to this, the village is in the immediate vicinity of a segregated Roma community (Doľany-Roškovce) which doesn't have even basic technical infrastructure, and social infrastructure is scarcely available. A solidarity initiative of Spišský Hrhov consists in activities which help the residents of the marginalised Roma communities of Doľany-Roškovce in the field of employment and social inclusion (requalification courses, the opportunity to apply for jobs in a village firm, services of field social work) and in the area of education (purchasing of buildings in the Roma community and the creation of a branch of the primary school).

The broad and professional public often stands over the mentioned development of the community and labels it as a small miracle. It is necessary, however, to remark that this condition was not always present here within living memory. It can be said that Spišský Hrhov up to the year 2000 was in no way different from comparable villages in terms of the number of residents, their makeup, technical furnishing, etc. From the viewpoint of the life of the Roma community it is possible to say, however, that its members in the village lived on a higher level than in the surroundings of the village, but this was provided primarily by the well-functioning agricultural collective in the village, where the larger part of the community of productive age was employed, as well as its relatively good level of education. A part of the community worked in construction enterprises and in the forests. This was all reflected also in the standard of living, housing and the like. Alongside this, however, a part of the community lived in conditions comparable with other villages, in disadvantaged provisional dwellings, with a minimal education and in the gears of social-pathological phenomena. The fact is that in the years 1989 – 1999 the difference between the minority and majority populations visibly and excessively widened, their previous natural contacts were disrupted and tension grew between the two communities. Members of the minority arrived at a productive age never having had the opportunity to work because of age and currently they have had no opportunities to work because of the lack of job opportunities in the region. We can boldly label this period as a period of sharp decline in the Roma community in Spišský Hrhov, and it happened on all sides.

The foundation of what we today call “success” with the resolution of problems in Spišský Hrhov was created in the process of planning and the creation of the Programme of Economic and Social Development of the Village. Today we can state that thanks also to the fact that the village concentrated primarily on the social sphere from which the Roma community was not excluded (left out), the village is at present successful and is developing. Village representatives even then understood that it is not possible (let alone progressive) to plan development for a successful majority without the less successful minority whose problems, likewise their numbers, are growing a great deal more.

It is not advisable here to recite all of the specifically implemented activities, an overview of successful and less successful projects. The reader and anyone interested can easily get this information through information channels of the village. In addition, a list with a short description of them would only surpass the possibilities of this work. We wanted, however, in the form of an overview to describe the actual know-how, thanks to which the village and its community managed to develop into its current form. Aside from the fact that the mentioned know-how was completed not only thanks to the experience from successful projects and activities, but also thanks to several setbacks and mistakes which the village understandably didn't avoid. It is these things, however, that form the backing for the present understanding of development and its illustration.

During the course of strategic planning three **key areas of development of the local community were identified** – 1. Education; 2. Employment; 3. Housing.

Key areas were understood to be those which closely associate such that with complex development it is essential to develop them simultaneously, under the assumption of a favourable connection. It is not possible to enter this connection equally and in a uniform way; it is derived from the given conditions, resources, problems and special starting points of the specific locality and community. From this point of view it is not appropriate to speak about priorities in terms of areas. It is possible to work up priorities on the basis of a well prepared programme of development. There we determine priorities on the level of measures. All developmental areas thus logically interconnect us, and accessibility during interventions derives from the possibility of the territory and its potential.

We consider as a common error when resolving the question of development the insufficient identification of key areas, which are specific for each individual territory or the close-sector approach of development in the sense of “the coming three years we will devote to the development of housing and the time will come later for other areas”.

We consider areas of development as inseparable. **Another common mistake is insufficient auditing of one's own resources and the taking of development resources from other localities.**

Following from key areas, the **key actors of development were identified** – 1. Authorised local administration; 2. Field social work/community work; 3. Actual subject capable of contributing to the resolution of the problems of unemployment (village firm, village enterprise); 4. Community centre.

We consider as key actors those subjects who ensure the connectedness of development areas and the continuity of interventions carried out on the basis of a strategic, programmed (not design-stage) view. Without the completeness of key actors whose activities are associated with other important actors (MVO, offices, businesses, experts and the like) complex development is difficult to carry out because these directly impact, manage and are responsible for processes in individual developmental regions.

We regard poor connectedness and lack of coordination of activities among the key actors (or the absence of some of them) as a common error when resolving the development of villages and communities. Only one (e.g. a village or the MVO) takes on the carrying out of development activities and it is obvious that it doesn't have a chance for carrying out the activities in all key areas of development (z due to competencies, potential or priority justification).

Prerequisites (quality potential for development processes) are associated with the key actors. They form the foundation for the implementing of a development programme. Their identification is not formally anything new. If we look at the quality of these prerequisites in practice, we mostly state only formality and nonsense, with which development also usually remains only as a phrase, and in place of complexity we can in the better case satisfy with the results of the project carried out.

From the viewpoint of experience of planning development in the village of Spišský Hrhov we want especially to point to the processes of planning unconditionally with participatory methods. Without sufficient mapping of resources and starting points, the identification of needs and problems, and of quality problem analysis it is not possible to be aware and to define development potential, development intentions, limits, determine the logic of an intervention and work through to specific measures and activities. This prerequisite stands at the complete start of development processes. In practice it is nearly impossible to find a well-produced development strategy for communities, because preparation and thinking

through of development is limited to the realisation of a few good ideas, which, however, usually does not guarantee us complexity and permanent sustainability.

Experience from Spišský Hrhov states completely clearly that the **basic assumptions for conceptional development are** – 1. Willingness and authorisation of local administration; 2. Activists working for a community; 3. Participatory creation of a plan of development for communities in collaboration with quality Programme of Economic and Social Development (PHaSR) and land planning (ÚP); 4. Potential for the creation and management of projects; 5. Good cooperation with nearby schools and educational institutions.

After experiences in the field of community development, allow us to confirm that without fulfilling of the names basic prerequisites for development, it would not be possible in a village to implement even a part of the activities in such a short time than was actually done.

We shall devote ourselves to the competency of local administration, community activists and strategies necessary for development in other locations. Here we would like to emphasise, however, the necessity of having available potential for the creation and managing of projects. Already with the creation of development plans it was obvious that for processing, primarily, however, of managing projects, no small effort will be necessary as well as sufficient professional potential. The village invested no small sum of money into the preparation of its employees in the area of project management, and today we can say that it has been returned many times over. In addition to training of their own employees, the village became a part of various networks of non-governmental organisations and partnerships which offered the village services of different types, particularly, however, in the area of project creation and project management. First, connection to the programme “Your Spiš” were made and partnerships with OZ ETP Slovakia, further with OZ Spiš – Association for the Renewal and Development of the Region, People in Need, Slovakia Branch, Heiffer Slovakia, Partnership of Social Inclusion Poprad Levoča and others. It has cooperated long-term in particular with OZ Spiš – Association for the Renewal and Development of the Region, which is based in the village, as well as with the Regional Development Partnership.

We mention this not only because for the creation and managing of projects the village did not expend large financial sums, but mainly because cooperation with the organizations and people who thoroughly knew the state and developmental intentions of the village and identified with them. Hand in hand with the village’s own potential it became a

reality that the village never had the smallest problem in regard to creation and managing of projects. We mention this fact because of the frequent mistakes of other local administrations, when they not only expend large sums for the creation and management of projects, but also spend money on projects on a wished-for effect, since those who create them or manage them do not know the specifics of the given locality very well.

Eventually, another important prerequisite for conceptual development is good cooperation with schools and educational institutions. Slovakia and likewise also the Region of East Slovakia, in our opinion, make available a sufficient and relatively quality network of educational institutions of different types. They often played a key role in the implementation of projects in Spišský Hrhov. At the highest level (university) in the scope of cooperation they often ensured the essential evaluation of processes of change and provided methodological help. This involved cooperation with experts from the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra and the University of Prešov in Prešov. At a lower level this was secondary schools and vocational schools which cooperated in projects and programmes, and last but not least the local primary school which to a full measure shared in the village's development programmes and is an inseparable part of them. Furthermore, we have in mind the educational academy and other similar institutions which in the course of a number of years were able to contribute to the building of the development potential of the village.

We say that without the creation of the prerequisites for development processes outlining the goals to be achieved would be very difficult. Therefore, for all those interested who arrive here for inspiration, we recommend the experience of Spišský Hrhov presented in overview in the table below:

BUILDING OF PREREQUISITES				
LOCAL ADMINISTRATION	ACTIVISTS	PROGRAMMING	DESIGNING	EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE
Willingness and authorisation of local administration	Activists working for the community	Participatory creation of a plan of development of communities in collaboration with quality PHaSR and ÚP	Potential for the creation and management of projects	Good cooperation with nearby schools and educational institutions

Clearly declared willingness of local administration to plan and carry out development	Good knowledge of the community and its problems	* Ability to process quality and useful PHaSR		Good cooperation with schools in the area
Experiences of local administration with development processes	Connectedness of activists to community life	* Ability to process by the ÚP	Preparation of own potential for creation and management of projects	Carrying out of common activities of local administration, activists, MVO and schools
Personal ensuring of strategic processes	Preparedness of activists for entry into strategic developmental processes	If necessary outside of a good PHaSR, inclusion of programmed development of a community		Functional connectedness of school – village – community – parent – child
Functioning social work in a village, especially a TSP			Preparation and carrying out of good projects for a community	
Organising and operating of village firms - social enterprises	Social mobilisation	Analysis of resources, starting point, status		
Built-up, spatial and technical background – community centre	Creation of social networks	Regular and professionally led community meetings		
		* defining of needs		
		* identification and analysis of problems		
		* proposal of specific solutions in the medium-term horizon		

		Initiating of a programmed by local administration		
			Creation of projects for basic current grant schemes in the scope of strategic development	Creation of projects for basic current grant schemes in the scope of strategic development

The results of the building of prerequisites should be:

preparedness for complex development				
<i>Preparedness for managing and a full guarantee of quality implementation of permanent development, good personnel, spatial, technical and other conditions necessary for development</i>	<i>Good cooperation and connectedness of actors of development with the community</i>	<i>Clarity of a development strategy derived "from below", logical interventions, specific adequate processes</i>	<i>Obtaining of resources for carrying out the strategy</i>	<i>Functioning partnerships, connectedness with existing systems of inclusion</i>

As has already been stated above, the solving of problems which are contained in key areas of development is not possible to apply linearly through individual areas, but always in a complex approach and cohesion.

The field of education and instruction were not from the start of building the development processes in the village understood as something that relates exclusively to education and conventional instructional institutions. As the naming of the field suggests, it involves improving the competencies of a broad spectrum for the least possible problematic application in life.

The first specific development steps in the village were associated with this field, and despite the fact that the surroundings were labelled as pointless, ineffective, done in place of more important – direct creation of jobs, the building of flats and the like. Today we can state that this approach gradually brought satisfactory results not the least in the fields

of employment and housings.

This stage was focused on preparation and strengthening of the key actors of development – local administration and community workers. The competencies of local administration workers as well as selected representatives (councillors) for resolving development questions were reinforced, primarily in the social field. An attempt was made to change the position and approach to resolving the problems of the community (the Roma in particular) by assorted activities. Gradually on this level it succeeded in modulating discriminatory approaches on the levels of civic and local administration; many small activities of Roma youth, women, pensioners and the like being supported.

A second key actor was the workers who daily and conceptually began working directly in the Roma community. In 2001 this was the work of so-called community activists, later of field social workers and community workers. Irrespective of their name, this involved every day solutions to problems in the community, assistance with legal activities, advising with family housekeeping, etc. These workers were a link between local administration, the majority and the minority populations.

The most important agents in development which in this period entered into the picture was the community centre (then called the Community Development and Service Centre, KRSC). It originated naturally as a necessity for the more conceptual work of local administration and community activists. In unused spaces in very poor technical condition (a one-time barn) with the participation of the village, activists, non-governmental organisations – but more so for people from communities – the spaces originated and was something like an institution which was here permanently here for all citizens, all age categories, all layers of residents and all communities. The KRSC (as it was called) originated in the form of a new centre of the village, which in our opinion also created a positive perception of it among all residents. As was stated above, the number of activities of these key actors in the period of origin of KRSC would exceed the possibilities of this publication; therefore, we will try to focus only on the concept of key **fields of education and instruction**, across key actors of development – local administration, community work, MVO and KRSC.

The foundation for resolving of the development field of education and instruction was made up of the community centre which was immediately involved (it formed a coordination centre) with local administration and its bodies, the local primary school, community workers, non-governmental organizations and informal civic associations.

The activities of the KRSC were focused on club activities for children (showing films for children, regularly meetings of children with

reading of fairy tales, creative arts activities, etc.). For children from the Roma community the following activities were also specifically carried out:

In the scope of nursery school preparation – language preparation for children from five years of age (participation of children in activities of community workers with maths); development of handwriting (specific activities with community workers and assistants); hygienic habits (with all activities).

In the scope of education of children of compulsory school attendance – tutoring children in the form of KRSC club activities; leisure time instructional activities; cooperation with the ZŠ in the sense of reinforcing skills of identified children, resolution of educational problems and the like; health and sex education (in the scope of gatherings and club activities).

The KRSC developed activities also in the cultural and social fields. This mainly involved activities for youth which were carried out for both the majority and the minority; interest in it was, however, nearly 100% only from the side of youth from the Roma community. These were in particular – motivational programmes and activities of preparation for employment; motivational programmes for instruction and studying; family raising and parental preparation.

For adults the KRSC carried out several programmes which were focused mainly on family and household management (budgeting, saving, keeping house, effective household energy); increasing the quality of life (health, technology, different educational activities, self-containment); employment (individual and group action planning) and the like. In addition to adults from the Roma community, residents from the majority community also took part regularly and in abundant numbers. Thanks mainly to the topicality of subjects and quality training there was great interest in the programme.

The KRSC (today called the “workshop” in the village) still exists today; the above-described activities, however, are only carried out sporadically in it and literally according to the needs of residents. We evaluate its overall contribution for the village as without a doubt highly positive. In the regime which we described the KRSC functioned perhaps 5 years and gradually its activities have naturally shifted to other places and to other institutions (the Village Firm, the Centre for Leisure Time, the Primary School, the Re-education Centre, the Primary Arts School, actual spaces and activities of clubs and associations). Allow us then to state that the KRSC fulfilled its role very well with starting up the development processes, and fulfilled its mission and the current needs of the communities in these areas. The current needs of residents and the village have led to the creation

of a weight-lifting room, a club, a learning centre and classroom for the detached workplace of a professional training centre from the KRSC.

Many projects and programmes focused on courses for folk crafts, the raising of agricultural animals, the cultivating of plants and agricultural crops, etc. are associated with the activities of the KRSC, local administration and community workers. In this case the bridging with another development field – employment – is involved.

Development of employment and employability

A priority for solving the problems in this developmental field was improving the conditions for the employment of the inhabitants. This related to the majority and the minority, and activities were handled at the beginning through the KRSC (the mentioned courses, motivational meetings and the like); later different projects aimed at improving employability were created and implemented in cooperation with the relevant labour office, businesses and non-governmental organisations. The projects brought specific results and prepared people for employment (building, agricultural), basic self-containment (the raising of swine and goats, the cultivation of potatoes and vegetables). Along with these activities a job advisory service also functioned in different forms. At first, on the level of assistance of community workers, later on the level of direct cooperation with the relevant labour office up to through the labour advisory office organised by the village office. The office of the Centre of Local Job Advisory Services operated for three years in the village, through which specific approaches were tested and successfully implemented in working with a client searching for employment seeking work and assistance with entering into the labour process.

The fields of employment and education were by necessity connected, as were the mentioned job advisory service as well as qualification and requalification activities realised through the local relevant labour office, with which good cooperation formed the basis for successfully met goals.

The most significant key developmental actor in the field of employment became the Village Firm – a social enterprise. It originated and began to develop in the most important stage of conceptual connection of developmental activities. It took on itself key competencies and tasks with the resolution of questions of conceptual and complex development through cohesion for education, employability and mainly employment. An independent contribution will deal with this later. Here it is necessary, however, to mention it from the viewpoint of understanding the complexity. With the help of the village firm, a very

important article essential for the resolving of key fields of development was successfully created and supplemented, namely – the direct creation of job opportunities for those who need them the most. In addition (as before with the KRSC from another aspect) the village firm began to create a kind of coordination development unit. Without its functioning it would be impossible to imagine the development of the village in such a form as we can see it today.

As was mentioned above the bridging from the development field of education to the field of employment through the KRSC, we can also determine a certain place for the village firm with the bridging of the development field of employment to the development field of housing.

Development of housing

Problems connected with the field of housing were identified as among the most serious upon the creation of a development strategy. Other problems were associated with housing, e.g. a lack of hygiene for children and adults, leading to additional problems in schools, potential or actual employment, problems in the field of health, like frequent illnesses, epidemics and the like, problems with the home preparation of children for learning, as well as other associated problems. A common denominator for resolving this web of problems was solving problems of housing for members of the community. In the introduction we stated that until the year 1989 the situation in Spišský Hrhov was relatively better (in the field of housing) than in the surrounding villages. That, however, by a long way (with rare exceptions) didn't achieve the level of and standard of housing for the majority population. What is more, after 1989 illegal buildings and different additions or objects began spreading in the vicinity of Gen. Svoboda Street which served for housing but even from the outside did not suggest anything like a residential space. The original community began to expand uncontrollably by people who arrived from other locations without permanent or even temporary residence, and without a conceptual intervention, a scene similar to that of other villages, where literally uncontrollable ghettos arose and locations which we can label as a visible centre of an unimaginable number of problems, would probably have been repeated in the village of Spišský Hrhov.

And in this field the first enterprising steps were taken through the KRSC. These activities were focused on the culture of housing, running a household, hygiene, co-habitation and the like. Further were activities aimed at improving aesthetically the exteriors of residential homes, back yards, front yards, maintenance of public spaces and the like. The village, as a key actor, began to observe rigorously the maintaining of legislation

relating to construction, began to help with legal property ownership arrangements - of land and houses, the legalization of living where at least the basics for possible legalization were observed. It began to solve and to build a system satisfying obligations related to taxes and fees in relation to genuinely living members of households. Aside from this, it set up a system of collection and hauling of refuse, liquidation dumps and polluted streets, primarily, however, a system of limiting the origin of illegal dumpsites.

Along with all of this local administration initiated the difficult process of building its own lower standard flats. Here the village firm, which secured with its own resources more than half of the implementation work during the construction of the flats, played an irreplaceable role. What's more, the future renters participated directly in the construction and did so beyond the then applicable conditions for construction of flats according to a decree of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic. In comparison with other villages, where a programme of development of housing through the construction of low-standard flats was carried out, problems during construction didn't multiply, but the opposite, they were significantly reduced. The participants in the process (future renters) were carefully selected and prepared thanks to cooperation with the KRSC, by community workers and by workers from individual departments of the village. The process was prepared such that it was able to resolve problems most effectively. Attention was paid on the assessment of problems like, for example, the high number of children in a household, the inconvenient multiple-generational nature of families, the current state of dwellings and its future, however, also connection members of the family to village events, participation in public works (e.g. removal of refuse), interest in a job in the village firm, the potential ability to pay the rent, the settlement of liabilities toward the village or different creditors (banks, non-banking institutions) and many others.

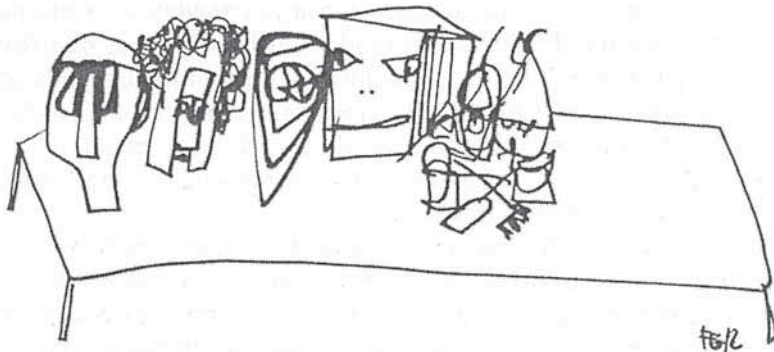
he result of this effort was a nearly problem-free process of construction, the general satisfaction of the community with the equitable distribution of flats, the liquidation of illegal buildings, namely buildings unsuitable for housing in particular; mainly, however, today after years, constant payment of rent without trouble, the good condition of the flats and their own maintenance common spaces and the exterior. We could also list many other factors, like the significantly improved hygiene for children and adults, the elimination of frequent infectious diseases and the unregulated arrival of residents from other locations.

From fields associated with development it is important to note that the construction of the mentioned lower-standard flats was not only carried out with a lot of work through the village firm, but that several of

the renters joined in to the construction and after its completion became employed in the village firm. In addition to this the appearance of the entire street gradually began to change, since those who began to work in the village firm gradually began, for example, plaster their homes, which had been without plaster for a decade, began to complete building or add on to their dwellings with quality technology, and mainly increased the connection of their dwellings to public utility mains and sewers (until then without water and sewage for households).

A shift in the field of housing is also the fact that four Roma families live in housing blocks among other residents and it is necessary to mention that they do so without any problems, as well as the fact that in the new locations in the village where construction of family houses is taking place there are also building lots purchased by residents from the Roma community. The village is currently in the process of resolving the construction of additional housing block (likewise in the new location, where construction is starting), where there will be space for the housing of Roma families equally as for other families.

The creed of the village is that the carrying out of a programme or project never ends. In contrast, everything is beginning. When we began to speak about the fact that at the beginning of the entire approximately 12-year process of change it was planned, it is necessary to emphasise, that this would involve a period of continuous changes, innovation and the supplementing of some plans. The PHaSR of the village itself was for this period completely reworked three times, and alongside it many other important strategies and conceptions existed which have been satisfied also thanks to the fact that they are continually evaluated, reinterpreted, reworked and supplemented. In Spišský Hrhov they understood that changes are not born easily, that development is not a short-term concern; and therefore it follows the adage that that "The slowest path often leads fastest to the target".



Two similar approaches - Pečovská Nová Ves and Sveržov

When presenting examples of good practices of individual villages in relation to the Roma community, we selected two villages which are very similar but at the same time they have many differences. They are both relatively small villages in northeast Slovakia – Pečovská Nová Ves and Sveržov. Both have different conditions, a different initial situation, but very similar approaches which are in their own way rather unique. The uniqueness at the same time does not consist in great financial resources obtained outside the villages but in the unique approach of the villages as such and in the maximum use of what the villages have available.

If we had to very briefly describe in what the presented approach consisted of, it would be the very similar level of priorities as in the case of Spišský Hrhov – a complex approach to the local Roma community and the strong personality of the mayor, who actively entered into this entire process. In Pečovská Nová Ves this is mayor Jaroslav Bañas and in Sveržov Pavol Celuch. Both mayors belong among the longest serving mayors in the region and also belong near the top of the Slovakia-wide imaginary table. Both mayors have been executing their function since 1994.

If in the case of Spišský Hrhov a complex approach was built on precise analyses based on a nearly academic approach, in these two villages a complex approach is built on “healthy common sense”, “bull-headedness” of the mayors and their colleagues and the conviction, that the Roma problem in their villages simply **MUST** be resolved. Pavol Celuch spoke very eloquently in regard to this when he evaluated the whole problem as follows: *“It’s illusory to think that the Roma will one day be Gádžos or whites. They won’t be. And we won’t be Roma. But we are here together and here together we must live. They are not going anywhere and neither are we. Therefore, it’s necessary to look for solutions that will allow us to live HERE, live TOGETHER, and live without problems”.*

Both mayors decided in the scope of their villages to approach the local community complexly. Both understood that the foundation is good relations with the community and very intensive work with the majority. The basic approach is the offering of **REAL** opportunities for local Roma so that they can change their situation with their own activities. Not even Jaroslav Bañas and Pavol Celuch had it easy at the beginning – neither the majority nor the Roma themselves at that point were “accustomed” to such an approach. More was spoken about helping the Roma than was actually done. In some respect nobody could help the Roma; they had to help themselves. And they did what they could, but they didn’t know what to

do. When both mayors realised this, they began to take the steps necessary to change it. They began to convince people (the majority and the Roma), to look for collaborators, resources, possibilities. They had perhaps most of the problems paradoxically with “persuading” the majority. A certain advantage was the fact that they both villages are deeply faithful and they found understanding in church institutions. Mainly, the then Bishop (today now the Archbishop) monsignor Bernard Bober was extremely helpful.

A second common attribute of both villages was the fact that in both large “investment” projects were beginning – in both villages everything possible was being built, repaired, developed and changed. Utility networks were being built or rebuilt as well as roads, sports grounds, the village office, school facilities, the culture house, the cemetery and the like. Both villages had begun to visibly change. And if the village is developing and people have the feeling that it is headed in the right direction, they are willing to “accept” and such “new items” like helping the Roma. Sometimes with difficulty, but in the end they understood and joined in.

In both villages many activities aimed at improving the situation of the Roma were carried out but two were in both cases predominate – housing and work. Each at the same time took on these problems a little bit differently – in their own way.

The larger of these two villages is Pečovská Nová Ves, which is located in the Sabinov District (Prešov Region). It lies in the valleys of the Rivers Torysa and Ľutinka, at an altitude of 345 m above sea level. It is located on the state road running from Prešov to Stará Ľubovňa. Pečovská Nová Ves has a rich history. Its founding has been dated back to the 11th century. The first available written record of the village is from the year 1248. It has six properties in the catalogue of cultural monuments (manor houses and mansions), which were built in the 16th to –19th centuries. Among the great advantages of the village having in the immediate vicinity the economically attractive town of Sabinov, which is just 4 km from the village and the town of Prešov is just 25 km away. The single-track Kysak – Plaveč – Muszyna railway line passes through Pečovská Nová Ves, forming the southern border of the village’s land.

The length of its cadastral border is 15 km, and the area itself covers 1,175 hectares. Pečovská Nová Ves is a centralised seat of local renown. The territory of its sub-region covers the space formed by the villages of Jakubova Voľa, Červenica, Hanigovce, Jakovany, Ľutina and Olejníkov. Pečovská Nová Ves, along with a number of attractive villages, is assigned to the urbanised space of the important district seat of Sabinov. The land of Pečovská Nová Ves itself covers an area of 218 hectares, which is 18.6% of the expanse of the cadastral territory.

The village has very well developed infrastructure. It is fully electrified, has its own water mains, sewerage and gas connections. The village has a fully organised primary school and nursery school (the Director is Mgr. Valentína Krajiňáková), surgeries of a general practitioner, a dentist and a paediatrician, a pharmacy, four grocery stores, two shops with consumer goods, a car-repair garage and five bars and inns.

As of 31 December 2012 the village had a total of 2,424 residents (1,188 men and 1,236 women). At present Roma in the village make up approximately 600 residents (which is nearly one-quarter). They live in two concentrations in the northern part of the village near the Ľutinka stream. No one from the local Roma community lives among the majority, even though it is necessary to say that both concentrations are divided by non-Roma areas.

The community in no case can be characterised as ideal or problem-free. The majority live in independent family houses of different quality (from shacks to very decent smaller family houses), and in the settlement is also a three-story housing block with 12 units from the year 1990 and 11 newly built flats of lower standard built in the year 2007.

About the village and its problems in the fields of employment mayor Jaroslav Baňas said:

“From the total number of nearly 600 Roma with permanent residence registered in our village not one has a university education, not one has a school-leaving certificate. I was elected mayor in 1994; that is 17 years ago. At that time there were about 300 Roma in the village. During this period the Roma population rose by nearly 100%. From the mentioned it is obvious that half of the Roma are 18 years or younger.

When I compared the situation 17 years ago and now, I have to say that the situation has not improved. More the opposite. The Roma have lost their work habits; they lack work discipline and no longer are able to travel to work. Today many are unable to work a full eight-hour a day. However, this is not a reason for resignation but the opposite – for mobilisation. Passivity in this direction would be beyond our village.

In 1968 the former leadership of the Local National Committee built and launched into operation – a small brick works. About 100 people worked here on average, about half of which were Roma. There wasn't a single adult Roma in the village who was not employed. After 1990 we had to close the brick works. When large support for unemployment came under the Mečiar government, the Roma gradually left their jobs. In 1995 I let the last Roma go from this workplace – Roma leader Andrej Červeňák.

Since our Roma had certain work skills and habits, I used all forms of employment, which the labour office offered and the local market demanded.

We established in the village a village enterprise, in the scope of which we carried out these activities, but we also used the opportunities from non-governmental organisations, with which we cooperated very intensively, leading to a many-sided advantage – for the village, for the MVO itself and obviously for the Roma. Among other things, we operated a carpenter's workshop, building production, a local restaurant and a tailor's workshop in which four Roma women worked. We applied for grants, wrote applications and projects. Many were successful but still more were not supported for various reasons. All activities carried out led, however, to the fact that I began to be more of a businessman than a mayor. In the year 2000 we sold all of the assets of the village enterprise to a private individual.

In the present period, we lease a part of the grounds to the local businessman. This, however, doesn't mean that we would resign from all activities in this area. We are, as they say, just taking a "small break".

In recent years we have employed Roma in small village services and activation activities. This is about 50 to 100 Roma annually. Most of them work in development jobs. In the scope of the ratified Local Strategy for a Complex Approach we responded to the challenge and submitted a project focused, among other things, on employment itself. The intention is through training and a training company in the end result to rebuild and unused oven for the production of fired brick into a work incubator facility for the long-term unemployed. By renewal of production in the spaces of the former brick works, I see a certain possibility in the local conditions to employ a group of Roma. Without support from the state, we can't do this alone, however. The Roma dream that they will once again return there to work. It's necessary here to say that the Roma do want to work and they know how to work. The most demotivating thing is for them, however, the current social system which does everything possible so that a client be passive in it, or so that a client not get out of it in any case".

The second field on which the village is orientated to a significant measure is housing. Unlike many other villages, in Pečovská Nová Ves they've already tried out nearly every form of help for the local Roma in this regard. In 1990 classic panelled multiple-story housing blocks were built in the village. The most recent approach, which was markedly passive to its residents, was not very successful, and the result was significant devastation to the buildings and high indebtedness. This went so far that one of the housing blocks was unliveable and so the village decided to initiate the construction of lower standard flats. This activity was carried out in 2004-2007, though it didn't go ideally and without problems. A new housing block with 11 flats was intended for renters of the run-down flats which at that time were already statically disrupted and had to be

subsequently redeveloped. Three renters from this housing block didn't agree with working off 20% of the construction, however, so the village found three others from the settlement with an interested in the flat and at the end of construction they simply exchanged them. The village received a grant of SKK 4,000,000 from the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic for this activity.

Problems with construction, however, in no way can to a full measure be assigned only to the local Roma community. The village invested no small amount of financial resources to all of these activities, as well as human capital and time, but at the same time a large part of them was absorbed by administration from the side of the state and its organisations or by public institutions (the settling of property ownership, documentation, utility networks and the like). When at the last minute the supplier of water (Východoslovenské vodárne a kanalizácie, a.s.) refused to accept individual water meters and "forced" the community to accept only one common water meter for the entire housing block complex, Jaro Bañas reached his imaginary "measure of tolerance".

*"All of these activities led me to the conviction that we will not build any more low-standard flats in our village. And not because the Roma don't need them, but due to the excessive administrative burden for the village before the actual building, during it and after completion. In the context of our village and our Roma community it simply isn't worth it and it is only a little effective. If we calculate the finances, the energy and time that we put into it and will continue to put into it, then from the viewpoint of the village, it means very little profit for the investment. **I calculated that if all of this we "invested" into settling the land ownership and helping the Roma, so that they built their own homes, this turned out to be cheaper, and I'll have a great deal less problems and mainly not burden the village for the next 30 years** (emphasis of the author).*

In this way we resolved a number of problems at the same time. The Roma will have to be more active in this direction, and for the most part they don't have a problem with this. They can carry out the building as they like and they will take much better care and maintenance of it. The fact that those more skilled will get involved in this I see as an additional bonus – help from the village will motivate them more and they will be an example for all the others. And this is just what we're doing in our village right now.

If the state doesn't want to be involved in this, then we have to do it at the village level by ourselves – we are simply trying to break the vicious cycle of dependence of this community of the social system and to rely to a greater measure on their own capabilities."

The village decided to settle the property ownership issues, prepare

them on the technical side (rebuilding of the slope, reinforcing the subsoil, construction of a protective wall and the like) and to offer them to the local Roma for individual residential construction. The village helped the Roma with the individual residential construction and did so mainly on the administrative-technical level. Interest from the side of the Roma now exceeds the possibilities of local administration.

In parallel with this activity, the local administration of the village is continuing in another activity. This involves the already long-lasting legalization process of Roma dwellings built without building permission. Many Roma families already have their house approved and they have been assigned a house number. Legalisation, aside from other things, allows the Roma to also obtain a housing benefit. Some dwellings (mainly wooden shacks), however, cannot be legalised. Over the past few years the local council has managed to legalise more than half of all the homes in the community.

Village local administration with the making of payments for rent in a number of families successfully uses also the institute for special recipients, through which the lawyer employed by the village ensures communication with Roma families.

Last year the village launched one more "new item", which has been very successful. The settlement is from an urban point of view not very suitable located and even more problematic is the planning solution. Unplanned building in the past led to the fact that the road communications are not very suitable. Only personal motor vehicles can actually reach the settlement. With larger automobiles this is very problematic. A vehicle for the hauling of communal waste simply cannot reach the settlement. In the past only marginal attention was paid the question of hauling communal waste in the settlement, which had the effect of significantly limiting the availability of a large-capacity container and its regular hauling away. The fact that this didn't really function need not be particularly emphasised. The environment, in particular, in the community suffered under such conditions, but also the entire community, not to mention that the collecting of fees for the hauling of communal waste (the obligation for which the law places on the village) under such difficult conditions was hard to justify and still harder to carry out.

The mayor of the village began to think about how to resolve this entire situation and came up with a relatively simple solution. He placed some dozens of small containers for communal waste around the entire community such that one was near to every house. In the scope of small village services three Roma were selected whose role is to regularly – once per day on a specially altered wagon – haul these containers to the front of

the settlement and dump them into an available large-capacity container.

The result was not long in coming. The cleanliness of the settlement improved significantly. The mayor said it very simply: "I can't remember if there was ever more order in the settlement." The local Roma, like all the non-Roma anywhere in Slovakia, have simply gotten used to the fact that refuse is regularly hauled away. They have the rubbish means close by and therefore they don't have a reason to throw rubbish anywhere else.

A simple but effective solution which can be carried out anywhere. It only wants to get started and then to be maintained.

The above-mentioned activities are in no way are the only which are being carried out in Pečovská Nová Ves for the local Roma community (or together with it). A calculation of all would surpass the possibilities of this publication. From the many activities we can mention, for example, the annual organizing of the Day of the Roma, the club and free-time activities for children, the field social work and different gatherings or performances of Roma in the village. Spiritual work with the Roma, which is carried out in the local chapel among other places, is also very active. The village built this chapel together with the community directly in the settlement back in 1996. On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the chapel's consecration (12 September 2011), Archbishop of the Košice diocese mons. Bernard Bober served the holy mass.

The second village of Sveržov is a completely different case. This is a small village in the Bardejov District (Prešov Region). As of 31 December 2010 it had 554 residents (264 men and 290 women), more than 80 of whom made up the local Roma community.

With a small area, the village of Sveržov (570 hectares) lies in the northwest part of the Nízke Beskydy Mountains in the Ondavská uplands. It spreads out in the lower part of the Sveržov Valley at an altitude of 346 meters above sea level. Sveržov belonged in the past to the Šariš County as a subject village of the town of Bardejov, from which it lies 12 km to the northwest. The first written record of the village dates from the year 1355.

There is a nursery school located in the village which is attended by approximately 19 pupils – both Roma and non-Roma (three Roma children and 16 non-Roma) – and a first degree primary school which has 30 pupils (11 Roma and 19 non-Roma). For the second degree of primary school pupils attend school in the neighbouring village of Gaboltov. Despite the lack of numbers the village is fairly well equipped with utility networks and civic equipment. In addition to the electricity connections, the village has a public water system and a gas connection. Thus far only public sewerage is missing in the village. In the village is a cultural centre, two grocery stores, a bar, a community centre and an active volunteer fire brigade. Building

firms such as R+T, BAUMAN and R.A.S. s.r.o. do business here, and the KOTVA trading network, a maker and sewer of household accessories, is based here, as are the village enterprise SVEPOS s.r.o., and a number of trade license holders.

A certain curiosity is the fact that the village of Sveržov is the administrator of a common office headquartered in Bardejov for more than 80 villages of the entire region, which in this regard puts it in first place in all of Slovakia. This common office has been functioning since the origin of the local administration in 1990. From the start it has performed by itself it has handled authorities for these villages, namely the accounting and wage agenda (overall this is for more than 1,200 workers). Since 2002 this office has also managed the agenda of transfer the performance of state administration, namely for the construction office, the environment, water administration, the educational office (for 55 schools) and the like.

There are two churches in the village. A classicist Roman Catholic church from the year 1828, which was repaired in 1903 and again in 1950 as a building monument, and the Lutheran church.

Just as Sveržov is not a large village, the local Roma community is not very large either. Overall about 83 Roma live in the community and they are totally concentrated in the northeast part of the village, which is called Osada ("the settlement"). If we wish to objectively characterise this community we would have to go back to before the year 2006. At this time there were 11 wooden cabins, or shacks, located here in which the entire community was cooped up. Not one of these houses, or shacks, even had building permission, and address number, running water, or even toilets. Their users had debts for village fees and the like.

The year 2006 saw radical changes take place. In this year the village handed over 12 new lower standard flats for use, into which moved the entire Roma community. This didn't involve a simple event which just "fell from heaven" into the community. This was the result of the village trying for many years to obtain a grant from the Slovak Ministry of Construction and Regional Development. Pavol Cel'uch today remembers that day when the Slovak Ministry of Construction and Regional Development announced approval of the grant:

"This was in 2005, right at the time we had the big celebration of the 650th anniversary of the first written record of the village, and the day before a now-deceased employee of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, Ing. Šteffek, had called me late in the day to tell me that we had been assigned to the programme for construction of flats, but that we must complete them by the end of 2006. I felt completely joyous when I announced this at the village celebration and I was convinced

that this will be the golden nail of the entire programs – such a wonderful gift for people and that everyone would be happy. Well – I ruined the entire celebration. I could hardly walk among the people normally – everyone asked me if I'd gone mad, building for the Roma... At the same time no one had said anything against it beforehand, and about the fact that we are requesting a grant for the entire village. Then if someone were to come to the village and say that he was stopping the construction, he'd become the mayor."

This activity, however, was only one of the many which were already then be carried out in the village on behalf of the Roma community. In view of the possibilities, the village was until then orientated on the field of educations and the field of employment. At the time Pavol Celuch could show off the fact that unemployment of the Roma dropped in the village by more than half. At the time there were 60 Roma registered in the village, most of whom were children and youths. Only a few more than 25 were of productive age. The local private business then employed six Roma from the village, the village office had jobs for five Roma and two others worked in the community centre as assistants. Overall at that time 13 Roma were employed in the village.

The educational level of the Roma in the village was and continues to be a disadvantage. Not one of the local Roma has even a secondary school education. Most pupils finish primary school in the sixth or seventh year. At present one Roma girl is studying in a secondary school. The mayor has personally taken an interest in her future and attendance because if she is able to complete secondary school successfully he would like to employ here in the village office or in the community centre. It is the community centre, which at present is operated by the civic association People in Need Slovakia, which the mayor is maximally satisfied with. Thanks to the community centre and its workers communication between the village and the community has significantly improved. In 2006 in an article for the Roma Press Agency (RPA) Pavol Celuch expressed himself clearly:

"I recommend to each local administration which still does not have such workers and which wants to really solve problems of the citizens of Roma origin, that it not hesitate and organise such jobs. This has clearly helped us in further cooperation. When I began 12 years ago to work as the village mayor, we registered 21 official declarations for the Roma. If we did not solve the so-called Roma problem or continued to put it aside, after a few years it would grow perhaps to an unmanageable size. Therefore, we built decent new housing in housing units of lower standard for them and at the same time we tried to provide or find employment for them. We often write letters of reference and recommendations for potential employers. In the end result we help the village such, because I believe that if we help the weaker now, later

there will be returns."

And he would change nothing about this statement still today. But what is unique about the lower standard flats in Sveržov? In our opinion it is the fact that the village, given its size, decided to resolve housing for the **entire** community. But the solution doesn't mean that it comes by itself, immediately and that it "falls from heaven into the lap" of all interested parties. It involves a long-lasting process which begins with the willingness to change the current state, with detailed knowledge of the community, by building mutual trust and the like.

With construction the village probably decided to take the most difficult path it could have taken for such activities. It didn't use any companies and brokers, but it built on its own resources and the capacity of the Roma themselves. It organised its own village company SVEPOS (Sveržov service undertaking), which carried out the entire building process. The fact that it mainly employed Roma is not even necessary to emphasise. Literally and to the letter, the Roma built all of the houses themselves. They worked off not only the obligatory 20%, but significantly more. And all of them worked in doing so. Obviously, this did not go without occasional unwillingness, without problems, without "chasing them down". But the result was clearly profitable. In 2006 the entire settlement moved into the new spaces. The old settlement was destroyed, the shacks taken down and the site was cleared. The new settlement at the same time is located some 50 metres from the original location and perhaps 200 metres from the village office. On this occasion Pavol Cefuch remarked:

I noticed that the local Roma didn't take any property from the old shacks to the new flats, except for new technology (TV, radio, refrigerator). It was as if they wanted to take leave of their old life for good and begin everything anew."

And they built really very lovely houses. The fact that they worked off significantly more than the required 20% and the fact that the village handled this in its own administration saved the village resources for the Roma themselves, which they invested into increasing the standard of the housing. In place of the requested empty flats, these were equipped with kitchen units, a stove, heating tiles, floors, completely furnished bathrooms with a WC, bath and hot water. And how does Pavol Cefuch perceive these activities today? Clearly positively. He doesn't have even one illegal building now; he doesn't have even one cent unpaid on the part of the Roma toward the village. The local majority has begun to perceive the settlement as an integrated part of the village.

*"Until then there was Sveržov **here** and the settlement **there**. Now if they say Sveržov, they automatically include the settlement. Ultimately, I*

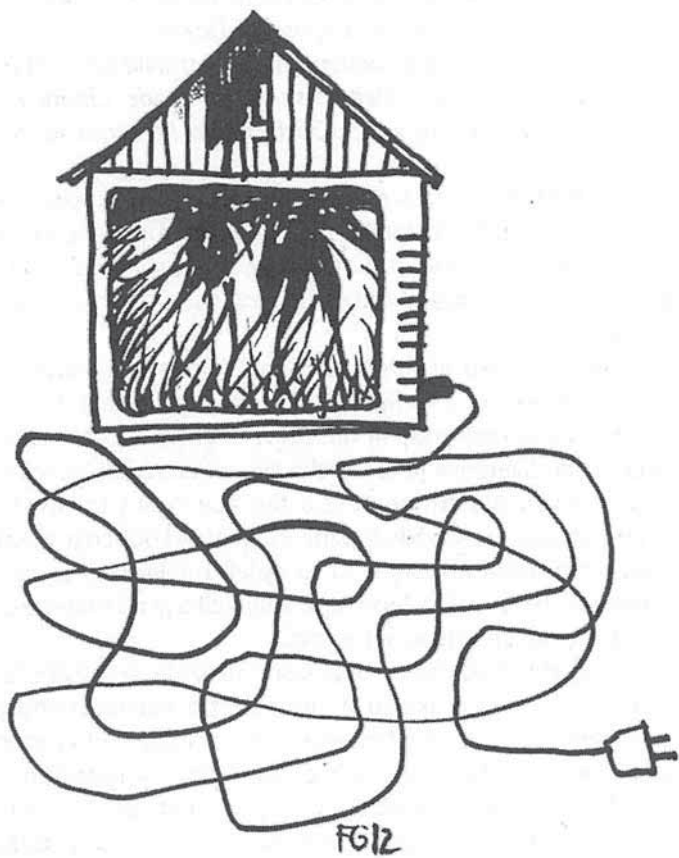
recall,” – says Pavol Celuch – “that not long ago an older woman on the street said to me: Mr. Mayor, and whether you saw what’s going on in the settlement. The Gypsies in these new houses normally walk around in slippers just like we do. The mentality of the village is gradually changing.”

The village company subsequently carried out additional activities not only in the village, but also in the wider surroundings. It built a new building for the village office, a rental housing block for small families in the village and a sports ground; it also reconstructed the cultural centre, flats of lower standard in the neighbouring village of Kurova and a nursery and primary school.

Like Jaroslav Bañas in Pečovská Nová Ves, Pavol Celuch also sees one of the great barriers of greater activation in the field of employment, aside from the financial crisis, also the not too generous social system. At the same time the experience from Sveržov is identical to that of Pečovská Nová Ves. The Roma want to work. But meaningfully and such that it’s worth it. And in today’s situation this is not always possible. Those who want to work and who find it worth it perform small village services (this in today’s situation isn’t worth it to some, because, for example, a wife is on maternity leave or on a parental benefit and the like).

The example of these two villages clearly shows that to solve the situation in a village it is always more effective than to not resolve it, or to leave it “in the hands of fate”. In the end this was later exceeded in the given village. At the same time it is necessary to look for a solution first of all in local resources (mainly human) and in one’s own willingness to start. Both examples again clearly show that what we wrote in the introduction – a universal and broad solution which would be suitable for each community does not exist. It must always be derived from the local specifics and needs. What works well in one village doesn’t have to function elsewhere. Fundamental, however, is to communicate with the community and to be open to listening.

It almost always applies that what is said on one and on the other side without emotion, has its truth; we simply must find it and understand it.



We have to work even though it's not easy - the town of Lipany

The town of Lipany can also be an interesting example of good practices. Even though at first glance this doesn't have to appear as a successful activity, this town can be a good example for many others in how it's possible to work with the marginalised Roma community.

Research in the field of Roma reality is so far not at such a level that we could responsibly answer the question of the reasons why, but the fact is that in the basin of the River Torysa there are a number of Roma communities whose level is not very good. In the entire upper basin we don't find even one community which would live integrated (except for a few individual exceptions) among the majority. In nearly all cases this involves a community inhabiting independent (often segregated) Roma settlements, in which there is a very low level of housing with limited infrastructure, a notable absence of social skill of the local residents, low achieved education and high unemployment. Professionally we can characterise these communities as communities with the presence of pronounced poverty, or with the presence of a culture of poverty. We do not want say that this means a priori problem communities. We only state that their living conditions differ significantly from the standard common in this region. In the case that in the present period the situation has changed more drastically, it occurred only not long ago with the construction of lower standard flats (e.g. Krivany), which doesn't permit in the present period the evaluation of the permanent sustainability of these activities into the future. In the context of the above stated, this involves the villages of Nižný Slavkov, Torysa, Krivany and Lipany. We could probably find the reason for this disadvantageous state in the past; however, research on the regional history of the Roma in the area of the Horná Torysa (Upper Torysa) hardly exists and is still awaiting its executor.

What is in the town of Lipany so unique that we decided to include it in this publication? State briefly, Lipany has devoted itself to work with the Roma community for a number of years now and simply stated there is no activity which this town hasn't tried or hasn't carry out. Many of them were unsuccessful, many (still) haven't yet reached the end, but many activities brought and still bring positive results. The fact that in Lipany itself there has been no radical change in the entire local community doesn't mean that in other environments this will not bring more significant results, that not a single activity brought to the community negative development and all in the end consequence meant at least a stoppage of the social

assault on the community. Stated otherwise, if work was not done with the community, the result would with the greatest probability a significant social assault and the uncontrolled growth of problems (and perhaps something worse).

The town of Lipany belongs in terms of location under the east Slovakia Šariš region and is located in the Prešov Self-governing Region. It spreads over the Spiš-Šariš inter-mountain area in the valley of the River Torysa in the Sabinov District. Lipany lies at an altitude of 390 metres above sea level. The town has an advantageous geographical location. The state border with Poland is found close by (the railway crossing to Muszyna and the Vyšehradský road border crossing into Poland through the village of Leluchov 17 km). Lipany originated on an old strategically important Royal road (the *via regia*), which connected central and eastern Slovakia. It is 13 km from the district town (Sabinov) and 34 km from the regional capital (Prešov). Today the town is an industrial, cultural and administrative centre of the Upper Torysa micro region. With an area covering 1,286 hectares, the town is, aside from the district town of Sabinov, one of the largest seats in the district.

As of 31 December 2012 Lipany had a total of 6,484 residents. The makeup of the educational structure is varied. The largest number of residents has completed secondary apprenticeship, vocational and complete secondary vocational school with a school-leaving certificate. The second group is made up of citizens with an apprentice education. The third group, consisting of 16% of citizens, is made up those with a primary education; these are predominately marginalised residents and pensioners over the age of 75 years. Approximately 7% of the residents have a higher secondary school and university education. The relatively low number of residents with a university education is caused by a lack of qualified work. Young people therefore depart for work to other regions and likewise go abroad.

The town has during its history undergone great changes, be they in social, cultural or sporting life. In the context of this publication, it is essential to mention, however, that the town perceives the solving of the Roma problem as its biggest issue.

In general, in Lipany the number of groups which are not capable of independently solving their own social problems and which are threatened with social exclusion is growing. Like other towns, here this involves primarily dysfunctional or incomplete families and the long-term unemployed (school leavers, women living alone and marginalised groups).

In the social field it is this sphere to which the social department of

the town office devotes itself. Likewise the town council has a social and health care commission and a commission for the Roma community.

The marginalised Roma community in Lipany lives compactly in the Za traťou ("Beyond the railway line") locality in the direction of the village of Ďačov near the River Torysa, the railway line and the industrial zone. This is about 1 km from the town centre. Only a few Roma families live in the town integrated among the majority and in such a way that the majority of them are not perceived as Roma and are not problematic at all.

At present approximately 630 residents live at the Za traťou site. Like other similar communities, here there is a significant portion of children under the age of 15 years: in all 327 (which is about 52%).

In the past, during the era of the first Slovak state, the Roma lived near the town centre. In reaction to the politics of the time, the Roma were moved out of the town centre, petty thievery being stated as the reason. The Roma community at that time, made up of approximately 250 people, settled (or were allowed to settle) in the town district called Kamenec. It was here the Roma built some 40 shacks. For their livelihood they made unfired bricks, which at the time were used to build homes. They also helped farmers, particularly in agriculture with the digging and picking of crops. Significant changes took place after the year 1948, when the period of so-called building of socialism began. Employment among the Roma gradually increased, mainly among men (women primarily cared for children). Ultimately, the construction of flats for this group of citizens began to take place in the town and the shacks at Kamenec began being demolished. The Roma were then moved to two locations. One was at Jarková Street and the other at Za traťou Street. In total there were four residential blocks, with eight flats in each. These, however, were already well-battered by use and the town resolved this situation with another move and the building of new flats, this time in only a single location. The new construction took place after 1989.

However, these flats, aside from the markedly poor hygienic situation, were already burdened by significant indebtedness for rents and fees for services and energy. In this period the town did not yet have organised an institute for special recipients; it didn't even have experience with field social work. What's more, the bad relations between the fellow citizens of the town and the marginalised Roma community worsened the situation.

This inconvenient situation peaked at the end of the 1990s, when the town decided to actively embark on a solution. The goal, among others, was improving the relations between the Roma and non-Roma populations and contributing to the elimination of the unfriendly attitudes

and experience of negative prejudices between them. One of the first activities organised was the so-called Institute for Special Recipients (IOP) in 1998 and the Roma Community Centre in 2002. In this centre emphasis was mainly placed on leisure-time activities or services associated with a job consultancy. For example, children from these excluded localities didn't have a place to go or ways to spend free time and their parents were often devoted to other activities than raising their children. The beginnings were from today's point of view not very successful; however, the town never conducted a complete evaluation in this regard. At this time there were relatively few activities with the Roma. Experience was lacking. In general the mutual awareness of those involved was generally low. But this community centre, thanks to the activities which were there conducted, identified a number of major problems which it is essential to bear in mind with additional work with this target group. There were mainly these limits:

- Very low awareness of the target group in regard to the functioning and mutual connection of the labour market and the social field. From the side of the Roma community interest came quickly, but these expected that social help will remain for them and that they will have the opportunity to draw a real wage. As soon as they found out that they will lose their social support, they backed out.
- The low social skills limited their preparedness to leave from their homes for work. They were not prepared for the disconnection of family and life outside their own community in a new environment. They inappropriately managed the financial resources need for survival in the first weeks of employment; they did not observe work discipline and the like.

These first steps led to town to re-evaluate its expectations and the speed with which it will see visible and permanently sustainable changes. And further, however, in specific activities the rule of "trial – error" applied, or learning "by doing". An overview of all activities of the town would be disproportionately extensive; therefore we will orientate only on those activities which from the town's point of view brought the greatest positive results.

A solution to the problem with the paying of rent

Thus, like other towns with this excluded community, Lipany wrestled with problems with the payment of rent and the devastation of flats. The town at present has in its ownership 56 flats of lower standard. These flats were built in three stages and all are concentrated at the Za traťou location. After experiences with problems in the past the town proceeded to a direct solution to this problem. In cooperation with the

Office of work, social affairs and family (ÚPSVaR) they began with regular deductions from the housing benefit through the form of an agreement and likewise with the payment of a common monthly rent (through the IOP). From the original indebted sum exceeding EUR 19,000 they managed to decrease the indebtedness for rent to about EUR 3,000. At present the situation in the town is such that if non-payment of rent occurs for some of the families, they are immediately assigned to the IOP. **In this context the primary interest is not an income for the town, but not encouraging non-payment** and thus not creating new problems. Likewise the IOP is credited with reducing the unpaid fees for the hauling and the liquidation of solid household refuse by more than EUR 500.

In view of the fact that debts for rent have dropped so significantly, the town decided to gradually renovate these lower standard flats. It bought the necessary materials for the repair of the exterior façade and under oversight of an expert; the renters from this location repaired and painted it themselves. Another step taken by the town was the concreting of the surfaces between the residential blocks, which likewise the residents did themselves.

In a pronounced way this success was achieved mainly thanks to field social work.

Work with problematic families

The organizing of the IOP helped many families get free of debts and poverty, but let us say that this work was not at all easy. The intensive approach and positive reasoning was successful in some families. Field social work in the case of Lipany was orientated on the entire community. The main part of the work, however, was concentrated on a number of families. These were families with the lowest social skills who in the framework of the Roma community itself were perceived as problematic and socially weaker.

As an example, we'll present the work with one family which lived in very humble and poor conditions. They had 17 people living in one room, in which there was only one bed and a small stove. This state in the family began being resolved immediately after the establishing of the IOP. The father was an aggressive alcoholic and the entire family suffered very much with this. The town assigned a lower standard flat to this family and began to intensively work with it. The flat was gradually furnished with furniture from the benefit which the family drew. The remaining finances were pre-divided into four weeks and the family was regularly assisted in buying groceries. With the social savings in this family, a usurer was also found and a purposeless use of financial resources. With the assisted shopping it was

obvious, that the mother of the family didn't know the value of money and bought the most expensive goods. It was gradually explained to her that it is more effective to buy raw materials for the family or semi-ready products than processed products (e.g. pudding and the like). Thanks to the field social workers this mother learned to cook, to care for the household and to ensure proper hygiene for her children.

The problem, however, was still with the father of the family. This could not be solved for a long time, but he was prevented from drinking up all of the financial resources. Thanks to the financial assistance, the TSP paid cash only to the mother of the family, if possible. Through the IOP they managed to completely pay off the indebtedness for rental of the flat, provide children with regular meals at school and nursery school and overall raise their living standard. School attendance began to be regular for the children, because they now had clothes to wear and the father of the family gradually stopped using alcohol completely and became a model father.

At present the flat is, compared with the past, cleaner, and furnished not only with basic furniture. The mother regularly cooks and both parents participate in activation work and there is very good cooperation with them. The family now does its shopping without the assistance of a TSP, and despite the fact that the family is in the IOP for a longer period and their conditions have improved, they want (now voluntarily) to remain within the IOP.

The centre for personal hygiene and the laundrette

The town very positively perceives the centre for personal hygiene and work (SOHaP), which was carried out in the years 2004–2006 directly at the Za traťou site. It obtained EUR 39,186.09 from the state budget and the town contributed from its own resources a sum of EUR 25,850.64. To explain the importance of such a facility is not particularly essential, but from a broader view thanks to this in the fields of hygiene and health the occurrence of transmittable diseases has dropped caused by a lack of hygiene. In the case of the occurrence of increased risk of skin diseases (scabies) and the presence of parasites (lice, fleas), after a doctor is notified measures are immediately taken, with priority given to disabled families where SOHaP plays an irreplaceable role. It is in these spaces that the TSP and parents have the opportunity to remove the parasites (haircuts, use of special resources and shampoos, which are handled also thanks to IOP and the like).

Field social workers assist mother with bathing their children and teaching them basic hygienic habits. We were able during the functioning

of the SOHaP to teach some families to attend this centre regularly and to also take heed of their own health in this way. Obviously, it's not possible to expect that the entire community will use this facility. In the end result a portion of the community don't need it. The number of families which regularly use the SOHaP make up 15-20% of the community, which is in our view a very positive number.

The use of the centre was also very successful during the weekends, when it serves mainly children and young people, who attend a secondary school dormitory and regularly travel to school outside of Lipany. It is this particular group, which the town and the field social workers are the most proud of, which regularly uses the showers and work room in order to meet their peers in school on equal terms. Also very positive is the fact that the parents of these students are very grateful for this centre and are positive examples for other families.

The work room in the SOHaP is used more than the showers themselves. This is mainly due to the relatively undemanding institution created by two functioning common washing machines, the use of which doesn't cost a great deal. Residents from the Za traťou neighbourhood often bought older clothing in local second-hand shops and then after using them, got rid of them by throwing them away or burning them. Then they would buy new clothing. Families thus spent uselessly and ineffectively a significant amount of financial resources. Many used this opportunity directly. In other cases are used the TSP. Each family which is included in the IOP regularly buys a monthly hygienic package which contains among other things, laundry detergent. This step had a very positive response in these families. Without the SOHaP it would never have been possible to raise their level of living in these families.

Securing wood for fuel

In low standard flats there is no connection for gas and therefore the flats are equipped with stoves for solid fuel. In the past there was a major problem in this location with securing wood for fuel. Residents solved this by stealing wood or other wooden items from the surroundings, but also the distant surroundings. It also occurred that they heated the flats with pieces of their own furniture, refuse, clothing or shoes.

Therefore the town offered the all citizens the opportunity to secure fuel wood for heating. Mainly families from the Za traťou site used this opportunity. Each had the right to buy a ticket for the preparation of fuel wood (this was waste wood up to 7 cm in thickness) from the town forests, which has a value of EUR 5 with validity for four days during a two-week period. The amount of wood taken and the number of tickets

is also unlimited. Only 50 tickets were issued for the last three months of last year in this location. This system very much paid off for the town and is perceived very positively. In addition, the amount of wood stolen dropped considerably. In the town forests a noticeable cleaning of the undergrowth occurred along with the clearing of excess (waste) wood matter after extraction and the like. In the end, even the revenues into the town treasury were not negligible, mainly at the time of crisis, when every extra cent helps the town.

The Roma watch

Lipany also has an organised Roma watch, which helps maintain order mainly in the Za traťou neighbourhood. It is likewise helpful during the drawing of benefits at the town office, where the IOP is established. Six members work in the watch in the scope of activation work. Their role is to maintain order by the road near the neighbourhood but also directly in it. They regularly notify us about different problems that arise in this location. In the Roma location there are also voluntary guards of public order who work closely with officers and police specialists and are very helpful also with uncovering criminal and other illegal activities. These volunteer guards of public order are used by the police for ensuring public order during various events in the town. The volunteer guards of public order are also assigned to a common watch with officers and police specialists with the protection of agricultural crops. We mention that for this activity the volunteer guards of public order are not financially compensated and they perform this service on a volunteer basis.

Roma watches, together with the town and state police, regularly carry out checks in the local gaming halls and locations where automatic gaming machines are kept. After finding out that someone is using his financial resources wastefully and that his family subsequently suffers, the town immediately steps in to resolve the situation, the result of which can be (and often is) the including of the family to the IOP, when the worker no longer issues any cash payments to them. Even though this approach doesn't fully resolve the mentioned problem, since some types of incomes (even social) cannot be included to the IOP, (e.g. pensions, parental benefits), the town has had as a whole good experiences and results.

In addition to the social commission, the town council has already had an established commission for the Roma community for more than 10 years. Of the 12 members there are representatives from local administration, as well as Roma and those from the third sector, the police and education. This commission is very helpful to the social commission with the organizing and assigning of client within the IOP, with work

with problem families. Likewise, it handles truancy, helps with organizing activation work, and checks the running of the SOHaP and the like.

Unemployment in this community is nearly 100%. Officially only four people are employed through the town itself. Aside from other reasons, the reason for this status is also the very low educational level of this community. In the present period there is not a single resident with a university or secondary school education. The vast majority has completed only primary school or even just an education in a special school. Currently, mainly thanks to the activities of the TSP directly in the community, the first three students from this location are attending a vocational boarding school in the town of Prešov.

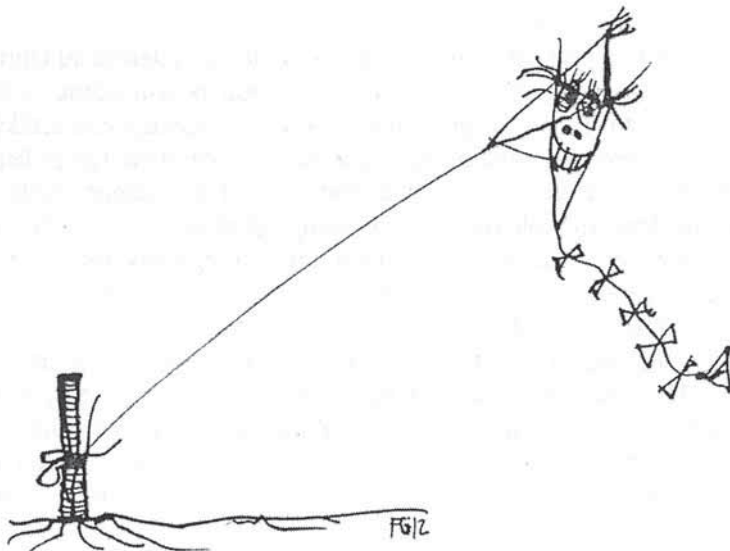
In the field of education the town works not only with youth of secondary school age, but gets children from the community in the preschool period. There are currently two nursery schools in the town, and each has two classes with a half-day operation for children from the community. Overall some 40-60 a year children complete their preschool preparation. In addition to this, in the town there is also a so-called preparatory (zero-year) year which is headquartered directly in the Roma community centre. Methodologically it is managed by the local primary school. The positive benefits of these preschool facilities are not necessary to mention. It is necessary, however, to mention that two Roma women from the community are employed as assistants directly in these classes and have been very useful. In addition to knowledge of the Romani language, the children have a natural respect for them and the community is at the same time continually informed about what is going on in the nursery school.

Even though this sounds a bit contradictory, cooperation with the district procurator also had a great effect on educational activities in the town. In June 2011 the town organised work meetings with representatives of all those interested (the district procurator, a social trustee, TSP, police specialists for work with the Roma community and the connected primary school), at which problems relating to schooling were resolved and subsequently the committing of crimes by children and youths (the priority being those from the local Roma community). The result of this work meeting was an agreed upon exact approach and mutual cooperation with the prevention, uncovering and resolving of these criminal acts. Subsequently, there were two cases when a suspended sentence was achieved against parents whose children regularly did not fulfil their obligatory school attendance. This very fact worked (and still works) as a clearly "frightening" example for other problem families, which in a significant way began to pay attention to the school attendance of

their children.

The activation activities in the town of Lipany were as of 30 September 2011 ended. But at present the unemployed also have the opportunity to take part in so-called small village services (MOS) organised by town. The town momentarily offers this opportunity for 115 applicants, of which 86 are from the Za traťou neighbourhood. At the same time four agreements were concluded with the District Court of Prešov, on the basis of which those convicted can serve their sentence in the form of mandatory work in the range of 200 hours per year. Intensive work also takes place with convicted persons in the scope of the TSP.

The town, even despite all of these activities, does not consider its work in the local Roma community as completed, or such which would bring about significant positive changes. The trends of positive development here are, however, fully apparent. And despite this fact, it is aware that without these activities the problems in the town would increase exponentially. They therefore plan to continue in these activities so that in the end positive changes will take place and will remain permanent. But without help from the state (whether in the form of changes to the social system or direct and continual support of activities in the target group), this will happen with great difficulty.



Closing in on a socially and economically self-sufficient community - Nitra nad Ipľom

The village Nitra nad Ipľom is situated in the southern part of the Banská Bystrica Region, in the Novohrad Region. It consists of three streets which spread out on the opposite banks of the River Ipel. The first written record of the village is from 1355 and its original appearance is preserved in the architecture of the family houses and the Roman Catholic church. The character of the region and the village is of bottom land, agriculture, with a high soil fertility, which formed the method of living for residents in the distant and not so distant past (cultivating vegetables, raising corn, cereals, potatoes and the fruit-growing business). With a change in the social system at the end of the last century, agricultural activities in the village regressed or in the end even completely stopped. The strong ties in the past of the land owners to the soil, its ownership, pride and family traditions were significantly influenced by events in the village in the 20th century, which were for the village a period of turning points and changes.

The original majority population of the village was non-Roma. After the Second World War, however, three of the Roma families living in the community (the Žandár, Žáčko and Kuštiferko families) migrated to Czech Republic for work. They settled in the Sudetenland, from which German residents had been evacuated after the Second World War. The families worked in agriculture and until the early 1970s they lived in the Czech lands. The second generation in the families which successfully took hold and had sufficient resources, however, and decided to return. In Nitra nad Ipľom they bought family houses and returned to their native village. This step was possible, because at that time the village had a sufficient number of available houses. The reason was the declaration of a building stoppage in the village (because of the thermal springs in the nearby villages, protected land around the Ipel). Only old settled families remained in the village – non-Roma. Families which came from the Czech lands settled here permanently and quickly grew, because they often had 6-9 children. The result of this process, squared further also by the mentioned departure of non-Roma from the village, is a state in which the Roma have become the majority in the village. And the present demographic development in the village is rising. In 2010 the village had 321 residents. At present it has 341 residents, of which 304 are Roma and 108 are children. All of the Roma in Nitra nad Ipľom have declared Roma nationality. This state occurred with a five-year building of awareness or Roma citizens on the part of the Roma mayor. Other residents have Hungarian and Slovak nationality.

Change occurred in the village in the structure of the population, but no change took place in the thinking and approach of citizens. The current mayor assessed the subsequent period thus:

“However, non-Roma had power here (the unified farm cooperative, the village office, the pub was state-owned). A hundred years ago the wealth was in the soil. The non-Roma who remained were the children of those who were property owners in the past and in the 19th centuries, before nationalisation came. The non-Roma got used to the changes and again had power in their hands and worked for the state. This lasted until the 1990s. In the early 1990s when we “got out of our marriage with the neighbouring village”, we elected a non-Roma mayor who was not a communist. He was the mayor for 12 years. He had a hand in the agricultural cooperative, was the mayor of the village and had a grocery store in the village. These three segments together – “nothing better could have happened”. The result of his mayorship was the decline of the Roma community. This was a negative.

We grew up – the third generation in the village – they didn’t ask us whether we were Roma or non-Roma. This was no longer unimportant to us, and so we elected as mayor a Rom who began to work for the community. He helped with education, activation work, invited Mrs. Orgovánová from the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, obtained resources for the reconstruction of the village office building and the Roman Catholic Church. The negative aspect was that he was unable to maintain the cooperation (co-habitation) of the two “camps” – the majority and the propertied part of the residents before 1990, their children, who had the feeling that “we are somebody here” and “the rapidly multiplying” Roma population”.

Nitra nad Ipľom has thus been an independent village since the early 1990s. Before then it belonged administratively to the neighbouring village of Holiša, which is 2 km away and today provides for the “Nitra” residents a part of the services (post office, marriage office, passenger railway stop). The village has a gas hook-up and bus transport available but is without a water main, because the source of drinking water for the residents is their own wells. Nitra nad Ipľom falls under the district town of Lučenec (14 km from the village) and Filakovo (8 km away). Residents visit offices in these towns as well as medical facilities. The local school is Slovak, even though Hungarian is the language of communication in the village.

When we include the events of the mentioned period we can say that the non-Roma population and the village leadership accepted the new majority only with difficulties. The first Roma mayor, G. Berky, despite trying, was not able in this initial situation to manage the resolution of

collective problems, and the situation worsened under the influence and pressure of the minority and on the other hand under pressure from the unhappy majority. During his time in office, the civic association Roma Community Centre Ipeľ was active in the village and in 2004, using UPSVaR resources, it carried out in Lučenec a course for social field workers (29 workers from the villages of Nitra nad Ipľom, Šavoľ, Filákovské Kováče, Filákov, Lučenec). Later, for activation work, it employed 95 people from the village and surrounding villages for field social work; it collectively offered also social advisory services and humanitarian aid.

In the years 2005 – 2006 from resources from the Social Development Fund the building of the village office in the building was partially reconstructed (improved the technological condition of the building) with the intention of creating a Roma community centre. However, they did not succeed in obtaining its intended contents. In 2007 the Roma Community Centre Ipeľ prepared the creation of a Roma police watch in cooperation with the External Department of the Slovak Police Force in Filákov. The statutory body of the civic association, M. Berkyová, in an interview for the RPA from 15 March 2007 stated that over the last five years the use of drugs and sniffing of stupefying substances had increased among young children, who got the money for them mainly by thievery and stealing and rowdiness. Thus, the Roma community centre was not successful in “edifying” – more the opposite; the unmanageable situation in the village worsened. Subsequently, this led to a change in the communal sphere and in the life of the community.

The present mayor of the village, Tivadar Berky, has been in office since 2007. We can say that he is a mayor who has clear priorities and “the same meter” for everyone:

“The village council has five members. For the first 12 years in the independent village the council was non-Roma in an unchanged form. In the subsequent period it was made up of three non-Roma and two Roma. Today we don’t have Roma and non-Roma council members; these are our council members. Meetings of the village council are open to the public. As mayor I set the priorities – I don’t lie, I don’t conceal things, the village office is open to everyone, and the village is for everyone, nothing for me and my family. So, they can’t be against me. The first day when I took office the councillors didn’t want to ratify anything. So I said to them: ‘Either we’re all going to go in the same direction, or this cannot go at all’. I got the opportunity to show and so far there was never any sign that anyone was against me. It never happened; we never argued. In the last election all five councillors who I proposed remained in office – one non-Roma, two “half” Roma women, two Roma. Our – my – doesn’t mean the Roma. When I took office as mayor, the first thing I

wanted was for segregated Roma to get to the level where everyone is a citizen – same rights, same obligations. In order for the Roma to be accepted, I had to leave the non-Roma population “as it was” and lead the Roma to their level. At the beginning the non-Roma ignored me. This lasted 3 years. Today it’s important that non-Roma residents know who has a majority here. Every day I show them equality and the non-Roma population accepts this; society has improved. It common to see that they drink together, work together, go to the cemetery together and accept one another.

For work with flood prevention measures the ratio of employees was 15:5 (15 Roma, 5 non-Roma), for activation work 3:3 (three Roma, three non-Roma) and then 13:7 (13 Roma, 7 non-Roma). I’ve reached a point when all Roma and non-Roma who have an interest in working, today can work 100%”.

The education level of the Roma in the village is low; the majority has only a primary education, some not even so much. Four Roma have a secondary school education with a school-leaving certificate (woodworking, pedagogical, technical focus); six have completed vocational school (saleswomen, seamstresses). No Roma in Nitra nad Ipľom has a university education.

The main and only employer in the village is the village itself. The business sector here is completely absent. The school has two jobs – a director and an assistant teacher. One saleswoman works in the village grocery shop; in the village office are three employees and a field social worker with an assistant. The field social worker and the director of the school are from Lučenec (there were no people from the village with the necessary education); the others are local. The village for the second time is carrying out a social field work project supported from the Social Development Fund. For the second year a project of anti-flooding measures is being carried out in the village with twenty people. It takes a lot of effort in such a small community to push through work for a larger number of people. In the 1990s some residents passed through a requalification course for building work. Local Roma helped themselves and rebuilt the village office; they also perform building work in the village (activation work). The mayor evaluates the handling of the building works and their quality appreciatively: “They can handle the latest technologies and are skilled. It is said that if one non-Roma ‘lays 1 m² of plaster, a Roma will ‘lay’ 3 m² in the same time”.

From 1 March 2012 to 28 February 2014 the village is taking part in a project of education within the National Project V – Activation of the Unemployed and the unemployed with low motivation reliant on the benefit in material need. Within the project people are trained in building work on the practical and theoretical sides, which is very important for

them. They will work on village property and aside from work activities they will also during the project be focused on obtaining good work habits. All the efforts of the village mayor and the village council are focused on the development and improvement of the village by its own force. This effort is visible not only in investment activities. Great emphasis is placed on quality education and the creation of the foundation for the individual development of children and residents:

"We don't have a nursery school. In the 'old world' (under communism) we were joined with the neighbouring village. There was also a village office there and they built a new nursery school, which the children attended. In the 1990s we became independent and the nursery school remained in Holiša, which is far away for the children. For the second year we have a zero year in the primary school for unschooled children (now nine children). We supplemented the "local strategy" and we are working on a community centre facility. It's a village building which we want to reconstruct. We're starting in May. We're mainly preparing a proper nursery school in these spaces. The community centre must serve the "community"; it must fulfil the purpose it is intended for and not as in the previous period, for charitable activities (storage of clothing).

The years 1-4 of the primary school have few classes. From the beginning of the 1990s there was always a maximum of just 9-10 children attending. The school was dilapidated. The first mayor didn't deal with this and the second went his own way. I made a study of the errors and looked for answers. It's not enough to just name things that are bad, but it's required to say how they should be. I had an advantage in that I had one year while I was a candidate to prepare. Some people run for mayor and don't even know why and what they want to accomplish. As mayor I listed the mistakes in the school and searched for a solution.

He who should teach in the first level of primary school has to be a teacher and the director. He has to have the education needed to meet the conditions; he has to be a person of higher education and he must have higher pay. My predecessors weren't able to or interested in finding such a teacher and to pay for her. Families preferred to send the children to town (the number of children in the school stagnated); we didn't have a teacher who had trust. There were 7 – 8 children in the school and a teacher from the labour office and the annual budget of SKK 530,000 for financing education... Can you imagine this? I saw that in the neighbouring village they know this, that they buy equipment and the school is on a certain level. I studied the financing of regional schools. The first year I wasn't able to do anything. The school ran from September; elections were in November and I started to work in January. In that year there was nothing I could do. From January to September I studied everything about education and I was able to prepare for those certain pupils

and the school SKK 900,000.

Then we wanted a new teacher. I began to carry out a selection process and attracted 6-7 teachers. A young woman who didn't have the qualification to be a school direction applies; an older teacher who didn't have the background. The village council and the school board had a meeting. Our first priority was that the new teacher be accepting toward the Roma. I saw a synergy in that young woman. She got the job and thereby we started the change. The problem wasn't just money. We had a 16-year-old girl who was still attending primary school. A 16-year-old girl and a 6-year-old can't sit together at a school bench. The new teacher was very much favoured; she showed the children that the system is changing in that she was humane. The young girl could give her a hug. Roma children who could never do such a thing before. They had the feeling that they are accepted, that the teacher is warm-hearted. This young teacher did well, but she left. Due to her lack of qualification she could only fill in for 1 year.

In the second year I managed to increase the number of children in the school from 8 to 14. For that year we managed to achieve that our children were accepted. We managed to get the budget raised to SKK 1.2 million. We again found a teacher. There were several who met the basic criteria. Even one from a neighbouring village who wanted to leave her school because they had a disagreement there. We found out the reasons from the mayor and we didn't accept her. A second teacher from Lučenec taught mentally handicapped children. When the school board met at the selection proceedings, it was necessary to decide which of these two candidates to choose. It was always a priority that the teacher could not have any "hate" for the Roma community. We selected the one from Lučenec. Look today on the Internet how today everyone eats together at school, take trips together. The teacher invited the children to her private cottage for a two-day trip. They take trips into nature together. This teacher is creative; she sews, makes mugs. A little "gypsy" boy who doesn't even know Slovak is able to help her make nice things (the small, tasteful ikebana in the office of the mayor). Do you know what that means to him? In the school year 2008/2009 we then had 18 – 22 children in the school, in 2010/2011 we had 28 children, the 2011/2012 school year we again have 28 children.

hat have me managed to do and what are we proud of? If a pupil should be 8 years old in the second grade, then he is 8 years old, not 14 or 16. Last year we reached a point in which no one failed. In regard to equipping the school, we have a painted classroom, new floors, new chairs, chalkboards, computers, a television, the Internet and a data projector."

Children after finishing primary school in Nitra nad Ipľom attend the second degree of primary school in Filakovo (the Primary School at

Školská Street). No child attends a Special education primary school. They used to often attend the Special education primary school in Filakovo (a boarding school with the possibility of accommodation). An interesting element in this small community is the simplicity of the solution, the ability to use local resources (human and material), their involvement and self-help for achieving the determined goals. Also interesting is, however, the thorough knowledge of the cycle of life in the community and its residents for achieving a positive change. Proof of this is in the handling with the village budget or the operating of the village grocery store and their role in securing meals for the primary school and the village's investment activities.

"We are able in our school to ensure school attendance with the fact that we have a village grocery store and we provide the school with supplies of food for children in material need. Under my predecessor the children got fifty cents for breakfast a roll and yoghurt, and sometimes not even that much. We aren't able to provide a hot lunch for the children. Three years ago I was able to arrange for the children to have lunch and breakfast paid for as a 'dry lunch'. We prepare the breakfast ourselves. The responsibility is on me, because not everyone is reliable and bad words spread quickly, I didn't leave this to fate. As for money, EUR 1 belongs to each child for meals. Sometimes we give them meals for EUR 1.30, when we don't have such a margin on products, because the village doesn't need to profit from these activities. I've managed to get all the children to go to school. They don't go only when they are genuinely ill. Today I came to work and I know that yesterday some children went to bed with their bellies empty and I know that when a child comes in the morning to school, he comes here to eat. The children eat breakfast in the classroom. They set their desks nicely; they have a snack in the late morning, then they all clean up and wash their own cups.

For breakfast there is mainly bread or rolls with butter, ham, cheese, bell peppers or some other vegetables, fruits, yoghurt from dairy products, biscuits, in summer juice or in winter cocoa. Half the children have learned here what cocoa is. And when they don't have a roll with ham, they have bread with a spread or seasoned bacon. They always have a dairy product (yoghurt) and a sweet. Last week I bought stoves. A change is to take place and they'll have cooked food. I can cook pizza for breakfast and make hamburgers with ground beef. Pre-packaged goods are being brought to me.

....how to get children to school. I left it freely to the teacher. We have a lot of time for creativity and movement. When the weather is bad they do all kinds of creative work in class. When the weather is good, they go out on the slides, the basketball court and football pitch in the yard. In each village there is a football pitch measuring 30 x 40 m. On such a pitch you'll not find 20 people at

a match. People have problems with subsistence and don't have time for sport. However, you will find parties with drinks, drugs, gambling and thievery. We don't need money for sport. We created a football pitch where every hour, any hour you'll find boys they'll be playing "three-on-three". The pitch has a fence around it so the ball won't go out on the street. It's always open; they can get there any time. We don't do things only so that we can say we've done them. It has to make sense. We finance most of them with our own money. Part is from profit from the village grocery store, part from savings in village outlays. We save where we can; I don't bill for fuel used for our own motor vehicles for work purposes. We try to save also on employee bonuses, mainly bonuses for the mayor. In the school we saved money and used them for the playground. If we want to do something we have to save for it. By law every employee is entitled to travel costs and meal vouchers. Those who receive meal vouchers return them into the "common fund". We don't draw money from the budget for fuel and telephones; we switch them to the social fund. In this way we built the front and the back playground and we didn't have to hire any building firm for them. I always think about what is necessary to do, and then we meet and do it. I pay EUR 10 to everyone for 8 hours of work. When we sifted the ground for the playground, in the end we had a brigade of 37 people. I told people: "If you stay at home, you don't have anything. When you come you've got EUR 10 for bread or groceries and we're doing it for the village". Everybody came. We employ people 'on agreement' and I pay them the money each day. This works. We did the pavements this way, the centre, the gutters, the bus stop and the culture house interior. We didn't have a culture house. We bought the building and now we already have new tables and chairs".

The whole philosophy of operating a village grocery store is based on the local economy and creates the conditions for a certain standard of living for residents with regard to the saving of financial resources for those whose incomes are low and for whom in the long-term point of view there are no real prospects for change in this regard:

"Residents can't go shopping in town because they lack the money for it. We merged the BALA shop and the wholesale grocer Fresh. We get 'flyers' at home, where the sale prices for goods are listed, and people find these prices in the shop. In this way we built up trust. We were getting town prices in the village. One family which has an income of EUR 400 needs EUR 200 for food. With these prices it's possible to buy more for EUR 200 than before. In the grocery store before (under the previous leadership) they didn't sell fruits or vegetables, or even dairy products. They sold consumer items and alcohol there. The things people need they can now buy for a price like in town and fresh. This is the importance of the village grocery store. Suppliers deliver the goods, and the grocery store is open every day from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., on

Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

In addition, a quarter of the residents aren't able to manage their money. We have never signed up citizens who like alcohol and have a large family to the special recipients benefit in material need. We began to work with 70% of the residents and today we have nine people who if they were to get money today, they would drink it up. It took us five years to get to this point. Those who can't handle their money can buy in the shop and then we pay from the community.

Families which were segregated have increased their level of living. Today they are no longer hungry and have the opportunity to earn some money. The village offers them an occasional income. Neighbourly coexistence, marriage and family cohabitation have all been fixed. All the things which were heading for failure we stopped and we are working with them. Everyone lives with the feeling that he or she is living in a society.

Four families were evicted from Lučenec from Parný mlyn and came to us. We placed them in the middle of the village. The entire village had them in sight and they wanted to leave. Today they aren't leaving. They've become used to our way of life."

Nitra nad Ipľom is not a community with a typical Roma settlement, despite their being two parts which are perceived as "settlements". All families live in family houses, yet despite this fact that housing is one of the basic priorities of the village, for which it invests and obtains no small amount of financial resources.

"We bought a family house where we want to make social flats. We are making three flats on six sites. We obtained EUR 17,000 for reconstruction (USVRK, 2011, Reconstruction of a family house for three social flats). We've already done the repair work – the floors, water, electricity and heating. We are relocating into the social flats "inadaptable families" or families which are living in village buildings (the village house, the community centre), which are not intended for housing. Families are moving there which are living in a building which we bought as a culture house and which we want to rebuild. If this is a work opportunity, "ours" always do the work. I always request the offices for permission to do things ourselves (aside from specialised works). Companies have a margin. We can do a lot for that margin. People work for minimal money but they have the certainty that they'll get this money. We have two "settlements" – the upper (two houses) and the lower (four houses). The poorest families live here. The village helped repair the worst homes. The three families were offered social help from the village budget up to SKK 17,000 and we also helped them with the repairs. We legalised all 24 illegal buildings in the settlements as well as all village building. There is now no illegal building in the settlements or in the village. He who lives in a house is also the owner of the

house. We brought radio to the village and the settlement (USVRK, 2010, the project Now you can hear all of us – reconstruction of village radio) and public lighting. A total of 34 families from the village got involved in the microloans programme for housing (ETP Slovakia – loans up to EUR 1,000 to families with low incomes for the construction of bathrooms, securing access to drinking water, rebuilding of roofs, installing heat, or insulating and the like). We helped the families prepare the specification of costs. I went to the families and helped them select the most essential things necessary to repair; we measured the rooms and made a list of materials. Everything took place under the eye of the mayor. The money for the families was paid into the village account and from this we then bought the material. We created a “building party” and helped with the repairs. Today you won’t find a Roma house in which there isn’t a floating floor installed.”

Nitra nad Iplom with its character and way of life is close to being a model socially and economically self-contained community which groups of people in many towns in Slovakia and in different European or foreign countries try to achieve. Perhaps this is the model of “community life” functional in the 21st century.

“Do you know what we don’t do? We don’t boss anyone around, what they should do and how they should do it. We don’t tell anyone what they can and cannot do. When people give something to the Roma, they usually expect that they’ll get something back. What do I give to people to do 6-8 hours of activation work each day? Should I shout at them and chase after them to clean up every day? I’m not going to brutalise people for EUR 60. When I announce on the radio that it’s necessary to clean up the village, there is order in the village in about 15 minutes. When snow falls in winter, everyone automatically cleans up his yard, before the gate, the sidewalk and for the neighbour, too. No one had a problem with this. We don’t order anything; we lead people on the path and when they want to, they go down it; if they don’t want to, they don’t go. If they leave the road, they usually return to it, because they find out that they need to live in a society.

The village must have what belongs to it in a good condition. We have a cemetery which is always in good order. Do you know why? It’s 1 km from the village. For this reason there are no dogs, children, vandals and it remains clean. We have a wireless radio and public lighting throughout the entire village. We built a bus stop which we never before had here. We have the village outfitted with the newest technology (twice now we’ve changed it), a quality bookkeeping programme and a university educated worker in the economic department. We are well equipped personnel-wise. We don’t have and don’t need a pub; it wouldn’t earn a living here. We have a culture house which we never had before. It serves for wakes which before had to be held in

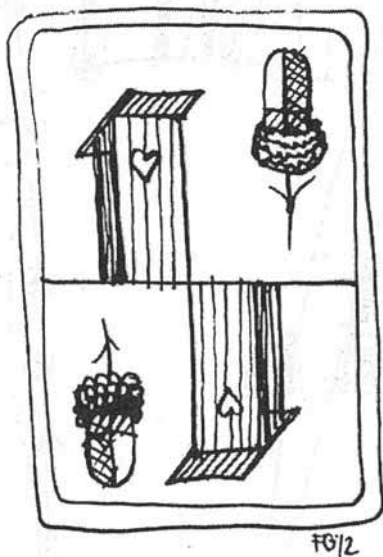
the neighbouring village. We also celebrated New Year's Eve here; people used to go to the New Year celebration to town.

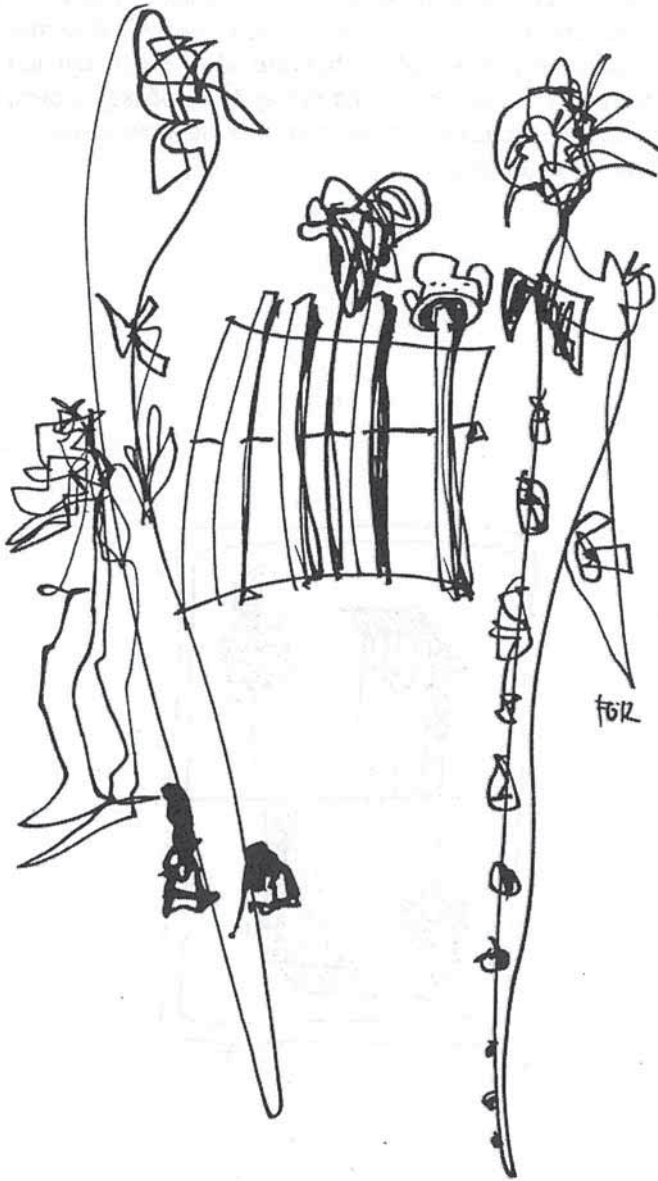
Children and young people spend their free time on the sports fields.

We want to expand these by nine swings, climbing frames and a large sandbox covered by a roof. We would like to join the social enterprises programme, if the conditions, which we thus far weren't able to meet, change, and the village would not be burdened. We have support for the carrying out of separate refuse collection. We're placing in each yard sacks with labels which each week we'll place on a truck, separate and haul away. In this way we dispose of village refuse and pollution.

From the prime minister's reserves, we obtained support for the reconstruction of roads, which have not been rebuilt since the 1960s. We're covering part of the reconstruction from our own resources. We have three streets, two of which we are now repairing. I know that before I finish in the position of mayor, we'll also repair the third. The state helps if people help themselves when raising their living standard."

The mayor of the village doesn't plan to run for mayor in the next election. All the challenges which we were taken on in the village were achieved or soon will be achieved. Another force of movement can be only new ideas, programmes and instruments on the national or European level which are able to support the stabilisation of the living standard of the residents and community development as in Nitra nad Iplóm.





A good direction - Liptovský Mikuláš

As in the other examples Liptovský Mikuláš is included in this publication to a certain measure for a specific reason. The reason why we put it in this overview lies in the fact that this town began to orientate itself on systematic work with the local Roma community and did so in a way in which we have already described a number of times. The foundation is good knowledge of the community and the planning of individual steps. During this process the specifics of the Roma community in the town are employed, mainly the fact that it is not completely concentrated in one place but is found in smaller groups in a number of locations. The town has a partially developed plan for the community (mainly in the area of flats), has organised a community centre, field social work, is building a communication network or more a connection between local administration and the community, is orientated on educational activities and the like. These are all very positive "initial steps", which are now beginning to bear their first "fruits". Stated otherwise, the town has in our opinion chosen a very good path, and if it manages to continue in the current direction, i.e. completes the process of complex planning (e.g. focussing on more detailed information about members of the community, their social skills, needs and the like) and creates a long-term mechanism of communication and cooperation between the town and the community, then the positive changes and trends will become permanent.

To introduce in a general way the town of Liptovský Mikuláš in this publication is not particularly useful. This is a district town in the Žilina Region, which lies in the middle of the Liptov basin near the Liptovská Mara reservoir. The technological and civil equipping corresponds to a town which is administratively, economically and culturally the centre of the district and the region. As of 31 December 2010 Liptovský Mikuláš had a population of 32,318 and consists of thirteen town precincts, which originated by dividing up the originally independent villages attached to the town.

The Roma population of the town is, according to official data from the Slovak Statistical Office 2.3% of the town – or 743 people; however, the real number of Roma in the town is approximately 5% - i.e. 1,615 residents. This community lives in more concentrations in some town parts and diffused in family houses and residential blocks (especially in the older town flat). The Roma in the town, or in the entire Liptov Region, have a very long tradition. According to information from the literature, as early as in 1561 there was in the Liptov a census made of the Roma, from which

it follows that in the region then lived 96 settled families, which survived as smiths, wash-tub makers, brush-makers, basket-makers and stated that on the side they play the fiddle. In the present period the number of Roma in the town is continually growing also due to natural population growth but also thanks to migration from the surrounding villages. Aside from the legal housing units in the town (small rental flats in residential blocks or lower-standard flats in the older town fund) there are in the town districts dwellings built and lived in illegally, without infrastructure and without social facilities. More exact information about the localization of Roma families in the individual town districts are processed in the document A Complex Strategy for Solving the Problems of the Roma Community in the town of Liptovský Mikuláš from the year 2010.

From the above, but also from other available strategic development materials and intentions of Liptovský Mikuláš (The Programme of Economic and Social Development for the Town of Liptovský Mikuláš and the Centre of the Liptov Region to 2013 with a glimpse at the year 2020 and the like) it follows that solving of the housing problem of (not only for the non-Roma, but also for the Roma population) is for local administration a long-term priority much like it is a natural priority for every person. By creating a broad scale and different levels of rental apartments in individual precincts the town is trying to create the conditions for the housing of different social layers of residents. The dynamic development and expansion of the town after 1989 and the construction of new buildings on the site of older ones, which necessarily led to the liquidation of a certain number of original housing units particularly in the centre of the town, became an important impulse for the construction of new flats of different categories.

At the entry to Liptovský Mikuláš in the direction from Liptovský Ján is the town precinct of Okoličné, under which falls the land of the Podbreziny housing estate. Prior to 1989 Roma families lived in the estate (at least one Roma family per every housing block entrance), which after 1990 lost work. With a worsening economic situation for the families, the relations with the neighbours also worsened and these families often became non-payers. This situation led them to the fact that they had to sell their own flats and search for a cheaper way of living (shacks, etc.) and they gradually got onto the waiting list for the town's social flats (particularly flats of lower standard), by which the migration of Roma residents took place within the town and the town had to resolve this new situation. Today in the Okoličné neighbourhood there are 12 Roma families in two smaller concentrations of family houses (mostly under private ownership) and three other families living so-called diffused, likewise in family houses.

In another town precinct, Palúdzka, there live more than 20 Roma

families in brick houses, caravans and container homes at Palúčanská Street, Okružná Street and SNP Street. The homes and their surrounding are mainly orderly, a part of the houses are rental flats for the town of Liptovský Mikuláš, which is preparing in this location the clearing of older family house and the construction of new rental flats.

Another more concentrated settlement of Roma families is in the precinct of Nábřežie Dr. A. Stodolu. At Vrbická Street there live 27 Roma families in three "blocks" of family houses and container homes. A particular specific of the "embankment" are the "black" or illegal buildings. This involves a complex of dozens of container homes, which are placed in neighbouring industrial buildings, on concrete surfaces, surrounded by sheet metal fencing. And despite the fact that the dwellings are placed on relatively small spaces, they have an orderly effect. The original container homes belonged to the leather works. The town of Liptovský Mikuláš is preparing on this site the building of social flats on neighbouring lands, which is in ownership of the town. Approximately 10 families live aggregated at 1. mája Street.

The settlement Hlboké is likewise a component of the town precinct of Nábřežie and is the largest location in Liptovský Mikuláš in which Roma residents live. Unlike Vrbická Street, Hlboké is located beyond the River Váh is thus separated from the town lands. The groundwork for the origin of the settlement in Hlboké dates from the first half of the 19th century. Proof of the presence of Roma in the settlement can be found among the historical materials in the Museum of J. Král in Liptovský Mikuláš. It is from the year 1919 and is a period photograph of a Roma family labelled by an unknown author as "Lipt. Sv. Mikuláš, gypsies". It captures multiple generations of a Roma family in the area of the Hlboké settlement, in the background with buildings which form an aggregate of single-room houses which were at the time most typical and most widespread housing for permanently settled Roma. The settlement remained unchanged until approximately 1970, when the resident began to build the first brick houses. In the same period the town also began construction on the first brick buildings (the old part of the settlement), and the settlement was electrified. It was originally connected with the centre of town by a wooden bridge which was later replaced by a stone bridge.

At the end of the 1960s the clearing of the Vrbica precinct began, and construction of a new housing estate called Nábřežie Dr. A. Stodolu followed. The construction and settling on the land on the left hand side, on which the Hlboké settlement was located in the past, was unplanned. In the new town planning from 2008 a change in the development of the town is planned, particularly in the transport infrastructure. It consists

of a construction of a new railway line and placement of the bus station in the southern part of the town, close to the highway. A new housing construction is planned for this site – the south side of the town with full civic facilities, sports grounds and a shopping centre. These intentions will have an immediate impact on the Roma settlement in Hlboké, particularly in bringing of basic infrastructure to the settlement which will contribute to the lowering of the present spatial segregation of the settlement. Basic civil infrastructure is at this time available to the residents of the Hlboké settlement in the Nábřežie Dr. A. Stodolu precinct (approx. 500 m) – groceries, industrial goods, a pharmacy and others. Residents most often do their shopping in the Kamenné pole shopping centre (across the meadow behind the settlement, about two minutes on foot). Its construction in this direction will positively impact the situation in the settlement.

According to records, a total of 559 residents live in Hlboké. In reality this is, according to data from field social workers, at present 599 residents (275 male, 284 female, 82 of whom are children up to age 6, 148 of whom are pupils at primary or special schools, and 13 of whom are over the age of 62). Information about the education of residents of Hlboké is not mapped in detail, according to existing information none of the residents has finished secondary school with a school-leaving certificate or university. After completing primary school (or special primary schools) children from Hlboké do not usually continue in their studies, or they continue at a Vocational Boarding School and the Practical School at J. Alexy Street in Liptovský Mikuláš and at the Secondary Vocational Polytechnic in Liptovský Mikuláš (agriculture department). At present about 10 young people study at secondary schools. It is often said, however, that studies never end. Only seven residents of the community work full-time and one has a trade license. A part of the residents are involved in activation programmes (activation work, anti-flooding measures) carried out by the town of Liptovský Mikuláš (165 workers, 153 of whom are from the ranks of MRK and 73 directly from Hlboké). A portion of the residents (not only in the Hlboké settlement) are also looking for work abroad (most often in Czech Republic).

The development of the Hlboké settlement is interesting in that in appearance and character it recalls something like an independent town precinct. It is equipped with complete infrastructure (water, electricity, sewerage), walled houses, a community centre and a personal hygiene centre with a laundry room. Only one brick home from the original settlement remains and it is in private ownership. The character of the housing and construction has gradually changed since the 1970s thanks to the active use of available programmes on the national level, for active,

particularly financial cooperation and long-term investment of the town of Liptovský Mikuláš (the State Housing Development Fund, the Slovak Government Office, the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, and others) and the necessary participation of people. In Hlboké today there are 111 official flat units which are (aside from one family house) rental flats of the town of Liptovský Mikuláš. The first brick houses built by the town were built in Hlboké in the 1970s (six housing blocks), which are in terms of age and use significantly worn down and in need in the near term a total reconstruction (partially realised in 2010). The old built up areas in the settlement were cleared and in their place 10 new buildings with 17 flats were built. Another building is a tenement block. Its construction began at the end of 1999 (through the MVRR SR – Programme for construction of rental flats of lower standard) and put into use in the year 2000. This is three residential homes connected by an external balcony for all residents.

In the past in Hlboké there was a sports club which had a dressing room and accommodation in the given location. These have already undergone the first stage of reconstruction (thanks to financing from the MVRR SR, the State Housing Development Fund the town budget) and 11 one-room and two-room rental flats were created which were put into use in 2001. In the next stage rental flats of lower standard with maisonettes were built in Hlboké. This type of housing is considered as being of the highest quality among the residents. The flats were built from a grant from the MVRR SR, and had a total of 5 buildings with 20 flats. Families which lived in the flats of the older housing fund at Vrbická Street live in them. Families invested their own financial resources into furnishing the flats to no small extent (kitchen links, carpets, seating, interior walls, etc.).

Since the 1980s container homes (18 units) have been used for housing in the settlement, originally as temporary housing for seasonal employees or temporary office spaces. These are placed around Hlboké in a disorganised way. A certain specific of this type of housing is the fact that usually older Roma women live in them.

One of the “remnants” of the original settlement in Hlboké is a brick family house, built in the 1970s, which is at present partially reconstructed. The house is in private ownership and divided into two independent flats.

In the vicinity of the legal buildings there are also caravans which serve as permanent housing and one as a leisure space. Newly built shacks have a similar function. A part is built from provisional materials and used as a leisure space and part (seven of them) is built as permanent dwellings, often by Roma registered to a permanent residence but who could not find any other form of housing and remain in the vicinity of their family

homes and relatives.

The fact that the flats are the property of the town allows the residents to preserve a certain residential standard. The town as the owner of the flats ensures through the housing enterprise certain repairs and maintenance (often with the active participation of the renters). The area around the houses is relatively clean and orderly. The town, through ownership of the rental flats, of which there are never enough, and their further expansion in different parts of the town, was able to respond in part to the change in the economic situation of the renters and families which have seen their standard of living lowered due to the loss of employment, subsequent economic and social need, as well as the inability to pay rent, by offering housing in a lower category, which is more economically acceptable for the family (especially families which lived in the older housing fund in the centre of the town during socialism or in the, Podbreziny housing estate).

A very important element is also the activity of the town in the area of employment, in the scope of which it tries to create jobs and conditions such that families are able to cover their basic housing costs (cooperation and agreements with business with rental payments, cooperation with town land management society when cleaning the forests, with flooding of the River Váh with cleaning of the river banks, activation work and anti-flood measures, educational programmes for supporting employment and employability, etc.).

And despite the many positives the town does not consider even this principle as universal and problem-free. Many problems do occur with this model (e.g. non-payment, high wear and tear on buildings, financially demanding repairs, illegal buildings, illegal connections to infrastructure and the like). It perceives it, however, as an attempt at a systematic resolution in the sense that it gives the opportunity to capture a part of the disadvantaged groups of residents before it falls completely into poverty and the loss of a home, thus the town anticipates an additional burden and the expenditure of resources for solving existing problems for socially and economically weaker groups. Another added value for the town and its residents, despite the high concentration of Roma residents in the settlement, is the favourable appearance and more dignified surroundings for the life of residents (we can also say this about the other mentioned locations with a concentration of Roma residents in the town).

Given the high concentration of Roma residents in Hlboké, the idea and attempts arose from the side of the town at creating a "Roma administration" which would broker the transfer of information and cooperation in the performance of activities of the town in the settlement. This intention has thus far not succeeded, however, because the settlement

does not have any natural leaders and the elected Citizens Council of Hlboké was more interested in a more opportunistic position (an attempt at gaining an advantage for one's own family). At present Liptovský Mikuláš has organised an advisory body – The Citizens Council of Hlboké.

Today an inseparable component of Hlboké is the “Nový svet” (“New World”) community centre. This is a building which has on the ground floor a Community Centre with social spaces, one two-room flat (where the building administrator lives), a part for the homeless (a shelter), a station of hygienic services and a laundry room for citizens in material or social need. Upstairs there are eight flats (two studio flats, four one-room and two two-room flats). This building was built in 2006 – 2007 from resources of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic and the Social Development Fund (the of Development of Local Infrastructure programme) as a socialization centre. The town financed the construction of the flats through the State Fund for Housing Development.

In the period of 2006 - 2007 programmes for children and youth was provided at the time by the Roma civic association KAMAS – Chceme (KAMAS – We Want). The activities were carried out in the spaces of the primary school. After the launching of the community centre, assistants from the civic association worked with children in the form of activation work directly in its own spaces. Since 2006 the programme of field social work supported by the Social Development Fund and the town of Liptovský Mikuláš has continually run in Hlboké, Okoličné, Palúdzka, at 1. mája Street and at Priemyselná Street. Field social work and the operation of the community centre is at present provided by seven workers. The community centre in Hlboké is a cultural-educational and sports centre for children and youth as well as adults. Space which is located directly in the settlement is being sought for the provision of help and use during free time. Given its capacity (spatial and human), it is unable to meet the demand after services and programmes and that's why the town is considering its expansion.

The community centre has a precisely defined work capacity and structure and operated all-day. In addition to the basic social consultancy for resident of Hlboké it is focused on work with children in the age category 3 - 6 years (daily from Monday to Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.). The average daily attendance is 15 children. Activities are focused on the development of children on the mental, physical and social sides. Workers at the community centre try as best possible to prepare them for mandatory school attendance, since the children now do not attend nursery school. According to employees of the community centre the most common problem is that “children don't know the Romani language, or the Slovak

language, or they know only one of the languages, and don't have good vocabularies, reasoning, skills". A condition is that the children bring their own morning snack to the community centre. The children have exercises and educational activities – basic maths, creative arts, creative technology, development of gentle motor skills, walks, experience education – in other words, they are prepared for being enrolled in primary school. Interest in this form of preschool preparation is great in the community, despite the fact that there are a number of preschool facilities in the community. The fact is, however, that nursery schools in the town are full to capacity.

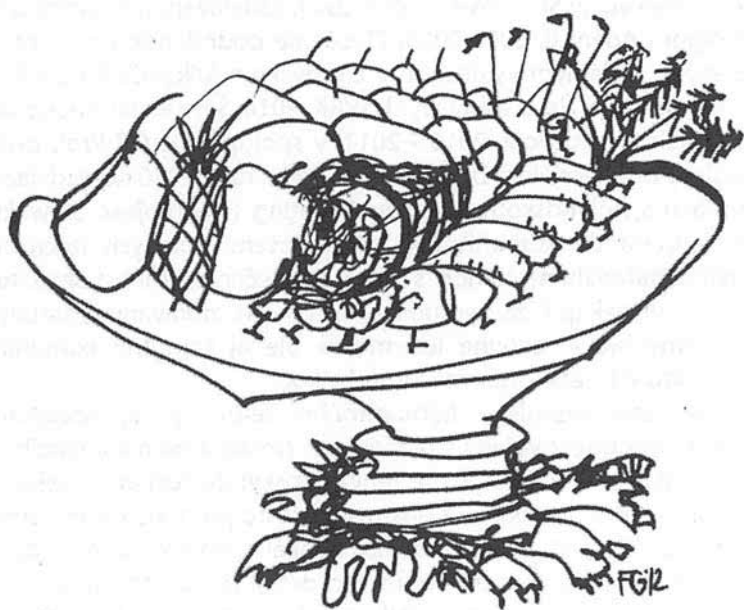
From 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. community centre workers provide administration (in addition to this period they are obviously devoted to clients during the course of the entire day). In the afternoon hours (from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.) they are devoted to school-age children of 7-13 years old. They focus on preparation for school and the handling of homework. Leisure time activities then follow (social games, creative activities, sports and competitions). On average about 30 children visit the community centre daily. As the workers of the community centre confirmed to us, the "feedback from the primary schools for these activities is very good; the children have fewer days with no homework done and are better prepared". The preparation of children for school is demanding for the workers, because the children go to different schools and have different homework assignments. In addition, they regularly communicate with the individual schools in the scope of which they ensure common assistance with the solving of children's problems in school and with parents in the community.

One interesting and much sought-after activity is the "Youth Club". It is intended particularly for girls and boys aged 12 to 15 years. The club meets every Friday from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. On average some 10 - 15 young people attend the meetings. Thematically the meetings are focused on individual development, knowledge about marriage and parenthood, the creation of opinions, improving skills (work with a PC), communication and improving relations with peers, parents and the majority. Young adults (17 – 35 years) also use the community centre, most often for playing musical instruments, playing games, and in the summer using the sports fields. Activities for adults are focused in particular on education and lectures (health, financial management at home), working with a PC, requalification courses (caring for public green spaces, sawyering courses, and others).

In addition to these events, cultural-social and sporting events are regularly held in the community centre, meetings focused on gaining new skills (Mikuláš summer house, sports days, International Children's Day,

trips into the surrounding areas, cooking and baking and others), work teams in the area around the community centre and others. Children are included in creative competitions and events organised in the town and surroundings; the community centre prepares activities also with other subjects working in the town (School nuns from St. Francis in Okoličné, etc.). Several current activities in the community centre originated and continue thanks to the carrying out of projects and grants (the Community Centre Club – Office of the Slovak Government - USVRK, 2008-2009; Education for Equality, MŠ SR, programme Adam II, 2008-2009; Improving Conditions for Citizens Threatened by Social Exclusion in Liptovský Mikuláš, MPSVaR SR, 2009; Mama's Day, Office of the Slovak Government - USVRK, 2010; A Chance to Have a Future, Fund for Social Development, 2010 – 2011, in cooperation with the civic association Against the Current from the Bratislava programme Nota bene from 2010, etc.). In 2010 the community centre joined cooperation with the Dutch association Stichting Hulpproject Slowakije, which gifted to the community centre 8 tabletop computers, many materials on activities with children and clothing, which resident of the settlement could purchase for a symbolic price. It is not only the town that is active with the receiving of grant resources, but the community centre itself, which is a component of its organization.

A component of the community centre complex is a homeless shelter and centre for personal hygiene. The shelter has 12 beds (eight for men and four for women) and offers beds in the months of November–April for people without a roof over their heads. The town didn't have any more suitable spaces for this purpose and the residents of Hlboké had from the beginning a fear of contact with the homeless (fear for their children, etc.), who used the shelter most often. The fear, however, fell away and the approach of the residents changed. Residents often try to help the homeless, and cases have been recorded when the "homeless" remained permanently to live in some Roma household. The town each year employs three night guards in the shelter for a period of 6 months (two of them are members of the MRK). The centre for personal hygiene was used in 2011 on average 6 times per week and the laundry room 37 times per week.



The negative media image doesn't mean that nothing should be done: An example from Ostrovany

At first glance it can seem that Ostrovany doesn't at all belong in this publication. It is one of those communities which have been in recent years portrayed in the media as literally anti-Roma. The media "brought fame" to Ostrovany in regard to the wall. The situation in the village is, however, significantly different and does not fully agree with the media image. For this reason we decided that we will include Ostrovany in this publication as an example of how a community can, despite the very negative image in the media, carry out a great many positive activities on behalf of the Roma community which could be more than good inspiration for other local administrations.

The village of Ostrovany lies in the basin of the River Torysa and administratively belongs to the Sabinov District (Prešov Region). Geographically and demographically it is a medium-sized village, covering an area of 585 hectares. The first written record of the village is from the year 1248. Currently, the population is 1,860 residents, 1,279 of whom are Roma, which represents 68.76% of the total number. The mayor of the village is Ing. Cyril Revák, who has been in this function since 1989 and who is thus one of the longest serving mayor not only in the region but probably in all of Slovakia.

In regard to infrastructure, the village is connected to all utility networks and also has its own wastewater treatment plant. Aside from the village office, there is in the village a grocery store, a pub, a nursery school, a community centre and an agricultural cooperative. There is also a special primary school here which is attended exclusively by children from the local Roma community. In view of the proximity of the larger village (in the past the so-called central), such as Šarišské Michaľany (about 2.5 km away), the district town of Sabinov (about 6 km away), the regional capital of Prešov (about 15 km away), the entrepreneurial sphere in the village is not strongly developed (including shops) and there is no primary school here. All of the children attend primary school in Šarišské Michaľany, Medzany or Sabinov.

The Roma community in Ostrovany is concentrated completed at the end of the village. This is a community which has concentrated in one place nearly all of the social layers of the Roma community and nearly all types of housing, from standard family homes in personal ownership, through two-story flats with village rental flats dating from the early 1990s, unapproved (or built without building permission) family houses

up through shacks. Some of the lands in the community are built on legally settled land while another part of the lands remains unsettled.

Given the high representation of Roma in the village, the village belongs to the category in which the percentage of unemployed is high. Officially, the number of recorded unemployed (or recorded applicants for employment) for the entire village is at nearly 500. An exact record of the number of unemployed Roma is logically not listed; however, the community is nearly completely unemployed, thus it is necessary to remark that the number of recorded applicants for employment doesn't decrease much year-on-year. Among the applicants for employment (UoZ) those with a completed primary or incomplete primary education and the long-term unemployed, who are registered as such for more than 48 months are predominant. An independent observer can get a certain image according to Table no. 1, where we list the number of recorded applicants for employment for the relative calendar year, the number of them who are women, the number with an unfinished education or with finished primary education and the number of UoZ, who have been recorded as such for more than 48 months, i.e. the long-term unemployed.

Table no. 1

Year	Number of UoZ	From this women	With incom. prim. educ.	With prim. educ.	On record for more than 48 months
2011	496	212	170	248	339
2010	497	220	166	251	305
2009	465	198	154	247	239
2008	404	185	145	204	226
2007	397	182	154	201	220
2006	399	174	148	201	235
2005	397	173	151	183	233
2004	375	166	148	163	236
2003	369	151	144	143	203
2002	355	142	140	146	84

The community has a very low education level. Most of the community has only an uncompleted primary education. Only one Roma from the community has a completed university education and one at

present is studying at university. A similar situation also exists in regard to a secondary school education. Only one from the community has a completed secondary education with a school-leaving certificate and a vocational certificate, i.e. 25 Roma have a secondary school education without a school-leaving certificate. At present eight students are at a secondary school without a school-leaving certificate (vocational school). This is only one of the many reasons for the already mentioned high level of unemployment.

Therefore many activities of the village office are orientated on increasing the educational level of the Roma. The village creates a good many activities explicitly focused on work with the Roma community. The field social work programme has been ongoing for a long period. At present two field social workers and two assistants of field social workers are working in the village. In addition, a community centre, which from the beginning has been led by Marián Trišč, has been functioning in the village since 2008. He speaks with pride about the community centre:

"At present the community centre is working on the project 'Bridging communities in Central and East Slovakia', which began in 2009. In this project we are focussing on preschool education for children up to the age of five years old. The children learn to recognise colours, draw, count, basic hygiene and the like. These things are essential for successfully managing of the primary school. Some children from the community are lacking these skills and knowledge and therefore we decided for this direction. And the results are evident. The children have learned to orientate around the home, recognise basic colours, fruits and vegetables and the like. They learned the parts of the human body, what a family is and who is in one, geometric shapes. They learned how to hold a pencil or colours and to draw prepared pictures.

The community centre is also orientated on the education of adults, for whom we prepare different activities aimed at legal advice, sewing courses for women, which has had a great response in the community. What's interesting is that this course, which was to originally be for women, is also attended by a number of men, which was a pleasant surprise for us. In the end, tailoring in the past was mainly men's work and in many countries it still is today."

How is the approach toward the Roma characterised was clarified by village mayor, Ing. Revák:

"I've been mayor here since 1989. I primarily thought that this will be only a short job, but in some respect this work, or more like this grind, stuck to me. Although I don't come from Ostrovany (I was born in neighbouring Šarišské Michaľany), I have lived here many years and so I think I also know very well the local Roma community.

And despite what has been written about our village, I'm convinced

that in general we can say that the co-habitation of the Roma and non-Roma is more good than bad. Certainly, there are problems, but these in principle originate only in the case of some individuals, I would say "known firms", about which we all know. I can't say that the Roma in the village were raised significantly inadaptably, that there would be theft to a giant measure, but likewise I can't say that this co-habitation is ideal either.

I'm convinced that one principle moment has had an impact on the overall co-habitation. Originally in Ostrovany there wasn't any Roma community. This is the village I came to in the 1950s, when construction of the Imuna enterprise began in Šarišské Michaľany, namely on the site where one of the Roma settlements was located. This had to give way to the new construction and so by a decision of the regime then in power there was the relocation to Ostrovany. For the village this was, to a certain measure, something new, and I think that the local non-Roma residents have still not learned in some ways to live with this. Many still perceive this as a certain 'outrage' or 'injustice'".

From the beginning of my time as the mayor I have tried to approach all residents of the village and this means to the Roma, too, in the same way. The Roma in the village in principle do not have any advantages or disadvantages. We try to learn to live without a support package, to speak figuratively. I'm convinced that this is the only way to function in this society. In my opinion, which many people certainly won't agree with, the Roma have the same rights and duties and an equal starting line – only they must themselves begin to "run".

Unfortunately, since the 1990s the social system has done a disservice in this regard, which is not that it's extremely generous, but that it is extremely non-motivational".

Certainly it's possible to genuinely polemize about many things, but to approach everyone in the 'same way' is not principally a bad approach. And how does the village express this in real practice? Perhaps the most interesting aspect is in the field of housing, in which the village takes two approaches which are more than inspirational – in our opinion they are commendable.

First of all, this is the legal ownership settlement and legalization of so-called black buildings.

The village decided that it will help the local Roma community legalise their buildings. For this, however, it is essential first of all to settle the legal ownership issues on which the buildings stand. They began there were this was from an administrative viewpoint the most clear. Part of the lands on which today stands the settlement belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. This, according to its own internal regulations, cannot sell land but

it can exchange it. Therefore, the village decided, upon agreement with the church, and exchanged land beneath the settlement for others which were in ownership of the village. These lands were then subsequently offered for sale to the Roma for the price listed in the expert assessment, increased by the administrative costs, which the village incurred. The result is a price which is approximately half as low as the original lands in other locations in the village. And if this at first glance seemed that this is a disadvantageous situation for the village and the Roma won't have interest in the land, the opposite is true. The interest in this solution is greater than the possibilities of the village. The village mayor added:

"With the handling of village property even in principle it's not possible to proceed otherwise. It is not possible to gift village property to someone or to go under the expert assessment, because this would be a breach of the law on village establishment. But on the other hand, this approach leads to the fact that those who buy these lands and subsequently legalise the buildings on them, will care for them a great deal better and will value them significantly more. The motivation of obtaining a grant for housing, for which they don't otherwise have a claim, is certainly possible in some people, but again this is not so simple.

After buying the land, the entire process of legalising buildings can then take place. If a building is involved which fulfils at least the basic criteria of the building law and the relevant experts (designer, static, fire prevention services, etc.) issue a positive position for this building, I don't see a reason why such a building could not be subsequently legalised. All those interested, however, have to pass the entire "calvary", just as any other building in the village. We help them with advice, we find the relevant experts with whom we agree on a suitable price (suitable I think for clients, i.e. for the Roma), and we check to make sure the legal conditions and the like are met. Obviously, that in the case of a shack or other different non-standard buildings legalisation isn't possible.

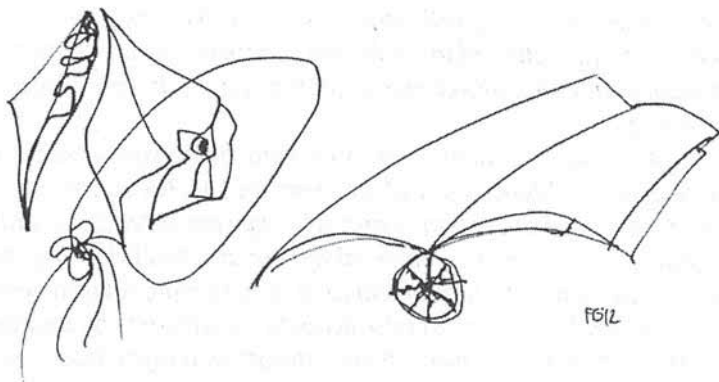
I often get the question about why don't I just simply demolish these illegal buildings. The answer is simple in principle. This doesn't solve anything. These people aren't going anywhere; they'll remain in the village and only increase the problem and worsen the situation in the community and in the village. Our intention is not to "pressure" the Roma from the village. In addition to the fact that this is against the law and unreal, where would they go? Only to another location or another village and this would mean that I've shifted the problem on the shoulders of another mayor and onto other people. And that simply isn't done. It is not right for the Roma, and it's not right for other people and it's not moral at all.

It's in our interest to improve the situation directly in our settlement, and I have to say that step by step we're gradually succeeding".

Aside from this, however, the village also joined a savings and loan programme, which is in a number of villages in Slovakia organised by the civic association ETP Slovakia. Similarly as in other localities, those interested in this activity must pass through training, in the scope of which they obtain new awareness from the field of family financial management and subsequently a savings plan is worked up for them and a plan for using the saved financial sums. This in principle can only be used for improving housing, and after fulfilling all of the conditions it is increased by an equal sum. Along with this it is possible to also obtain a suitable loan for an exactly determined and defined purpose.

The situation in Ostrovany has certain uniqueness in that not only Roma but also socially weaker non-Roma involve in this programme. The approximate ratio of Roma to non-Roma in the village is also preserved in the case of this savings and loan programme, i.e. perhaps 70% of clients are Roma and 30% are non-Roma.

"Exactly this approach has been successful in the village. I think that this is one of the few possibilities for how to mutually connect these two communities and bring them closer to one another. And I have to say that slowly this is also working. Perhaps for a different village this would be a negligible improvement, but in the context of our village, this is great progress, for which we are grateful".



Devising of non-standard approaches – the village of Žalobín

The rather small village of Žalobín is located in the Vranov nad Topľou District, in the Prešov Region, not far from the Domaša recreational area. Even though a small village with a relatively good-sized Roma community is involved, we think that the approach of the local administration is on many levels inspirational. As in other cases, in Žalobín this depends on the basic assumption, which is the willingness of people and local administration to solve problems that arise. Here they rely, however, mainly on their own resources (even though the possibilities for obtaining resources from grants or donation schemes is in no way ignored), coming up with non-standard approaches, an equal approach to all residents of the village and the like. This particular approach has shown to be as the most effective and is expressed in many specific activities which are still today unique in their method, even though they should be completely normal. Only as an example here at the start do I mention that the construction of the local village water main didn't begin at "main street" as is common in nearly every community, but it began in the local Roma locality, because there the problem with water was the most acute.

Žalobín has 803 residents, 302 of whom are Roma. In recent years the number of Roma residents in the village has gone up, probably also because the village has created good conditions for living there. What is interesting, however, is that this village doesn't perceive this as a negative, but as a normal, natural process, by which the total number of residents of the village is increased.

The former mayor of Žalobín, Mária Fečkovičová, was one of the main organisers of activities not only in the local Roma community but also in the entire village. She spoke about her own approach:

"I worked in the position of village mayor for 16 years; that is, for four election terms. When I started to the function in 1994 my road immediately led to the Roma settlement. A lot was lacking there. Infrastructure, housing, hygiene and mainly a change of thinking was needed. I found out that in the settlement they have only one well and also one with non-quality "red" water. Since water is the alpha and omega of living, we immediately began to construct a village water main. Two years later they had water in the settlement as the first in the village, since this was such an acute problem. We built a reservoir which now serves four communities, so that in the end we helped them significantly, too. Three of them have a significant Roma community.

The entire village had water built in stages later, since the non-Roma

residents had their own wells or private water lines. Although water sources here were not always quality ones (they contained particular nitrates), the problem was then not so acute. In other years the settlement was along with the village connected to gas, as well. Like anywhere else, connecting gas in the settlement doesn't mean that all of the houses are automatically hooked up. Some households are connected to gas for the purpose of heating; others use it only for cooking.

Since in the village and in the settlement were often power outages, the transformer was strengthened and later a new switching station was built. In recent years we built sewerage in the village and a wastewater treatment plant, the result of which is the present state, when all Roma households are connected to the village water main and public sewerage. They pay all fees nearly without problems through SIPO, so that we have only minimum non-payment."

In other years in the community a funeral home was built which everyone uses, including Roma from the settlement. And such activities help raise their standard of living.

In the year 2002 seven rental flats of lower standard were built in the village, namely three duplexes and one free-standing home. The houses are interesting in that each received the village property by the house so that it could be cared for and developed, which the local Roma actively do. In addition, they developed different educational activities focused on informal instruction. The "gardens" project was quite interesting, in the scope of which Roma residents created (and still create) near their homes a nice garden or interesting garden architecture. Mrs. Fečkovičová adds in regard to these activities:

"Each year the village announced a competition for the most beautiful garden, environment, balconies, the prettiest yard and surroundings. The Roma families surprised us with everything they managed to create. From the start there were just a few, and then later everyone got involved. The competition was village-wide and surprisingly Roma families won. Here it is clear to see how important motivation is, public evaluation that is moral appreciation. The prizes were only symbolic, but the joy of winning was great. They were assessed at a public celebration, on the village broadcast, and their names were in the village newsletter, in the regional newspaper. They were also praised for activation works. And we were pleasantly surprised in everything they were able to do, what they thought, how they were able to get fired up. Their gardens are very richly decorated, for some perhaps a bit kitschy, but in no case is there any disorder in them. We see their plaster storks, a ceramic dog, polystyrene toadstools, wooden figures and the like. Each garden is different, but you can say of each one that it "has a soul". One is a flower

garden, another has animals, a third is on a fairy tale theme with elves, but there are also modern gardens with white stones, colourful stones, grass. We're happy that they continue to do this. The decorated gardens are by the private (rental) homes, but it's worse near the block of flats, where eight families live. Here there are enough problems relatively speaking, since it's not possible to maintain the common space. And here we tried the garden idea, but I have to say that the results were weaker. The Roma worked only "by compulsion" and to a small effect. I think that living in blocks of flats is for Roma citizens the least suitable. Living in rented houses which can be built also as a line of buildings, is far more interesting".

Also interesting was the competition under the name "Golden hands of the countryside". The competition, like the others, ran the entire year and the results were evaluated at a large village celebration or at a Mother's Day celebration. In this competition the residents of the village had the opportunity to make something nice mainly in their yards. The results in the Roma settlement were exceptionally interesting as well as delightfully surprising. The Roma in their yards built above all summer houses, roofs, different decorative statues, paths from stone, garden decorations from stone and the like. Even the non-Roma masters were surprised, e.g. by the terrace wall of stone, the green bench over a stream, women with embroidery and crochet works, embroidered coats-of-arms and the like.

The village office also carried out for Roma women the project "Carpet weaving". Why exactly this project? The former mayor explains:

"In many people the feeling of happiness is not connected with material wealth, but, for example, with the feeling of freedom, with the time when life was simpler. I remember that back then our mamas were weavers. And looms have always fascinated me. And then they were forgotten. The time came to dust them off. Perhaps such a regression or images of happiness help us change aspects of our lives, to look differently on everything we are chasing after. Indeed, peaceful, quite moments with handiwork are as equally good as a nap.

And our looms, but also crafts I mention genuinely pleased and inspired us for many years. With weaving we tried to preserve an old folk tradition and crafts typical for our region, but also to lead Roma women toward work, toward a systematic activity. Many Roma women alternated and learned to weave in our weaving workshop, and in the end one of them even began to weave carpets at home. That's why this Roma woman was named 'Woman of the Year' in our village".

There are a lot of different possibilities and opportunities to motivate, encourage or acknowledge the good results of Roma youth,

adults and children, too. The situation is different in each village but for the most part it's the same everywhere. Roma citizens everywhere also want to be successful, praised, acknowledged, although only for small things. The principle of progress also applies here. To begin with small successes and not to be discouraged. All of these successes are written about in the book "The Environment and Folk Traditions in Žalobín" and in the brochure "Žalobín and Crafts". In both publications the good results of local Roma were accentuated with rich photo documentation.

The above mentioned activities and care for the environment of the Roma was also awarded by the commission for the Slovak-wide "Village of the Year 2005" competition, when Žalobín became the only village in Slovakia to obtain the exceptional "Award for a unique and exemplary approach and results to solving the problems of co-habitation with the Roma community".

In the year 2008 another project was carried out: "Courses of traditional crafts for the unemployed". They obtained resources for the project from the European Social Fund. Why did they decide to do such a project? Žalobín is devoted to traditions and the Roma problem long-term with good results as can be seen in the above-mentioned activities. The local Roma community has a very difficult time looking for work, since the educational structure of the residents of the Roma settlement is like other settlements – most people have only a primary education and no vocational certificate or school-leaving certificate, with a minimal amount of practice. The primary goal of the project was integration and re-integration of long-term unemployed women and men from the Roma minority on the labour market through the acquiring of skills in traditional crafts.

The offer of activities in full measure respected the needs of the unemployed. Obtaining skills provided them with competitiveness on the labour market. At the same time it eased their return to the labour market and their access to education, which a major part of them also took advantage of. Had there not been a financial crisis and the loss of jobs in the region, the results would be excellent. Overall 64 participants were trained, most of them women.

In addition to this, other courses focused on work skills, social skills, the integration of women and the like were also held in the village. Aside from the mentioned courses on weaving carpets, there were courses on crocheting and knitting, sewing embroidered dolls and weaving baskets from wicker and the like. Even when this at first glance doesn't seem so, the courses had a huge effect on some levels. First of all there are the skills which the local Roma women obtained, but this was also a place where

they could meet, not only each other, but mainly with the majority, and interesting interactions occurred, contacts and friendships were made, leading to the exchange of information, toward the demolishing of stereotypes and mistakes and the like. The lecturers were usually women from the village or the surroundings (e.g. the lecturer with the crocheting courses was a holder of the title “Golden Hands of the Countryside”, a woman with a secondary school vocational certificate, then a 71-year old Žalobín native).

The largest in this direction was the course on weaving carpets aimed mainly at Roma women. Since the village already had certain experiences in this project (smaller one), it was also able to expand the opportunity for instruction to women from the neighbouring villages (Ondavské Matiašovce and Jasenovce), which entered into this project as partners. There were bought three hand-made looms, in theory the history of the village and the region (by which Roma and non-Roma residents earned a living) was taken through as well as old crafts (workers from the Upper Zemplín Museum in Hanušovce helped). An important part was teaching about the materials, the tuning of colours, shading, colour selection, in order to fit in with furniture, colour of the walls, etc. For practical learning experts were found directly in the field. Older women and men from Ruská Poruba and Jasenovce were among them.

A large part of the project was made up of practical teaching that is the weaving itself. Young women also got involved, who from the beginning had lots of excuses, which they could have a lot of fun with (of the type – *my hand hurts, I have eczema, I have an allergy, my ribs hurt, or Mrs. Mayor these fibres are going to send me to the psychiatrist*), but in the end they had to weave – they didn’t have the courage not to weave, or they were afraid they wouldn’t be able to. The enjoyment from weaving, however, in the end was significantly greater than the unwillingness to begin. Their photographs from weaving are in a book “Courses on traditional crafts for the unemployed”, which was issued at the end of the courses. The village later used the results of their work as prizes when handing out awards in different competitions, as souvenirs from the village, with collective visits, as gifts for pensioners, for the decoration of some school spaces and the village office and the like.

For men the village organised primarily a course on basket-weaving, which in the past had a very important tradition not only in the Roma community but in the village as a whole. Unfortunately, at present this craft is only sporadically practiced by only a few Roma families. As with previous courses, this was also done for a target group, namely 16 men, most of them Roma. Like other courses, motivational training and teaching

about materials also took place in this course. The lecturer taught the group about all processes associated with boiling the willow twigs, weaving the inside of the baskets from twigs, the possibilities of using plywood and the basic techniques of basket-making. He taught them to weave baskets and decorative objects of different shapes and sizes.

This course was perceived in the village as a beautiful return to the folk habits, crafts and traditions of the village and its surroundings. The result of the course was the fact that one local Roma family undertook this craft and continued making mainly baskets, brooms and on request decorative objects. The course participants took part in the "Crafts workshop" event in Turňa nad Bodvou and in summer courses for children in Malý Kamenec.

The project contributed to reviving the crafting capabilities and skills of the Roma and mainly helped unemployed Roma women and men to increase their trust in their own strength and abilities. The goal of the course was to increase employment in the target group, which it managed to do and many eventually found work. Unfortunately, due to the financial crisis, most of them again lost their jobs, since job opportunities dropped in the region and there is still fewer of them. Even though everything didn't work out, the village perceived these activities very positively – the Roma community is by far more integrated into the village than before. Mainly their way of thinking changed. This is reflected also in the fact that a lot more pupils are studying in secondary (vocational) schools. Obviously, not everything has been achieved; there are still problems which need to be solved. But it is evident that the community has taken one worthwhile step forward.

The results were also valued by the organisation the Provincial Parliament in Slovakia, which advocates increasing awareness of the quality of life in the countryside and support village activities while working for its development. On 14 October 2011 it announced the results of a competition, Village Woman of the Year - Leader of the Year 2011. A total of 33 women from all of Slovakia who devoted their free-time activities in different fields of public life in their own community were nominated in 5 categories. Among the victors was former mayor of Žalobín, Mária Fečkovičová, who obtained the prize for a woman – politician of the year working in community politics. The commission appreciated that during her work as mayor she helped with the integration of the Roma community in Žalobín and a permanent change in their lifestyle. During these events the then-village mayor was asked by a journalist: "What do you think about the problem of the Roma and how would you get at least partially good results in Roma communities?" We think that her response doesn't need

any special commentary:

“Infrastructure is necessary, solving the housing problem. To work and to educate. And activation work is a great motivation and help. We know that mayors also have many other duties, not only solving the problems of Roma settlements, but when they want to achieve results, this is daily difficult and uncompromising work. Sisyphean work. Push the boulder up the hill and it'll fall back down again. Sometimes motivation is also demanding. This requires a great deal of energy and the results don't come immediately. But even though something doesn't succeed the first time, it's necessary to muster the courage and start again and not look at everything immediately with worry. This is a long and complicated road, but even the longest journey starts with the first step. It is necessary to proceed together. A mayor can only do a little alone; he or she must have a team of people around, orbiting satellites, which help. It's good to lean on social organizations; it's important that they be involved on committees. The awarding of good results at public celebrations helps a lot, so that they, they were “vain” about what they did. This will be effective when the hall is full of Roma and non-Roma citizens. This is how we create models. Others will also want to show what they can do. To make good results public and put examples in newspapers and publications. It's necessary to request more from village councillors, to point things out, check them, cooperate with Roma citizens. Many Roma citizens are also village councillors most of whom are used to helping. A community social worker who connects them to work is important, someone who guides Roma citizens and who helps them a lot.”

In addition to these popular activities is the less well known, but very effective method, of joining residents mainly to beautifying and developing the environment, which was done in Žalobín in association with the so-called small grant programme. In principle this involves a standard grant model, known from many other grant and donation schemes, except that this is done on a small scale in a specific village. In the case of larger towns, this model is known in the form of community associations, but in the case of a village it is not used at all. In nearly all similar cases, the effect from resources thus spent is many times greater than if this activity were to be done directly through the village. Citizens can subsequently apply for a financial grant for a specific activity and do so by submitting a standard grant request. Aside from the financial effect, this model is a very suitable instrument for activation of citizens for public things, increasing their self-confidence and last but not least also beautifying the village and village property.

Starting with such a programme must begin with budget planning for the following year, which must be ratified by the village council. The first time it is appropriate when the village council agrees with a certain volume

of financing (obviously within the means of the village). At the same time this doesn't have to be a great part. According to the experience in Žalobín, it's enough to start with a sum of approximately EUR 1,000 – 2,000. For citizens of the village a small financial stimulus is very interesting, since in the region is high unemployment and this is more so in Roma settlements.

Aside from this the moral dimension is also a motivation here, namely in the context of evaluation of a project for public assemblies, celebrations, meetings of social organisations and the like. It is very important to document results through photographs and videos, which can be placed on the village Web page, evaluated by the village council, published in print, in the village newspaper, on the radio, on the local notice board, etc. In principle the well-known rule also applies here: that when you do something and nothing is known about it, then it's as if you didn't do it at all.

The focussing of projects can be different and should be derived from the needs of the village. If the demand for financing will be much greater than is possible for the village, it is also advisable to give others a chance in the following year, too – this is only proof that with the notice of this grant help the village office exactly "hits" the needs of the village.

An application for a grant or a project should be very simple, because in the opposite case people (applicants) will be deterred from work and will not be interested. The simpler application model worked in Žalobín; it contained – 1. Subject of the project - a simple description, what the applicant wants to do and where; 2. The aim of the project; 3. Materials - from what will it be made (this should be typical for the given village); 4. A brief procedure for realisation, including a time schedule which it is essential to observe; 5. Financial burden – a simple budget which cannot be, after ratification in the village council, additionally increased from village resources; 6. The place of staffing, carrying out, a guarantee period; 7. Person responsible for the project.

The entire grant process must be absolutely transparent and village councillors should take part in the selection and ratification process in full measure. Work largely can be done in the form of work agreements which are signed after approval of the project by the selection committee. Only residents of a village can get involved in such a grant programme or those who have temporary residence in the village and have an interest in public affairs in the village; in such a case residents should know the applicant well. Projects with a high degree of sustainability have a great weight with the selection of applicants. And a practical note at the end – it is appropriate to pay for work up through the end of the project and after the inspection which is made by the relevant commission of the village

office in cooperation with the selection committee.

In Žalobín, thanks to these small grants, they managed to carry out the following activities which may serve for other villages as well: a park bench, exterior planters, interior flower pots, a bench at the cemetery and the funeral home, decorative wooden statues in the park and other public spaces, souvenirs for the village (e.g. wicker baskets which can be used with collective visits, needlework - the village coat-of-arms, woven carpets and the like), decorative objects (wooden figures, primary school decorations), decorative exterior toys (a wooden train in the local park, swings, etc.), the cleaning of dumping sites, repairing the terrain and planting trees and the like.

When at the conclusion we asked Mrs. Fečková for a method of achieving positive results in the Roma community, she answered us unambiguously:

"First it is essential to build infrastructure (water mains, gas lines, sewerage, wastewater treatment, rental flats, etc.). In this way the Roma see that we have a serious interest in their problems and improving their lives. To take an interest every day about what's new in the settlement. To make contact every day upon taking office. Usually the village mayor meets them in the morning, when they are waiting for activation jobs. And it doesn't have to only be the mayor, but all employees of the village office. To ask about what's new in the settlement, whether something is going on, be it the threat of floods or a fight that took place, who's ill and the like. Seemingly banal, but in fact very important things. To address them by name (they don't get angry even with their nicknames, when we joke around with them), make friends with them. Visit their families, praise them, enjoy being with them. Mention, for example, at activation jobs a visit and praise them in front of the others. Models are important in the settlement. One family begins, for example, with garden architecture, then another decorates, they want to be like them. This is similar with clothing, musical expression, etc.

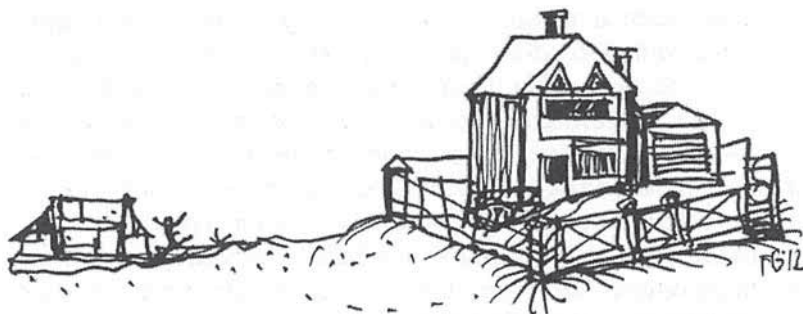
Giving praise, whether on the village notice board (names, photographs of gardens, houses, pavements, craft products and the like), at public celebrations (who created the most beautiful environment, gardens, who got the Golden Nightingale in singing, who dances best) or in the news has served us very well. Competitions are very suitable activities – each year organise a competition ("O The most beautiful garden", Golden hands of the countryside (who creates something nice, e.g. a gazebo in the yard, a still life, etc.), Woman of the Year (who did something, started a business, etc.). The competitions can vary according to the character of the village, or according to what we want to improve. All competitions must be evaluated publicly in order that people be pleased, be proud of what they've done. For example, we had success at the

Mother's Day celebration, at a meeting of pensioners, a Month of Respect for the Elderly and the like, when the hall is full of citizens together, both Roma and non-Roma. The prizes can be symbolic but the praise should be public. Everyone from the settlement wants an award and in development or some other activities they will anticipate. Publish photographs of activities on the Web page and obviously don't forget photographs of the winners.

Brigade work in Roma settlements must work maximally under the watch of a TSP or a village councillor. Housing is very important and the construction of rental flats was a success for us. It is very positive when along with these houses they also have the property. They can prepare a garden, plant fruit trees and the like.

With all celebrations get children from school involved as much as possible – all Roma pupils must be involved and this should allow them to step forward – parents change for the better through their children, and vice versa. To the maximum possible measure get all Roma involved in projects, courses, social organisations, committees, to organise social events, the preparation of which involve Roma in the relevant committees and the like. If, however, problems do arise, it is necessary to resolve them consistently – personal interviews (of the type - Why is it only you "function" badly; look at your street, everyone has a nice setting. Are you the worst? And the like), remove deficiencies via village councillors (point out, cooperate, inspect), use the community social worker (to scold, to guide, to help). All of this should be consistent, emphatic and permanent, and at the same time it cannot be offensive, snobbish and undignified. Don't expect, however, that everything will change immediately, as if by waving a magic wand. This will certainly last a long time and it is essential to stride forward with gradual and permanent small steps."

We think that no better commentary could be at the conclusion. If such an approach were used in every community there would be significantly fewer problems with mutual coexistence.



Well-aimed help – lower standard flats and other activities in the town of Hanušovce nad Topľou

If we speak about lower standard flats, a very good example lies in the town of Hanušovce nad Topľou, which in 2002 began construction on such flats (if, obviously, we don't take into consideration activities in this direction back before 1989). But it's not possible to speak only about lower standard flats, because in this small town there have been attempts to approach the Roma in many different fields. This small town has 3,783 residents, approximately 750 of whom are considered to be Roma.

Hanušovce nad Topľou is located in the Vranov nad Topľou District in the Prešov Region, almost exactly halfway between Prešov and Vranov n/Topľou (perhaps 24 km from both towns). Geographically this is the northeastern part of Slovakia in the valley of the River Topľa. Its geographic location is set by the coordinates 49" north latitude and 21° 30' east longitude.

The cadastral territory covers an area of 14.3 km². The lowest elevation is on the bank of the River Topľa near its confluence with Voľanský stream (Lužiny) at 158 metres above sea level. The centre of the village is located at an elevation of 190 metres above sea level and the highest point in the town lands is a location beneath Stavenec in the foothills of the Slanský Mountains at 455 metres above sea level. The land of Hanušovce drains the River Topľa with the feeders Hlibovec, Hrabovec, Hanušovský and Medziansky streams. In terms of climate, the town belongs to a warm, moderately damp area with cold winters. From a geomorphologic point of view the village's territory is part of the Beskydy foothills, a part of which is the Hanušovce hills. The Slanské Mountains, which run to the southwest from the town, here and there marginally touch the town lands.

Even though this is a rather small town of regional significance, the town is equipped with nearly complete civic infrastructure – aside from a town hall (the current mayor is Štefan Straka) there is a nursery school here, a primary school, a special primary school, or as it is officially called today, a Unified School and Primary Arts School. From the cultural and sports activities in the town there is, aside from the culture house, a football ground and a Homeland Museum in a beautiful manor house from the 18th century and a town library. In addition, the Oblík folklore group operates here, as does the Vargovčan football club, a hiking club and the like. Among its infrastructure the town has available all accessible utility networks and similar other civic facilities – different shops, a wide assortment of different services, a cash point machine, petrol station,

a health care centre and the like. A number of business and companies operate here, as do a number of churches. Three of them have churches in the town – Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Greek Catholic churches.

As in other towns and villages the town office in Hanušovce nad Topľou offers its residents a whole line of social services. The home care service in the town is provided by the non-profit organisation Kordant, which is registered in the VÚC (Higher Territorial Unit) and a contract with the town for the provision of this service. At present it employs 4 workers who provide help to 10 patients with the performing of basic living needs.

In the year 2009 a room for seniors was prepared in the town office, where they can meet. In the social field the town actively cooperates churches, the Agency for Home Treatment Care (ADOS), a social services home and the non-profit organisation Ovečka. The town office manages the agenda of the special recipient, pays social benefits and thus part of the debt recorded in the town business for services and town office gradually repays them.

A significant part of the town's activities (and not only in the social field) is made up of activities which are focused on work with the local Roma community.

At present two field social workers and two assistant are working in the town. They work directly in the field, giving priority to the marginalised Roma community living at Slovenská Street – diffused among the majority (blocks of flats), at Kláštorňá Street (social flats), Pod Šibenou – a Roma settlement on the edge of the town (shacks, houses, blocks of flats, low standard flats) and at Železničarska Street – a free-standing block of flats outside the town. Field social work, however, began in the town much earlier, back in 2004. Because this was a social activity and the service fully new not only for the target group (MRK), but also for the applicant, the entire first year the employees devoted themselves to the collection of information, records of individuals and families, making contacts with institutions working in the field of social help and the provision of services. Since the coming into law of Act no. 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services and on changes and amendment to Act no. 455/1991 Coll. on Trade License Holders (the trade license holder's law) as amended, which in a principle way expanded the competence and obligations of local administration, specified social services in the field of basic and special consultancy were transferred to employees working in the field directly with the target group. Because this does not involve a small village with a small Roma community in the scope of which all residents would know each other, knowledge regarding all potential clients was an essential prerequisite for handling the work of a field social worker.

Social-demographic data offers a better picture regarding the community in the town. As Table 1 shows, as of 31 December 2010 there were 3,691 residents in the town, 752 of whom are perceived as Roma. From them 37.63% (283 residents, the average in the town is 23.07%) are children up to the age of 16 years, and 12.36% (93 residents, which correlates approximately with the whole town average of 13.13%) is made up of residents over age 60 years.

Table no. 1 – Composition of residents of the town of Hanušovce nad Topľou

Composition of residents	Number of residents	From this MRK
Permanently living residents	3 783	752
Men/women	1 844/1 939	361/391
Pre-productive age 0-16	873	283
Post-productive age over 60	497	93
Number of those drawing the benefit for material need (DvHN) as of 31 December 2009	480	356

Overall approximately 150 families live in the town, z the majority of which (89 families) live in 71 flats and only a minority (61 families) inhabit 51 houses. A number of shacks or homes in a very poor state are located in the community. Their number is around, but does not exceed 3-4. Like the differentiated housing for the Roma in the town, the infrastructure is also differentiated. In principle it applies that only a few residential spaces have complete infrastructure (electricity, water and gas), but the majority have standard connections to running water and electricity. Only a small number of dwellings have limited access to water or energy. Table no. 2 describes this more exactly.

Table no. 2 – Dwellings fitted with infrastructure

Type of housing	Water, electricity, gas	Water, electricity	Electricity	Water	No water, electricity or gas
House or flat	39	72	9	2	3

Similarly as in other comparable locations, the majority of Roma in this one have completed only a primary education, but two Roma live here who have completed university (for more details, see Table no. 3)

Table no. 3 – Composition of the community by degree of education achieved

Degree of education achieved	Number
University	2
SŠ without school-leaving certificate	78
SŠ with school-leaving certificate	14
Primary school	247
Special primary school	59
Illiterate	8

Unemployment is a very significant problem for the Roma in this town. Up to 205 of them are recorded in the relevant labour office as unemployed and only 26 residents of the community have a full-time job. A certain positive phenomenon is the fact that there are 11 trade license holders in the community; these work mainly in the building trade, assistant construction works, assembly work, processing of plastics and the liquidation of scrap iron. Table no. 4 offers more exact data.

Table no. 4 – Stratification of the community by selected types of activities (employment)

Type of activity	Number
Registered at ÚPSVaR	205
Full-time work	26
Trade license holder	11
Maternity leave	59
Disability pension	11
Old-age pension	40
Caregiver's benefit	10

A commonly accepted stereotype about the multiple-children Roma families is not fully confirmed in the case of Hanušovce nad Topľou. Even though the number of children in Roma families is higher than the Slovak-wide average, multiple-children families with four or more children make up only about one-third of the total number. A more exact stratification of the local Roma community is provided in Table no. 5.

Table no. 5 – Composition of Roma according to the number of children

Types of families by number of children	Number
Childless families	13
Family with 1 child	35
With 2 children	25
With 3 children	27
With 4 children	23
With 5 children	10
With 6 children	6
With 7 children	7
With 8 children	3
With 10 children	1

A very important indicator of mutual coexistence of the majority and the local Roma community is the measure of “instability” of incorporating of individual families among the majority. In this context, in no case does this involve exactly measure data, but subjective numbers, as they are perceived by the field social workers and subsequently a the town office (or the town as it is). An important indicator mainly for social intervention of the priority of field social work is the spatial arrangement of families according to the measure of potential need for social intervention. The figures are show in Tables 6 and 7.

Table no. 6 – Number of families from the Roma community by the measure of integration among the majority (subjective estimate)

Measure of integration	Number
Problem-free integration	50
Integration with smaller problems	72
Integration with larger problems	11
Families with a critical level	25

Table no. 7 – The number of families from the Roma community by individual location according to the measure of potential social intervention – subjective estimate (1st group - problem-free family, 2nd group – self-sufficient, 3rd group – partial help, 4th group – can't solve problems without help)

Name of street	1st group	2nd group	3rd group	4th group
Pod Šibenou	53	208	37	96
Komenského St.	—	—	21	10
Šarišská St.	11	31	—	11
Slovenská St.	57	32	9	28
Kláštorná St.	12	—	—	—
Štúrova St.	7	—	—	—
Kukorelliho St	17	14	—	—
Prešovská St.	—	20	—	—
SNP	—	12	—	—
Budovateľská St.	21	—	—	—
Dukelská St.	7	—	—	—
Železničarska St.	11	30	—	—

Since the year 2009 social workers have been working individually with individuals and families and they help them daily resolve the problems with subsistence. They began to develop individual action plans, analyse a family and its financial rehabilitation. As in other communities, a lack of knowledge and a lack of information have been shown to be key problems of possible social help, along with weak communication skills (writing, reading, filling out an application form, communication with institutions) and a lack of financial resources for paying fees when arranging benefits (postal fees, duty stamps, fees for registered documents, copying of documents) and the like.

Social work in the field is tied to social help, an outcome of which is also a change in life style and the level of living of a family.

In cooperation with schools on the territory, the town managed to improve the children's attendance to primary school and to eliminate the risk of absence and truancy. One very positive example of success was the employing of Roma as an educational advisor at the Unified Primary School, in which the major part of the pupils are children from the local Roma community. In addition to common activities, he initiated a meeting of all interested parties who directly or indirectly work with the local community (the town mayor, social workers, a doctor, a deacon, the

community centre, parents, the director of the social insurance office, the labour office, teachers and others), at which these not only met together for the first time and got to know one another, but an important element was that they talked about their activities, problems, and began to search together for solutions, and agreed on a series of steps and the like.

In the end result it was this activity which was one of the load-bearing elements of a programme named "A Local Strategy for a Complex Approach", which the town of Hanušovce nad Topľou prepared, submitted an application for and succeeded in getting supported. Its main part is, aside from education and employment of members of MRK, and therefore it is essential to include in social work in the community also activities associated with the preparation for employment and the entry onto the labour market for individuals who from the end of their compulsory school attendance have never before worked anywhere. A total of 752 members of an MRK live in the town. Up to 35% of them are in the age group from 16 to 30 years, with whom it is essential to systematically work for their placement on the labour market. This is a group which will build a family and it is essential to change their dependence on state help and social benefits from the state and local administration. The fact that this involves no easy task suggests, among other things, the fact that the impact of the economic and social crisis in the world and in Slovakia has again increased the measure of unemployment in the district to above 20%.

But in the town they are working in this direction. We will, however, write more about this in another place (see the activities of the civic association Svatobor).

And what kind of specific results does field social work have in the town? In the parts of the town where the Roma community live, through regular visits they have achieved that resident take heed of greater order, performing regular autumn and spring cleaning. In cooperation with the town, disinfestations and disinfecting were provided in the surroundings and in buildings, which aside from town resources, was financed also by the European Fund through the Regional Public Health Office. Through the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities they obtained a grant for the building of two wells, also a benefit for the project documentation for flats of lower standard and the like.

In relation to health, in cooperation with the Red Cross, the TSPs secured shampoos for removing lice and likewise other hygienic needs. A series of activities were held directly in the community centre focused, among other things, on this area. Mainly children are led to hygienic habits directly in the centre, where after-school activities are held, like

the children's club, tutoring and the like, and where very good spatial conditions and technical conditions are created.

Social workers cooperate with practicing doctors for adults and paediatricians in regard to immunisation, regular medical preventive examinations and take clients to regular consultations for pregnant women and mothers.

In the field of education, aside from the already mentioned after-school activities, workers motivate the parents of children in regard to starting nursery school. The town of Hanušovce nad Topľou was, among others, connected also to the project "Let's go to school together", which was orientated on this very field. The project offered parents from an adverse social environment to place children into a collection and thus ease the financial burden of attending nursery school through certain advantages which followed – payment of meals and school fees, the provision of trousers, gloves or galoshes. After finishing nursery school and starting first grade at a primary school, each child got a package of school supplies. The project continued even during the attendance of the 1st and 2nd grades of primary school.

The community centre regularly writes applications for the support of many organisations and individuals. Through small grants we ensured the purchase of creative materials, social games and musical instruments. In the spaces of the community centre clients can play table tennis, take part in singing clubs, dance clubs which are associated with the presentation of their talents at cultural events in the town like Mother's Day, the Hanušovce craft fair, Children's Day and other cultural events in the scope of the school year.

Why Hanušovce nad Topľou is included in this publication is, however, due to the flats of lower standard which the village built for the Roma community in 2002. The building of the lower standard flats itself is nothing exceptional, but in Hanušovce there was focus on a very specific target group during their construction.

Like in other towns and villages here also they started from basic strategic materials from the Slovak government for the given area, particularly with the conception of the state housing policy up to year 2005 and with a look at 2010, ratified by Slovak government resolution no. 355 from 2000 and Resolution of the Slovak government no. 137/2000 Coll. on programmes of development of housing and the performing of prescribed provisions of the State Fund for the Development of Housing, including programme a and non-programme support of ŠF RB (or Act no. 503/2001 Coll. on the support for regional development as amended).

The town leaders and village councillors v in cooperation with a

coordination commission in 2002 responded to the situation which arose in the Roma community as one of the largest problems associated with a shortage of flats. From the total number of families, which came under consideration as clients for the provision of flats, the town selected those most active and the least "problematic". This, however, was not a simple process and certain problems had to be taken into consideration:

- acceptance of the community by other residents,
- responsibility of members of the community for caring for their own housing,
- the (non)devastation of a flat and its surroundings,
- the fears of residents of criminality and hygienic conditions,
- the ineffective selection of a renter,
- financial demand for operation of the building (in view of the unfinished deregulation of a renter, the inequality between the authorised owners of a flat and his responsibility with the given legislation),
- living space of the flat of lower standard should not be less than 12 m² for the user and 6 m² for each additional person which lives with the user in the household.

Since the town did not have any suitable available property for construction, after consultation with experts, it decided s that in the location at Pod Šibenou Street in the part which was not lived in due to the wet ground, construction of ten residential blocks began after drainage.

According to the individual legal definitions low-standard flats are intended for socially inadaptable citizens. This involves flats which have minimal amount of space, minimal energy supplies and basic hygienic furnishings usually commonly for several renters. Low-standard flats are flats intended for socially urgent cases which cannot (z for economic reasons on the side of the applicant or from other serious reasons) furnished by the renter of a standard flat. These are flats with a lower than common level of quality for housing– e.g. with smaller living area, with incomplete furnishings or flats of lower category. The standard flats are intended for the furnishing of other cases. A social flat is a flat whose assignment is tied to fulfilling specific conditions defined by the state and the town and by the town of Hanušovce nad Topľou and are intended for target groups of citizens.

In view of the target group the town decided for the second variant – the construction of lower standard flats. Initially a private company carried out the independent construction of the flats. Since the town leadership was unsatisfied with it, the final part of the construction was carried out by the town itself through employees of the Town Business

for Services and recorded applicants, who at this time were taking part in activation work. The town financed a certain portion of the costs also from its own resources.

The residents who were selected to move into these flats had to work off 25% of the price of construction themselves. Ten two-room flats which are built in a row of five one-story flats turned facing each other were handed over. Therefore, they have a common access road and are connected to the local water and electricity mains. The low-standard flats have an area of 40 square metres. Each of them has its own water metre and electric metre, and rent is paid to the town office, because the owner of the flats is the town of Hanušovce nad Topľou. The price for rent is only symbolic, since the flats are built from irreclaimable financial resources. Each flat has a hallway, a kitchen with a vestibule, two small rooms, a WC and bath with a shower cabinet. These were built as so-called “naked flats”, that is low-standard flats where the floors were only of cement, stained walls, no tiles in the bathrooms and no furniture included. The owners must organise and provide these from their own resources.

After the agreement of all of the owners, gas was introduced into the flats, which the renters had to finance themselves, even though due to the high monthly costs this did not prove to be an ideal solution. And for this reason the possibility of heating the flats with solid fuels remained and many residents use them. Several families had a fireplace made, while others heat with stoves. Each family built a terrace at the entrance to the flat, which was aesthetic and served for sitting or for drying laundry. Behind each flat is a woodshed, which is also used for other necessities. In connection with the demand for improving quality of life, it is necessary to resolve the need for maintenance, repairs and renovation of the buildings. The town reinforced the access road with concrete panels from its own resources. In the last phase it is necessary to finish the ditch around the road around the flats, due to the flooring of some flats during storms. A project has already been prepared for carrying out this work and at present the town is trying to obtain financial help (two previous attempts were unsuccessful).

What was the greatest benefit of this solution for the town itself? From the viewpoint of the town, an example of good practice lies in the fact that only 10 families received low-standard flats and they are able to develop and protect their own housing rather than devastate it; in the end they even added on the terraces and introduced gas lines into the dwellings, making them higher-standard flats. The families have for a certain period their housing problems resolved and are a model for other families. There are no non-payers and these families are problem-free in

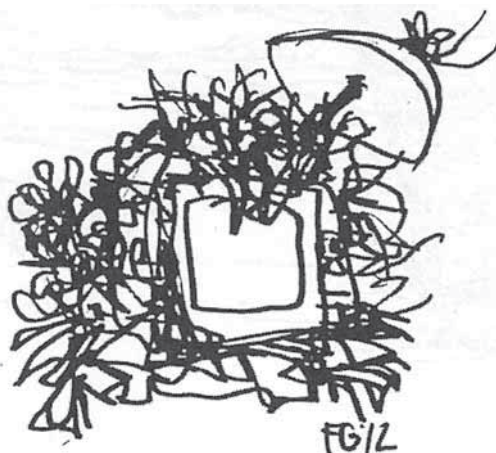
terms of needing potential social help. Thus, the activities of the town can in a large measure orientate on the remaining part of the community for which these are a certain model and motivation.

If the town had from the start taken the path of construction of flats for the most undeveloped part of the community, with high probability it would have led to these flats being in a much greater state of devastation and could have led to the growth of non-payers (the clearing of which would only be possible in principle through the institution of special recipients of social benefits, which would lead to increasing pressure on the administrative and social workers) and the least problematic and most active portion of the community would then be significantly frustrated and demotivated.

Perhaps after a year and after determining that such a chosen path is a good solution, due to the great interest of other families, construction began on an additional 12 low-standard flats, which are designed a bit differently (they have an attic). At present these flats are almost completed and the entire activity is in the phase of handing them over.

The path of constructing "standard" social flats for this target group is not a solution and leads to the problem of non-payment of rent, which in this case is significantly higher than in the case of lower standard flats, because with their low income, often only a benefit in material need, it is not possible.

The ideal goal in this context is to gradually achieve in the structure of a housing fund and creation of the conditions for the construction in Hanušovce nad Topľou such a state that citizens of target groups have the opportunity of obtaining housing commensurate with their financial possibilities.





What they are doing in Nižný Komárnik has already been recognised

If we speak about examples of good activities in villages and towns in Slovakia in relation to the Roma, it is impossible to leave out the village of Nižný Komárnik, which carried out one of the best programmes for construction of lower-standard flats for the Roma community. Like in Sveržov, this not only involved the construction itself but also a complete approach on the part of the village, which was derived from a simple principle – the Roma have been in the village, are here and will remain here and we have to live with them as with any other people.

The Ruthenian village of Nižný Komárnik is a small village lying (figuratively speaking) almost at the end of the world. It is located in the Svidník District near the Slovak-Poland border on road E371. It has only 156 residents, more than 60 of whom are Roma.

This distinctive village has an interesting history to a significant measure. The first written record of the village dates from 1618; at time it belonged to the Makovica estate. Economic development, which took place prior to World War I (in the village at the time was a match factory, a sawmill and a mill) later came to a stop. After World War II the village was almost totally destroyed; however, it was gradually renewed. It was during this period that part of the exhibition of the Museum of the Carpathian-Dukla military operation in Svidník was placed in the village. Unfortunately, in the present age, aside from the village office, a grocery store, a beautiful church (this is the wooden Church of the Protection of the Holy Mother of God, which was built in 1938 on the design of Ukrainian architect Vladimír Sičynský) and a small ski centre, there is nothing more found in the village.

Material limitations, however, have not prevented the village from actively working with the Roma. The moving force behind all of these activities was village mayor Anna Ferkaninová, who for these activities was awarded in 2011 the prize Gypsy Spirit in the main Person of the Year category.

During the preparation of these materials about the village we found in the archives of the periodical *Romano Nevo Ľil* a report of Daniela Obšasníková about this village. We are convinced that this is so well written that perhaps we would have trouble adding to it; therefore with the consent of the author, we here in this place publish it again in its entirety. (The report of Daniela Obšasníková, as well as the photographs of Jozef Ferenc from this village can be found on the Web page <http://2010.rnlweb.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=17174>).

About the lady of the water and crystal clear relations. Like in a fairy tale.

Daniela Obšasníková, Roma New Letters

When I first came some years ago to Nižný Komárnik in the Svidník District, I experienced a positive shock. In place of the mayor, Anna Ferkaninová, who had to leave for somewhere else, a Roma woman came to unlock the building of the village office. The idea that I could experience such a thing in some other village was nice, but – unimaginable. And so far it actually hasn't happened.

The years passed, and many things changed in Nižný Komárnik, but one remained the same. The relations between the Roma and the non-Roma in the village. Their good mutual co-existence. The last time we visited this village beneath Dukla it was some days after the floods which, unfortunately, did not avoid even this village. On Friday the mayor telephoned me and proudly let me know that they had just finished the garden alterations in front of the new lower-standard homes. She invited our editorial staff to visit the village. And so on Sunday we learned about the havoc caused here by the sudden, short and copious cloud burst that had occurred. More than 20 basements were flooded, two water mains, drowned cottage colony, destroyed electricity poles and the coffer dam on the River Lodomírka, the completely overflowing Sivarna stream, which formed a new path beneath the village, the two steel footbridges destroyed, the undermined bridge, about 60 metres of literally undermined local roads. This was the result of the rampaging elements. No wonder that we headed off for the village full of fear and concern for how the water had damaged the new houses for the Roma. "The water left us in peace, because we're good Roma," young Ľuboš Sivák told me in the village, when I asked him about the flood. Years ago, specifically in 1976, a storm which blew through the village took out a number of wooden shacks in the upper part of the village. People still remember its devastation. Therefore, they try in the village to keep "Lady of the water" on her own course. And this worked. As we saw with our own eyes, the housing for the Roma remained untouched. Mrs. Helena Kraková invited us to her home, with her son Maroš and his bride Lenka. I ask the young people if they have a baby yet. The twenty-three year old woman and her husband, two years older, said that it's still too early to talk about a child. They have lived together for three years and would first like to earn some money. They wanted to at least have that and then start a family. It's simply a pity that in the land beneath Dukla there are not any job opportunities. "We've already considered going abroad," they say and then add that they wouldn't hesitate if both could find work somewhere where they could work together. I ask the man of the house, Mr. Demeter Krak, whether in his youth there was such a lack of work as there is now. A man on a much-

deserved retirement says that in the past, under socialism, everyone had to work. He worked; like the majority of the other local residents back then, 16 years in the sawmill in nearby Krajná Poľana. He worked another 5 years at the cooperative. On a tractor. Some more than one year he was employed with regulating of the local streams. Talk turns in the direction of cohabitation. They tell me that the local Roma get along normally with the non-Roma. Good. I try to explain to him that what is normal here in the village is exceptional elsewhere in Slovakia. It is unusual and uncommon to say the least. You only have to watch the television news. "Indeed, when we see on television how different the Roma live and mainly how they behave – we feel ashamed of them," explains Maroš Krak.

The cohabitation of the Roma and non-Roma in this village is so exemplary, so conspicuous and above all so natural that a person wants to say – "If only people would live in such harmony everywhere!" **Mayor Anna Ferkaninová is proud to speak on this subject: "During my 8 years as mayor I have not had to resolve any problems with cohabitation. The opposite, in fact; I can't even imagine life here without our Roma.** A lot of old and lonely people live here. If there were no Roma there would be no would take these elderly folks to the doctor by car, shop for them, carry the shopping home, prepare wood, bring medicine, go to give medicine to the elderly, cut the grass and in winter shovel the snow". To be thorough, it is necessary to say that the mayor comes from this village and lives in it. She went to school with Roma peers and she always considered and considers mutual respect and good cohabitation as obvious. Equally obvious is the regard of the Roma residents for her, that this is their native village, they live and work with her where necessary. The mayor tells us that she has educated Roma here. They have driver's license, sawmill courses, finished vocational school. And their children are clever. Many want to study at university... Later I learn that often the Roma children visit the mayor's office, so that she can check their homework or help them with it if their parents can't. Or just because – because of the books or to consult with her. **"I don't know about elsewhere, but when I buy a newspaper, the daily press or magazines at the village office, I give them to our Roma. They go from family to family and you wouldn't believe how they are returned in such good condition"** says A. Ferkaninová. She adds that the local Roma are not only interested in events in the village, but also in the country. They vote and have their own elected representative – a councillor. "They live an organised and pious life. They attend religious services in the village, live in marriages and not 'wildly' as the Roma live in some places. Families here don't have more than three children..."

I'm curious how it's possible to achieve this state. What path led to such equality, to such a level? The mayor says that this is a puzzle for many people.

But she primarily says that it is necessary to talk to people a lot about what they want to achieve, what kind of life they dream about. And then it is necessary to fix on the things they should change. "My experience with our Roma residents is such that if a person admonishes them good-heartedly, they will not make the same mistake a second time," says A. Ferkaninová, and I'm curious about what kind of magic wand she has used to achieve cleanliness of a kind that other mayors could only envy her. "The cleanliness of the village is the visiting card of our residents. Those who are employed in the small village services have the village divided into smaller segments and they care for these. One part of the village – one group. They are led by a foreman – they are all Roma, too. He who has the job of taking care of the bus stop goes there a number of times every day. If it is necessary – he cleans up." How simple, I guess. But this doesn't tell me why nearly everywhere else aside from Nižný Komárnik this simply doesn't work. I ask the question again. Why? "Here everyone knows what he or she should do. Whether I am in the village or I'm not here," explains the mayor and adds that this was shown in the floods not long ago. "I wasn't in the village. My representative, Ľubomír Varga, handled the emergency work excellently. First of all, the fact that the village had a power outage. Because the village was in the water and beneath the current. With some thirty residents employed in village works, they made sure that the bridges were not blocked. Thanks to him, just five hours after the storm the village was passable. I meet with 76-year old widow Zuzana Siváková in front of the new houses. We begin to talk about how she is doing, what kind of life she's had. She says that she comes from nearby Miroľa. She worked at the sawmill for 34 years. She cut wood on a circular saw! With much respect I look into the eyes of a woman who spent her life doing a man's job. A mischievous fire shines in her eyes and despite her age and difficult life there is a well-dressed woman hidden in them. Even now she has on her neck a string of pearls; her dyed hair showing the correct shade beneath her scarf. "No, I never felt that people scorned or showed that I'm a Roma woman," she says and mentions how the water took their shack in 1976. How she bought a woodshed. How she cooked outside until the home was ready. She says that non-Roma built the home for her. She has some good friends among them. She sometimes goes across the road behind for a chat, if they don't come to see her. And now she goes to see Anna Skarupová.

I use this and I try to get both women to remember the past. Anna speaks mainly about poverty. "How the children after the war experience great poverty. There was nothing to eat or to wear. Mama made me a skirt from blankets used to cover the horses, so they wouldn't catch cold. So that we had something to wear to school." I'm curious whether Roma children also went to school back then. Anna says unambiguously no. But to my question as to why, the answers uncomprehendingly. "And how would they go to school

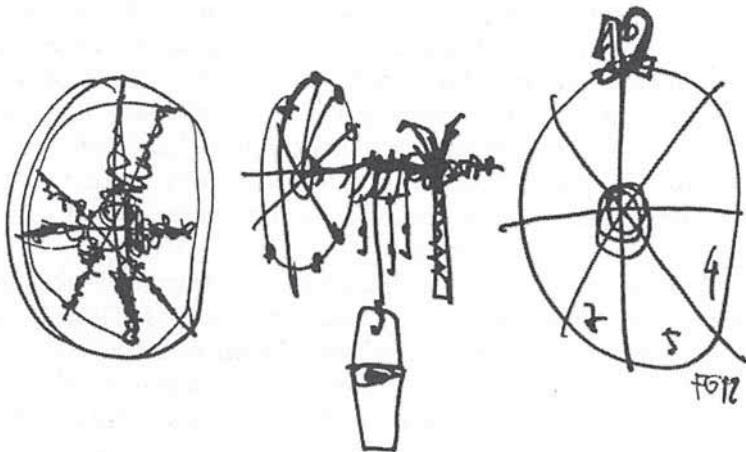
when they didn't have anything to wear?" I can't even imagine such poverty. Anna Skarupová recalls how at the time of her childhood Roma children walked around totally naked. In winter and in summer, though in winter they were outside less visibly. "The boys ran around into the frost naked. Ten or twelve minutes they slid on the ice and then frozen they ran back to the shacks. Today's children would die of pneumonia," thinks the old woman and she starts in on another memory.

For a piece of bread

"It was after the war. There was poverty in the village like you can't imagine today. Mama baked bread which was only called bread. So dry. It just crumbled and hardly tasted like bread. But we were glad to have it. There was no flour. We had so little... A man from Stropkov came to school on a wagon. He had a mill and once a week he brought bread to the village. He called the orphans to stand in line. The children waited while he sliced them pieces of tasty, good-smelling bread. And he spread jam on it for them! We other only swallowed our saliva... I came home and told mama: why isn't our father dead? Then I could also get some of that bread with jam..." Tears trickled from Anna's eyes. She quickly returned to the present. "Our Roma are clever. They try but they can't save. On Sunday they roast chicken and on Monday my dog eats for lunch what they don't finish. They don't eat warmed over food. And so far nothing has ever happened to me. Although I'm still eating Sunday's soup on Wednesday... They give bread their children don't eat at school to the hens I raise. Two slices of buttered bread, ham in the middle or a bit of salami. And these children don't even take a bite of these goodies. What we would have given for that bread back then? Children today don't know what poverty is..." Zuzana goes before us to the bench and while she sidles up to her non-Roma friend, Anna tells about what a difficult life her Roma friend has had. "From the age of six she worked on farms. And then that work at the sawmill. And now I see how day to day she goes there and back on foot. And the journey home always with a stick on her shoulder. And on it in front and behind wood scraps, so that she had heating".

Nižný Komárnik. A village on the Poland-Slovakia border. With a beautiful wooden church on a hill. With 153 residents, some 60 of whom are Roma. There are only seven school-aged children in the village. And the adults are largely unemployed. The village employs 42 of them. For ten hours of work each week they receive an activation benefit of EUR 63.03. The mayor can't imagine life in the village without the Roma. She cannot leave her residents. "Do you know how the construction of the lower standard houses was prepared?" She asks us and immediately answers. It started at eight in the morning and ended in the dark. And every boy and man worked on them.

The mayor counts the examples testifying to the humanity of the local people, and such talk in today's situation are very nice to hear. And it sounds like a fairy tale which begins magically with: Once upon a time... In Nižný Komárnik they finished in May the landscaping work in front of the houses of lower standard thanks to last year's donation of EUR 3,000 from the Slovak government. They helped themselves only with the help and advice of an expert, they hauled earth, planted grass and trees and flowers. And when everything grows and blossoms, then there will be a fairy tale here. The mayor, as if she didn't have enough problems in the village, often solves the problems of other villages. The Roma from the surrounding area come here to see her. They know from the locals that she is able to find a passable road for everyone, to invent, to unearth a solution. Indeed, they come to her for advice. And she helped. How to get money for a well in the settlement, how to ensure it. At the village councils there are commonly speeches for guests from the Stropkov and Svidník Districts. They come to inspire, to find a solution here. And aside from the resolution of the technical problems here in reality it's possible to see that cohabitation can be good and pleasurable. If people want it. If they live together. If they solve things good and bad.



Village firms – possible impossible? A few theoretical-practical observations from Spišský Hrhov

In the contribution “Ten years of development in the community in Spišský Hrhov – possible inspiration for others who are serious“, we described processes which succeeded and didn't succeed in introducing with attempts at development of the village with the special focus on the Roma community. In this contributions we wish to focus on one of the important development articles, the village firm – a social business – a phenomenon which, in our opinion is deserving of special attention.

In the village of Spišský Hrhov more than 10 years have been devoted to the question of a social enterprise (particularly in the form of village firms) and this village was from the start the foundation for inspiration, trials and experiments, as well as a model for villages in the phase when applied models began to function well in Spišský Hrhov.

It's true that we would also meet with ideas of a social enterprise elsewhere (mainly abroad) and long before they began being applied in Spišský Hrhov. It was here, however, that arose very naturally, if not originally, what was later called a “social enterprise“.

One of the main initiators and activists of the social enterprise (and not only in this village) is activist Michal Smetánka, who moved to Spišský Hrhov, in order to work as a teacher, and who was later elected as a village councillor. We asked him, therefore, to describe his experience and observations from this whole process for an example from this village.

...in place of an introduction - how it all began...

“In the scope of different projects focused on employment and employability we managed to train and prepare many clients for the performing of interesting activities. One of the most effective projects was one in which a part was a metal-working course. In the scope of this we were able from unemployed Roma men without experience with metalworking to prepare nearly ten such that they were able after the course ended to create interesting artistic-useful object like, for example, candle sticks, ornaments, iron flowers, decorations and the like. For Roma women we ran a course on sewing and weaving, the result of which were beautiful products with folk subject matter. There were a great many more activities (the making of shingles, baskets, wood carvings, useful utensils, knitting works, decorations and the like) and for a few years we were surrounded by many interesting and nice products. We reached a phase, however, when we were compelled to say that improving work skills or the production is not a problem. The problem is

placing the products on the market, and to do is so that it had for production (working) a more permanent wage effect. Despite the gigantic enthusiasm, many attempts and significant efforts, we were not able to solve this problem.

After a time we prepared in the scope of the course the construction of a gazebo and to our surprise we couldn't at this time rustle up an clamp iron (an iron clamp for connecting beams, a timber joint), because a producer from Czech Republic wasn't able to distribute them... This small episode helped us resolve not the above-described problem but induced us to consider the production activities for unemployed from a fully different angle of view. At the same time it clearly resolved the dilemma for the assortment of products and services as well as the defining of locations for their distribution.

These experiences shifted us in the direction toward the creation of a conception in which the foundation was built on "how to create job opportunities tied to activities and products, for which demand is directly in the locality or surrounding region".

Alongside this we began to identify and observe the then unprecedented possibility of administration for our own developmental dynamic activities associated with the gradual shifting of competence to the village. Most of all the measure of awareness of the importance of a civil society began to gradually strengthen in the village, namely in the sense of selecting its representatives to public functions. Local administration began in function and ideas to draw a great deal closer than before to the citizen, which began to appear to us as an advantageous key to resolving the problems of employment and employability on the local (village) level.

The further it went, the more the concept created began to relate to a permanently sustainable development of local administration generally, thus in a broader radius than "only" solving unemployment. Its main line became the emphasis on the possibilities of a broader solution to problems of excluded or threatened social exclusion".

...how we learned abroad...

"We managed to develop an interesting concept and tried to find in practice something similar, on the basis of which we could verify several of our theoretical starting points. Unfortunately, we were unable to find anything similar. The closest we came to our intention, whose "end" should be the creation of new work opportunities for people from the Roma community directly on the site of the dwellings, were models of social enterprises abroad.

All, however, stood on the basis of a generous donation of the state, donors, volunteer networks, and the like. We ran into what was for us unacceptable problems of permanent sustainability. Institutionally these social enterprises were handled in different ways, from administration of

small non-profit organizations to different partnerships, associations, even consortiums of several sectors. One them connected them, however – with the reduction or expiry of donations from external sources, they failed. At the same time this was also true regarding social enterprises in developed countries like Great Britain or Denmark.

An exception, perhaps, was only social enterprises tied to church (and similar to them) societies (of the type Kolping's workshops), where there was a permanent flow of activities and financing secured by the building of strong social feelings of ownership, who support activities for the socially weaker. Another inspiration for us were the small operations (3 – 5 people), which performed small specialised activities, which, however, were strictly tied to one customer (usually local administration). We evaluated these alternatives as the most suitable and for us transferable, the proof of which is in their long-term functioning. However, we were compelled to adapt the conception to different conditions in Slovakia."

...defining of concepts...

"In the last two years in Slovakia the terms social enterprise, social economy, social business and social entrepreneur have had a very fashionable ring. Abroad this terminology has been in use for a long time and from our experiences we can say that terminological simplification predominates in them. Here these terms as well as other professional expressions with them are, unfortunately, often mixed together and the users have the tendency to mistake them more than orientate them. In the last years the term "social enterprise" has become an abusive designation for defrauding public resources and liquidating natural business environment. And at professional forums terms are juggled to such a measure as to bring chaos and misunderstanding. We try to divide this general terminology according to two basic viewpoints."

The idealistic view

"The term social entrepreneur belongs here, for example. A social entrepreneur is not a person who opened a trade license with social services. A social entrepreneur is one who makes social capital available. He develops it and expands it. His social "business" means expanding ideas, creating conditions, motivating and encouraging people, said simply – inducing and realising of the desired social changes".

The pragmatic view

"Here we select for clarification the term social enterprise. This is a business subject of a social dimension using his profit first of all for solving problems of unemployment in a village, as well as problems associated with a long-term or short-term socially non-standard situation for residents, by which they get to (in comparison with common business subjects) another, social,

qualitatively higher dimension. His priority is not the creation of profit for profit's sake and raising the living standard of the organiser (owner, operator), as this is a natural and logical characteristic for a common business subject, but the creation of profit for the purpose of maintaining jobs, the creation of more jobs, the realisation of public works or development of business as it is.

This differentiated view should give notice to us on the differences in our understanding and common understanding of social enterprises such as they are known and defined in Western Europe. For the British, American, Italian, French or Danish "theoretical model" the principle of doing business applies with a social content – an intention, by which the provision of services to people is ahead of profit, etc.; on the other hand, however, all of these models accentuate the irreplaceability of volunteerism in a social enterprise, whether drawing a minimal wage as a prerequisite of maximum commitment in a social enterprise. Equally so our conception in understanding of social management and autonomy of a social enterprise is different. From the viewpoint of these models, Eastern Europe is understandably judged in these areas, labelled as little aware, insufficiently developed and too market-oriented.

Also in Slovakia a number of social enterprise projects or a similar model, a so-called protected workshop, were implemented. Even though these projects are close to our conception and only stand on other foundations.

Let's imagine that a key to bypassing the lack of understanding is the above-outlines division – the idealistic and the pragmatic views.

With the conceived forms of social enterprises in our conditions we (the preceding possible theoretical disruption) tried to use terminology which would be independent and thus easier to understand. We began to use the idea of a **Village firm.**"

...village firms generally...

"After 1990 the first village enterprises began to originate in Slovakia on a market basis. They transformed or again originated after the idea model of village operations, affiliated production and the like. Villages began to find new conditions in the market space. Several of them were able to identify opportunities, sources and conditions for business, for carrying out activities, which were needed on the local market, above all their own – the village.

They began to implement area programmes for "solving the problems of unemployment" – activation or small village services. Local administrations had the opportunity to confront their own ability to lead, manage, educate people, to use and prepare the potential of their own residents for public work, their own development.

Local administration began to take on more the question of solving the problems of marginalised residents and for its own development it actively

began to use the possibility of state or EU help. Still more important was the fact that a healthy and functional village administration in its essence is derived from its own needs and the needs of citizens; it is not an institution which through the official optic of centralism and global solutions applies programmes without a polyspectral impact on the permanent sustainability of individual locations or villages”.

...the village firm as a social enterprise...

“So, theoretically we would be able to describe a process which is obviously related to the village of Spišský Hrhov. Here, however, we mostly began to focus attention on communities threatened by social exclusion as a part of the village and the problems of its residents. The conception of a village firm as a social enterprise in Spišský Hrhov rested on the current state, which among others offered a bridging with the existing national programmes and projects, like, for example, the construction of village rental flats of a lower standard, community social work, community centres and clubs, existing social development programmes realised in the scope of instruction and education in schools as well as many other activities carried out by non-governmental organisations or by villages themselves. We succeeded in founding a village firm (in the sense of a social enterprise) in 2003 and we can boldly state that from its founding it entered onto the road of progress which continues still today. From the beginning up to today it was the centre point of interest of many other local administrations, non-governmental organisations, partnerships and the like. The mystery remains about why despite the sufficient presentation of an existing functional model at the most varied forums there never was and still isn’t even marginal interest from state institutions.

The village firm in Spišský Hrhov from its origin served us nevertheless as a motivational element for other villages, but also as a comparative unit (from the viewpoint of time processes, personal engagement, the developing of individual activities and institutionalisation) with the founding of other village firms, which we will mention later on.

A specific description of the origin and development of the village firm in Spišský Hrhov up to the present would perhaps be an interesting chronicle of the specific steps and activities. For those interested all information of this type easily accessible through the information channels of the village. In this place, however, we would like to describe the origin and development of a village firm as put into a simple theoretical form. All theoretical stipulations, however, have an authentic foundation in practical experience with the building of a specific village firm in Spišský Hrhov and other mentioned village firms”.

...how to build a village firm – social enterprise...

"If we want to further describe a village firm and at the same time respect other theoretical constructs of social enterprises, we primarily focus attention on the pragmatic view. We will thus deal with doing business as such (generally relevant, terminologically useful). This can be, from the mentioned viewpoint, defined as applying innovative method in processes of lawfulness of offers and demand for goods and services.

An important fact which is necessary to have continuously in mind is whether when building a village firm we consider as priority the economic aspect (the enterprise) or social aspect (solving unemployment). Whether our priority is economic prosperity marginally associated with solving social exclusion or solving social exclusion through the conception of economic activity.

The permanently sustainable development of the village (as the most appropriate real unit) is secured through the building of the permanent sustainability of its communities, thus regions for development of employability, housing, education, economic activities, etc.

If we are able in the village – in the location – in the region to a maximum measure use and improve existing sources with a maximum measure of our own help and activities, then we draw near to a form of genuine permanent sustainability and general prosperity.

The village is a unit which in general cannot only expire or go bankrupt. A village is the resident living in a certain territory in a certain makeup and constellation. By itself (as an institution), it shouldn't have any meaning. It acquires meaning only in the form of a living organism which is properly managed, organised and deliberate, and is also beyond the framework of generally applicable and utilised methods. A village can be that which is not only expended but also what is made. Whereby it is able to work more proportionally with the ratio of consumption – production, thus it is able to grow more dynamically and provide a dignified life to its citizens.

It is from this point of view that we prefer and defend social enterprises in the form of village firms. We acknowledge that in the case of towns or larger villages such a conception is not so distinct. We run into here the question of specificity, directness, transparency. Obviously, these are matters individual and specific. In a small village with the founding of a village firm a transparent structure is a huge advantage. In other words, everyone knows everybody else. In town conditions it is often problematic to orientate in the tangle of offices, authorities, agendas. The idea of an individual and a long-term approach to a citizen of a town is obviously utopian. It is not real, however. The chance of building the optimal conditions walks hand in hand with the building of a civil society.

The idea of a village firm consists also in interaction and cooperation. The present piteously points to the deficiencies in these characteristics. If an innovative mayor today has an idea to build a village operation for the production of tiles, shortly after other villages will begin to copy this activity, because they see that it works. With this short-sighted consideration, however, they often aren't aware that they are mutually limiting each other. If instead of copying the activities they began to devote themselves to another activity, well-coordinated and agreed upon in advance, not only that after a time they won't be in competition with one another in a regional space, but they can achieve a common cooperative growth. The idea of strategic planning consists, among others, in the accepting of the surrounding (although little dependent) sources, in other words, respecting one's neighbours. If one village firm carries out excavation work, another (if its resources and needs allow it) can devote itself to building activities, a third to making machines available, another to the production of materials, another transport activities".

... what specifically functioned and functions in Spišský Hrhov...

"From the founding the village firm in Spišský Hrhov was profiled as a firm carrying out building and earth works, the production of paving stones, later carpentry work, the production of wood chips, joinery work, the production of souvenirs and folk-art objects, the administration and maintenance of village buildings, and in recent years the maintenance and repair of roads, excavating under roads, small sawmill production, as well as agricultural production, construction of wooden houses and the like. We'll note that the number of employees has been relatively stable over the last few years, about 10 in winter and around 30 during the rest of the year.

The village firm today makes available machines, equipment, mechanisms and technical devices on the level of a mature and modern firm, with its own spaces, permanent management and other resources which predetermine its further development".

... expanding the model from Spišský Hrhov....

"The preceding lines are a theoretical description and partially generalised knowledge from the practice with building a village firm as a social enterprise in the village of Spišský Hrhov. An interesting model arose for us which in 2006 we tried to confirm and apply in other villages. We identified and selected these on the basis of qualification of key players in development and basic assumptions of the concept of development.

Allow us to say that thanks to this project it was possible to carry out the preparation, establishment and launching into operation of village firms in such a time, that it would not be possible to create a functioning conventional

firm, or this time would be minimally trebled. This was conditioned especially by the fact that complete services and consultancy for the realisation of village firms was possible to secure through an external organisation (outside the villages involved). In other words the villages were not compelled financially or materially to participate in the preparatory consultancy work. These were provided to them in sufficient professional quality free of charge. We carried out the project in 2006 and 2007.

The main intent of verifying and building village firms within the project was preparation of strategic plans for the origin and development of village firms in selected villages. The villages were audited according to several criteria, namely from demographic makeup from the socially disadvantaged environment in the villages up through the ability of individual village administrations to carry out a new and demanding vision.

The first stage of planning the firms – social enterprises – was preparation of mayors and village councils consisting of a thorough explanation and theoretical preparation focused on the problems of the Village firm – social enterprise.

The villages were selected such that it were possible to compare in parallel processes and results from preparation up through the origin of the individual operations themselves. Aside from the villages where there were no operations, villages were also worked with where village operation facilities were already established. In this case, however, this involved operations without visible development (largely only formally functioning); furthermore operations without a social dimension. In other words, this involved village operations established only for the purpose of carrying out different small jobs for the village without permanent employees.

The project was implemented in villages of the Prešov Self-governing Region - Kurov, Sveržov, Šarišské Čierne and Torysa. Spišský Hrhov was connected to the project as a focus village.

All of the strategic plans of the village firms were implemented through the "From Vision to Strategy" methodology. Aside from the village mayor and the village council, representatives from the village business sector, citizens and local activists were also invited to the planning process for village firms. The strategy of development of village firms consisted of these parts:

- 1. Analysis of the current state/starting point*
- 2. Audit of supplies*
- 3. SWOT analysis prepared from the vision of the village firm*
- 4. Formulation of problems and other analysis*
- 5. Setting of goals in individual fields*
- 6. Action plan for minimally three years*

7. *Time schedule for implementing individual tasks*
8. *Hiring personnel for the firm*
9. *Financial analysis of the village firm for the determined period"*

...the specific form and real activities of the village firms launched in the years 2006 – 2007

"Sveržov - Svepos s.r.o.

activities: construction with a primary focus on construction of lower standard flats, sales and service of PC technology, supply and services for common administration of 80 villages, creation of projects and strategic planning

prospect: collection, separation and liquidation of refuse, cultivation of rapid-growing wood, concrete production, transport, education

Kurov s.r.o.

activities: production of concrete bricks and concrete paving stones, building activities and earth works, preparation, implementation and complete management of projects for the village,

prospect: cultivation of rapid-growing wood, holding of requalification courses and activities

The village firm in Šarišské Čierne

activities: moving and cutting of wood, sawmill production, planting of trees, hauling of communal solid refuse for 36 villages, agricultural work

prospect: separation and liquidation of refuse, building activities, administration of a home for social services, agricultural production

VPS Torysa s.r.o.

activities: administration and maintenance of village buildings, building activities, administration of TKO (solid communal waste) storage, refuse collection

prospect: valorisation of waste, activities in the travel industry"

... evaluation

"Thanks to the project not only the theory of establishment and functioning of Village firms was verified but it directly created a strategy of sustainable social enterprises operated by village administrations. Some of them are still functional today and let us say that they have a very good outlook. The firms fulfil their mission – they employ above all people from a socially disadvantaged environment.

Even though in a Slovak-wide measure no significant drop in unemployment can be spoken about – given the number of directly created jobs in village firms, the project clearly created and verified a model which undoubtedly has a potentially good future and from a long-term view can

have nationwide significance, obviously as an alternative.

In addition to this, activities were realised thanks to which it is possible in the future to design them mainly focused on other village firms (despite the fact that the conditions for the origin and function, thus the work and activities are in principle different).

The original selection of villages to the project was influenced also by the regional distribution of villages operating firms. There were created three, the so-called clusters – Bardejov Cluster (Sveržov, Kurov, Šarišské Čierne), Spišský Cluster (Spišský Hrhov and Jablonov, which began to work beyond the scope of the project; however the project was eventually not realised due to the time deficit) and the Upper Torysa Cluster (Torysa and in the near future planned Krivany and Pečovská Nová Ves). Clusters were created for this reason so that smaller regional units could in part better cooperate, as well as secure less expensive and more accessible quality management. We started from the assumption that where a village firm (minimally at the beginning) cannot pay for a quality manager, the combining of three villages as a unit is a real possibility.

Thanks to the creation of clusters it was possible to also implement the idea of village development agencies (ORAs). Thanks to the results of the project already in a short time after its completion, two ORAs originated - Kurov and Spišský Hrhov. These in themselves compiled, aside from management of village firms, also other services helping the increasing of employment and employability, like, for example, the creation of projects for local administration, job and legal consulting, management and consulting of community social work and others. A turning point in this case is expressed in that these ORAs were not operated through resources from the projects, but with the direct involvement of the individual administrations and other village firms. In 2009 the ORAs (after two years of functioning) were transformed into Regional Development Partnership organizations, which began to deal with this agenda and which were able to cover all the personnel capacity of the one-time ORAs”.

... a few questions at the conclusion...

“From the viewpoint of the range of the contribution it is not possible to explain the conception of village firms in detail let alone describe the details from the implementation of activities of their founding. With presentations of the ideas of village firms as social enterprises we meet with many lay and professional questions and opinions. For all we therefore present at least the two most common objections in discussions of village firms:

objection no. 1:

the village firm inadequately enters the market and can weaken the common

business sphere

reaction to the objection:

If a village firm is really well set up, it accepts legislative norms like anyone else, that is, it creates and strengthens the natural competitive environment. Indeed, the market is the market; the subject of a village firm and its legal form is nothing exclusive. The philosophy of internal functioning and the conception of employment cannot be limited from the viewpoint of quality of services or prices on the market.

On the other hand, it is important to mention, however, the fact that during the process of strategic planning is an attempt by the village firm to cooperate with the existing business environment or perform as a priority services and activities which are absent from the village, locality or contiguous region.

Finally, it would be inadequate and utopian to envision the mass origin of thousands of village firms which through their quality would roll over the common business sector in all of Europe.

objection no. 2:

the village firm is a return to the collective production and formally similar to village operations from before 1989

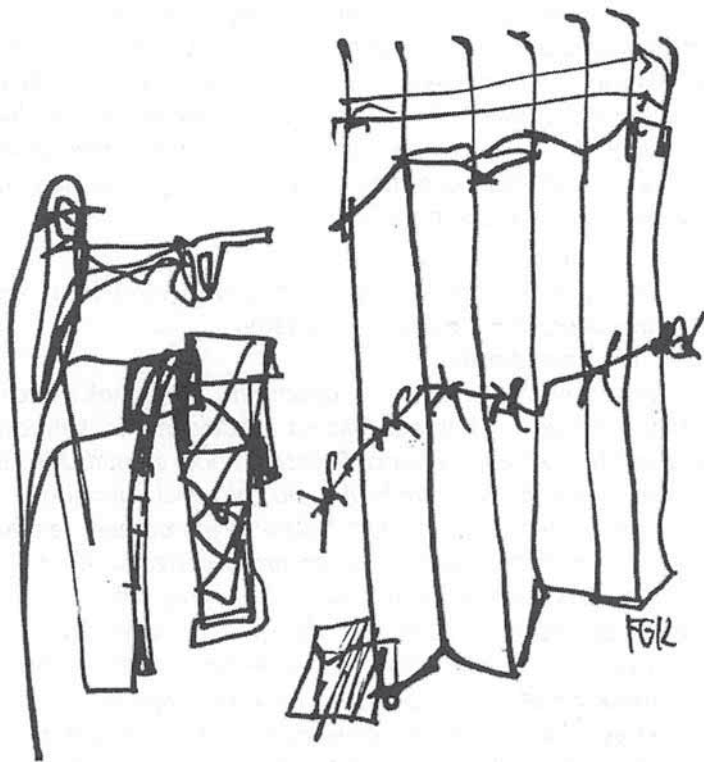
reaction to the objection:

A significant deficiency of village operations, technical, local and other services was the (as we imagine it) socialistic model of management and access to work. The current model is governed by the laws of the market economy, which is also merciless (natural) to the internal functioning of the firm in regard to the "slapdash" or "possessing". It is founded in respect to work – that is, that I appreciate that I can work and earn for compensation - that I am aware of the need for quality work in relation to its possible continuing (that is, that I can work and earn even longer than only during the realization of one order). Worth mentioning is also the awareness of the opportunity to work in one's own village, or outside of it together with those who connected not only work (but also other social) ties.

Again let us mention that the assumption of a well functioning village firm is quality management, a good organizational structure and a quality employee, who from the start is perhaps not "perfect", but with work habits and instruction after a time can become a quality employee. Over all of this (as has already been accentuated a number of times) awakens the reworked strategy of development.

Over two years the conception of village firms was successfully verified; specific village firms were prepared, established and run or restructured into forms of social enterprises, and they started the required processes for nearby

local administrations as well as in the region. Particularly gratifying, however, is the fact that the idea of the village firm – social enterprise was successfully spread also outside of the Prešov Region and the terminology used and publicised phrases began being used more often.



The village of Rudlov and the civic association Svatobor pod Oblíkom

To the category of alternative solutions we could assign the activities which were carried out in the village of Rudlov (and partially also in the town of Hanušovce nad Topľou). In this case activities are involved which are focused on agricultural production, but not only on the first level of self-sufficiency but in a broader context of landscaping, ecoproduction, the renewal of traditional crafts and processes, protection of works and the like. In both localities they are carried out by the civic association Svatobor pod Oblíkom, which was founded and is headed by Štefan Straka. This activity, or the activities of this association, is an ideal example of how a village can use foreign experience, the taste of activists and modern trends with the resolving of social problems above all for the Roma community.

The village of Rudlov is located in a charming corner on the eastern slopes of the Slanské Mountains. It is a part of the Prešov Self-governing Region. It is a part of the Vranov nad Topľou District (Region: Horný Zemplín). The village itself neighbours three other villages. To the north, it is Hlinné, to the south – Zámutov and to the east, it is Sol', with which Rudlov is nearly connected. In Rudlov and in all of the neighbouring villages there is a substantial Roma community (Hlinné – 1,000 Roma, Sol' – 1,200 Roma, Zámutov – 1,500 Roma). The Slaný potok stream runs through the centre of the village. Near the village of Sol' it flows into the River Topľa. The current mayor is Ján Markuš. Rudlov had as of 31 December 2010 exactly 668 residents and 156 houses (of which 142 are permanently inhabited). The origin of the village dates back to the year 1402. On 20 December 1817, a national builder and co-founder of Matica Slovenská (Slovak Cultural Institute) A. I. Dobriansky was born here in the Greek-Catholic parish house.

The village at present has a gas main. It also has had a water main and public sewerage installed (a common wastewater treatment plant serves Rudlov, Sol' and Jastrabie nad Topľou). A primary school which was built in 1909 (1st degree) operates in the village. We also find here a Greek-Catholic parish office and church, a funeral home, a newly reconstructed culture house and a nursery school. In Rudlov there is an agricultural cooperative and 2 shops for mixed goods. The neighbouring village of Sol' has a primary school (with 2nd degree) which is available for residents of Rudlov as well as services of a travelling dentist and a general physician for children, adolescents and adults are provided there. The cadastral territory of Rudlov covers an area of 1,604 hectares and spreads over the

Podslánska pahorkatina (Sub-Slanec Hills). The centre of the village lies at an elevation of 201 metres above sea level and the village lands from 155 to 961 metres above sea level. Climatically Rudlov belongs to a warmer region with moderate humidity and relatively cold winters. It has brown forest and bottom land soil and in the western part extensive oak and beech forests.

One interesting fact is that in the past there was extensive extraction of iron ore. Its residents were known as good scythe makers. Between Rudlov and Hlinné is a location where a salt water spring is found along with curative mud. In the past there was a smaller spa here which was, however, destroyed before the First World War. Northwest of the village are two springs of ferrous acidulous water. Between Rudlov and Sol' is also a lode of white salt, which is a part of Zbudské súvrstvie (Zbudské Strata). The salt deposits form a gigantic lenticle that reach a depth from 270 to 450 m. The long-distance cycling track ALŽBETA passes through the area of the village. In the surrounding forests are two protected locations: "Zámutovská jelšina" (Zámutovská Alder Forest) and "Zámutovské skaly" (Zámutovské Rocks).

A total of 187 Roma live in Rudlov. Of the total number of residents Roma make up more than one-quarter of the local population (exactly 27.99%). All of the Roma live in the village territory, on settled property and diffused among the dwellings of the non-Roma majority. Only a few families live on the edge of the village. With regard to the rapid growth of the population in the Roma community, the housing fund is insufficient. The Roma live in 21 brick houses, which means on average 8-9 persons per home. Most of the Roma community is unemployed and in material need, which means that the possibility for the independent resolution of the housing question is for them significantly limited. The danger for them is the local stream, and this is particularly in the case of increasingly more common occurrence of heavy rains.

All of the Roma has access to electricity. Their dwellings are heated mainly by burning wood (in stoves, fireplaces or through a central source of heat in a boiler) and additionally with gas, since the village has a gas main. Despite the fact that the village has a completed water main and sewerage, most of the Roma continue to draw water from their own wells and discharge sewerage into their own sump.

An asphalt access road leads to the Roma houses, along which there is public lighting. The local community in Rudlov lives approximately 3 km from the first class Prešov – Vranov nad Topľou road. From it, in the village of Sol', a third class road turns off to Rudlov. The local and tertiary roads in the village lead off from this road. Transport connected with the surrounding

area is secured via buses. There are three bus stops in the village (Rudlov has a direct connection with the district town of Vranov nad Topľou; and the connection with the regional capital Prešov is from the nearest stop in Sol' or by train along the Prešov – Strážske – Humenné line).

In the relevant locality there are traces of opportunities for employment for the Roma, mainly in the field of the so-called "green economy" (e.g., in the sphere of bio-agriculture, with composting of communal waste or use as biomass for producing energy). These opportunities are associated with a number of requests for manual work in agricultural or forests lands.

Relations with the majority have been good for a long time. As a principle problem, however, we see that the Roma do not own the property and space for independent farming activities. Most of the help from the state for the idea of a conversion from conventional agriculture to ecological and brokerage of access to the soil are keys to finding the most significant methods for supporting the employment of people from the Roma community. A gigantic space for cooperation exists in this field particularly in cooperation with enterprises and institutions of state administration, which are represented by Lesy SR, š.p., or the Slovak Land Fund.

Similarly as in other regions, in this village they see large reserves in the education of Roma who are mostly all low qualified. The lack of interest in education is deepened even further by the fact that as long as some Roma manage to finish secondary school with a vocational certificate or school-leaving certificate, they subsequently, due to the non-existence of job opportunities, end up registered at the labour office as unemployed. These more educated Roma citizens regularly ask the question, why learn, why finish school, when afterwards we won't find jobs (similarly as those with the primary education)...?

Activities for Roma in Rudlov

The village as a whole is burdened mainly by low education, high unemployment and poverty – not only the Roma. On the basis of the mentioned facts, several projects are being prepared and implemented in the village, which are financed by a combination of resources from the state budget, the village budget and the EU structural funds.

For example, in the local primary school a Roma assistant, who is especially devoted to Roma children, is helping the teachers. The results are very encouraging. Not only has school attendance improved but also their school results. The pupils are more successful with the help of the assistant and are better able to handle the demands of school. The assistant

also offers effective help to the children with improving their hygiene and communication skills.

Field social work, through which advice is provided to the local community during the resolution of different practical problems, is also carried out in the village. These problems are to a significant measure linked to financial illiteracy leading to the large indebtedness of families. A social worker tries in communication with the Roma to create a solution (e.g. in the form of a payment), in order to forestall ending up in difficulties, for example, in the form of disconnection from electricity or gas, or a levy, or prosecution. There are, however, many other problems which workers at the village office have to deal with. They are connected with the keeping of order and cleanliness in public spaces, night time peace and with the resolution of emergency situations in some dwellings.

As in many other villages, so-called activation work or anti-flooding measures are taking place in Rudlov, to which the unemployed are connected. These activities have their own undoubted importance not only for resolving the disorder in the village, with the prevention of flooding, but obviously with the brokering of possibilities for earning some money.

It's true, however, that the potential number of activation workers is not utilised to a great measure. Rudlov, like any other village, simply doesn't have the real possibilities such that daily – in winter and in summer – to provide meaningful job opportunities for so many tens of people. This is also in consequence of insufficiently passed legislation which at present doesn't allow activation workers to be employed not only by the village but also, for example, by non-governmental organisations and church organisations.

An example of cooperation between Roma and non-Roma – the establishing of the Malinka ecocentre operation

An illustration of what over the years has been shown as a hopeful opportunity for the provision of job opportunities for the Roma is the launching into operation of the Malinka ecocentre near the village of Rudlov. The mentioned centre is operated by the already mentioned civic association Svatobor pod Oblíkom. The Malinka grounds at the same time serve as a local community centre, and not only for socially disadvantaged Roma.

The initiator of the founding and activities of the centre was Štefan Straka – activist (originally from the nearby village of Ďurdoš, Hanušovce nad Topľou District) and the psychology graduate. After his return from Austria, he together with his family and some friends (a total of 7 people) registered in the fall of 2006 the civic association Svatobor pod Oblíkom. It

was established with the intention of gradually fulfilling the vision of support for food and energy self-sufficiency of rural (especially Roma) communities.

The activists saw (and still see) the implementation of a so-called green economy bound mainly to ecogardening activities as the ideal space for fulfilling their intentions.

The first task of the activists at the start of their activities was finding suitable spaces which would allow them to connect agrarian and social activities. In the scope of preparatory activities in cooperation with the Slovak Environmental Agency in Prešov they began searching and doing a thorough analysis of selected locations (in the Šariš and Upper Zemplín regions). The result of these analyses was that the location Rudlov was selected as the most suitable for carrying out their intentions. It is necessary to note that none of the initiators of this idea had any family connection with the village of Rudlov – for everyone this was from the start a completely unknown locality in which they decided to carry out their work, or better said, their vision.

Thanks to successful negotiations with the then director of the state enterprise Lesy SR, they acquired into their own administration in the location of Rudlov at the start of 2007 in the form of a long-term lease (for 50 years) an abandoned, excess state property, i.e., today's grounds of Malinka near the village of Rudlov.

Members and sympathisers donated at the start of the association some SKK 100,000. We want to say that at the start there is no need for a lot of capital; one can begin with a modest amount and then gradually, step-by-step, fulfil one's goals. We will try to describe the individual stages during their implementation in the following lines.

Most of the activities had and have the form of specific activities which to a maximum possible extent are supplemented by resources from different sources through smaller projects, thanks to which they are gradually building up the mentioned ecocentre. In this case it occurred what we wrote about in regard to the activities in Spišský Hrhov. Activists defined a clear goal which could be segmented out into gradually smaller steps which subsequently are much easier to fulfil. Without quality and detailed preparation the realisation would probably not be possible, or it would be chaotic and poorly conceived, the result of which would be in the better case an ineffective activity and in the worse case irreparable damage, for example, to the human capital (frustration of participants, burnout, non-cooperation with the village or community and the like).

The absolutely first project from 2007 was called "Let's meet by the Malina!" This project was supported financially from resources of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic. In the first phase of the introductory activity (June 2007 – December 2008) more than 80 socially

disadvantaged Roma from the surrounding settlements and more than 30 non-Roma (mainly from the villages of Sol', Rudlov and Zámutov) carried out the first steps with the renewing of the gardening centre Malinka, i.e. building modifications with repairs of 3 devastated agricultural buildings (e.g. repair of walls, facades, or water systems) and above all the recultivation of abandoned, self-seeding wood overgrowing the garden lands over an area of some 5 hectares.

After completion of outlining of the first phase of renewal of the centre the activists received permission (from December 2008) from the Regional Office of Public Health in Vranov nad Topľou for starting a **operation of a protected workplace**, for which subsequently with the help of the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic in Vranov nad Topľou they gradually integrated into the work process health-disabled people (8 Roma and 7 non-Roma). The mentioned educational and consulting workplace is still functioning and focuses its activities on carrying out the active connection with ecological agriculture, with the renewal of traditional crafts, with environmental education, with composting and with the use of biomass as a renewable source of energy.

The second project was the project "I want to be an ecological farmer!" With key support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the organisation Fnasat – Gens du Voyage and also with co-financing from Hermes Österreich in 2009 in the grounds of the protected workplace they carried out gardening, family-oriented training associated with development, renewal of work habits and skills in 85 (68 Roma and 17 non-Roma) low-qualified, long-term unemployed and poor people. They primarily carried out practical activities connected with the cultivation of vegetables, fruit, medicinal plants, mushrooms and with the production and use of bio-preparations from medicinal plants. In the context of the renewal of traditional crafts they began with the trial production of brooms from exclusively natural materials.

Another project was called "Biomass – let it be our fuel!" This was realised in the years 2010–2011 mainly in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Vranov nad Topľou and the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities. And in this case it also involved an environmentally and socially orientated project. Included in it, as they called it "our", were 15 health disabled employees and also more than 150 Roma volunteers, sympathisers and pupils from the Roma and partially from non-Roma communities. The project was focused on carrying out of activities leading to increasing the quality of the soil in the Hlinné microregion in the context of community compost of bio-waste and also lowering emissions of greenhouse gases, namely through reconstruction of heat sources and

heating systems which allow for the use of remains of sorghum, birch, hay and other types of biomass as a renewable source of fuel.

The statutory of the civic association and main “drafter” of nearly all of its activities, Štefan Straka, delivered an interesting lecture on the margin of his own activities, or reflections on the subject of the Roma and a theory of broken windows:

“During the carrying out of the outlined activities we in our association attained several enjoyable experiences. For example, we determined that in a nice, repaired and clean environment people’s attitudes and behaviour are modified, changed or beautified much sooner. So, despite the fact that the participants in activities are also people who are widely known as being repeat offenders (most in connection with different petty thefts), during cooperation with us nothing like this occurred that someone would steal a device, a tool a work aid or some kind of furnishings. In the end we became aware during this time of other positive phenomena. In the area around Malinka near the village of Rudlov nearly all of the so-called “wild dumping” of communal waste disappeared on the side of the Roma. We found out that less wood was stolen from the forests or vegetables and fruit from gardens and fields belonging to the non-Roma majority.

*Speculation over these experiences led me to confirm the assumption of the **so-called theory of broken windows** (see, for example, the work of Dutch psychologists with Kees Keizer from the University in Groningen at the forefront), according to whom neglected, broken environment leads its residents to a lack of respect for common norms. This was confirmed to us that whether for the engaged Roma but also non-Roma it is easier to breach social rules if the surroundings are deformed, or stated otherwise, it is easier for people to observe social conventions, laws if their surroundings are repaired and beautified. Stated simply and expressively – a dirty environment leads to and evokes dirt, criminal tendencies in human characters and orderly and harmonious surroundings lift up, initiate, awake in people the good and the beautiful.*

The question is this: what are the causes which lead a part of the Roma from the Hlinné micro region to us from passivity to activity? We see these causes in the application of 3 factors:

1. identifying with the local renewal (i.e. the Malinka grounds and surroundings) and with the ideals which are associated with our association. *This mainly involves identification with the idea that “we Roma from this land here will have our own enterprise/garden and therefore we should take care of it and protect it”.*

2. awareness of the meaningfulness and feeling of satisfaction from the results of the activities. *This mentioned awareness is not only in connection with the fact that part of the Roma (8 persons) have already found in relation to people and nature prosperous employment. Namely for many others who*

we are still currently unable to offer permanently paid work to (approximately 150 Roma volunteers), other benefits for their activity are meaningful. This alternative remuneration is related to different natural items they can obtain through connection to their help working. These are mainly things like fuel wood, vegetables and fruits.

3. the feeling of belonging/fellowship and the family form of realization of activities. *With participants in activities (especially with Roma women) the common, group form of carrying out activities is very important, i.e. so that they are together with their children and adolescents. Therefore, nearly all of the activities which allow this we carry out in multigenerational family form”.*

It is interesting to note that, without knowledge of the above-mentioned theory (only on the basis of natural intuition or a system of “trial-error”) people also came to the identical conclusion in many other locations – Spišský Hrhov, Sveržov, Pečovská Nová Ves, Nitra nad Ipľom and the like – about which we have written in this publication. Experiences from the past five years of work with the Roma in Rudlov has shown that brokering the approach to the land for the Roma brings several valuable effects not only for the Roma community. The alternative offered brings work opportunities for men (cultivation of forests), as well as women (garden activities). Step by step the local Roma community through eco-gardening activities, composting of wastes, crafts work (production of brooms from birch and sorghum) and the use of renewable resources of energy are improving the possibilities for a meaningful life.

Several village and town offices have already expressed interest regarding the application of the model of a green economy which they have tried in Rudlov. For example, in the spring of 2012 selected certification activities and processes, in cooperation with this civic association, will be launched into practice by the town office in Hanušovce nad Topľou.

Štefan Straka in this context remarks: “We live in a period when the twilight of a stagnating economy and a lack of finances in different spheres of life is more and more noticeable. It is not necessary, however, to sink into a dejected spirit and a depressive mood. Indeed, we all know this – to feel happiness and meaning in life does not depend on the measure of our material wealth and consumption. It’s possible to live well, with dignity even in modest circumstances. And in addition to others, this applies that good opportunities for useful work and a meaningful life for the Roma or the non-Roma is a lot...”

A village from farmer's logic – Šimonovce

If we were to briefly characterise the village of Šimonovce and the reason why we included it in this overview, it would certainly be the long-term, extensive and fruitful cooperation of the village with the non-governmental sector. Non-governmental organizations are a very good instrument for civic activation, which creates very good possibilities for community development, social skills of citizens, positive relations among residents toward their own community and the like. This type of cooperation can be, and the case of Šimonovce is clear proof, useful for one's own potential (human as well as financial), which is not only an accessory to village activities but is an integral part of them.

The village of Šimonovce is located in the southern part of the Rimavská Sobota District, in the border area of the Banská Bystrica Self-governing Region, in the foothills of Cerová vrchovina (Cerová Highlands). It falls under the district town of Rimavská Sobota, which is 17 km away (Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, the district office, the tax office, and others.) and the village of Jesenské 5 km away (the District Division of the Slovak Police Force, the register office).

The technological equipping of the village is complete, including the "Roma settlement", which, however, in the course of 2003 and 2004 changed its character thanks to the activities carried out there. The differences between the dwellings of the Roma and non-Roma residents in the village were obliterated; the Roma residents now live integrated in the community and the typical "Roma settlement" no longer exists in the village. The village has a public water main, lighting, paved asphalt roads and pavement, public sewerage with a connection to a wastewater treatment plant (connected to 60-70% of the houses), has a gas link and the larger part has Internet available. The village is also fully covered by local broadcasting system. The village has a post office, 3 shops with foodstuffs and mixed goods, an espresso (without gaming machines), a nursery school and a low-grade primary school in one building, a funeral home, a culture house, a community centre, a firehouse, a children's playground and a football pitch. The village is accessible by bus connections, and the closest passenger railway stop is in Jesenské (5 km).

For health care residents travel to the surrounding villages. A paediatrician is in Jesenské, general practitioners for adults in Jesenské, Hodejov and Rimavská Sobota; dentists and gynaecological surgeries are in Jesenské and Rimavská Sobota.

The village covers an area of 730 hectares. The population is 555 in 234 family houses. In 2002 the village has 470 residents. The growth in the number of residents over the past years was caused in particular by the arrival of 3-4 families (Roma and non-Roma) from Rimavská Sobota, which bought and rebuilt older family houses in Šimonovce. Approximately 49.3% of the residents are of Hungarian nationality, and the Hungarian language predominates in the village; the village newsletter is published in Hungarian. The Roma nationality has 48.87% of the residents. A very small percent of residents have Czech or Slovak nationality. The Roma live diffused in the village in family houses. Co-existence between the Roma and non-Roma residents in the village is on a friendly, standard level. There are no inequalities and serious conflicts among the residence; the village doesn't have any serious problems with criminality, as other villages have. Contributing to this harmony are the long-term and intensive programmes with Roma residents which have been carried out in the village since 2004. The biggest problem for the village remains the debts of residents toward the village, which is difficult to eliminate for the reason of high unemployment and low incomes of the residents.

Šimonovce as a village was produced from the original space of an agricultural homestead. The village has spacious streets fringed by walnut trees (110 trees planted in 1967), 3.5 hectares of green spaces used for a leisure zone with small architectural elements (a flower wagon in front of the church, a village well with flower decorations, and historical park with benches, an historical well, a fire hydrant with decorations and others). The centre of the village has been declared a conservation area. Two landmarks are registered in the list of national cultural landmarks. The church of the Reformed Lutheran Church with a tower built in the 17th century and a farmyard courtyard. A total of 110 residents are declared as Lutherans, while some 400 are of Roma-Catholic faith; the latter attend church in the nearby villages (Jesenské, Dubovec).

The written mention of the village is from 1221, when it is mentioned in connection with the name of the squire Ruska Šimon (from which the Šimonovce name is derived). The village belonged to the agricultural homestead of Fiľakovský and later the Širkovský castle estate. From the beginning it was a known agricultural homestead and spread over the most fertile fields of the River Rimava. The good farming results were already known in the 18th century. The agricultural character of the village has lasted into the present. From 1951 to 1996 a unified farm cooperative functioned in the village, in which most of the local residents worked. The residents have positive relations to the soil. Near their family houses they have extensive gardens (of some 2000 square metres) which are cultivated.

Unemployment in the village moves around 30%, while unemployment of the Roma residents is around 80%. In 2011 the village employed 19 residents in activation jobs, and 110 people for small village services. The village also employed 3 young people for graduate's work. At present it employs 15 residents – 13 of them Roma – in anti-flood measures. From 1 April 2012 this will be 25 people, 20 of whom are Roma. Residents of the village do not have any other work opportunities. A few residents work in Rimavská Sobota; others have left to work to the Czech Republic. Residents also occasionally work in brigades and in seasonal work in agriculture or forest management. The private sector in the village is not developed. Business activities are performed by a private businessman with a hauling company, Böviba s.r.o., focused on agricultural production.

The village's efforts are focused on the provision of basic life needs and preserving at least a minimal standard of life (sufficient food, preserving the standard of housing, education, cultural and social life), for which it uses a variety of instruments and possibilities. The village has, for example, good cooperation with a private businessman from Austria, who secures the cutting of wood in the regions. Aside from providing work opportunities, each year he secures wood fuel for the village. The village stores the procured wood in village spaces and sells it off to residents in material need for the purchase price in smaller amounts, because they do not have sufficient financial resources for creating larger stocks. The businessman donates a portion of the fuel wood.

Work opportunities for residents in a great measure are influenced by their level of education. This is lowest among the Roma residents, as 90% of them have only the primary education. Others largely have the secondary education without a school-leaving certificate (carpenters, electro technicians, plumbers, locksmiths, masons and farm workers).

The educational process in the village is provided at a nursery school and the primary school. They are located in a single building which is partially reconstructed and at present needs additional investment for repair and maintenance. The nursery school and primary school use Hungarian as their teaching language. At present 7-8 children attend the nursery school, though it has a capacity for 23 children. Children from the neighbouring village of Drňa also attend the nursery school. The school has its own sports ground, a school canteen and a children's club. An assistant teacher works in the school and has a share in creating the conditions necessary for overcoming the social barriers of children in the educational process. The school has 36 pupils and most are from socially low-inspirational environment. The village would welcome the more active connection and cooperation of the school to activities and programmes in

the village. Children attend the second level of primary school in Jesenské and Hostice.

Different associations and societies provide the cultural and social life in the village. In the past a village reading club operated here and the church choral group – today the women's church choral group Bárka – has a long history. Since 1948 the organisation Csemadok – the Hungarian social and cultural association in Slovakia – has operated in the village. The village quarterly publishes a village newsletter, the Šimonovce Watchman (Simonyi hírmondó). The village is known for organizing singing competitions – a regional competition of interpreters of traditional folk cimbolo music, which is regularly supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic in the national minorities programme. **Events, activities and development in village are realised with close and exemplary cooperation of local administration, the community centre and civic associations.**

This cooperation has had an impact on communal politics. When in the last communal elections the then mayor, Mr. Emil Madarász, left for retirement, Ernest Lakatoš became the new mayor. He had worked under the previous mayor (since 2004) (since 2004) in Šimonovce as a field social worker and was a statutory of the civic association Dúha (Rainbow). The village thus ensured the continuity of programmes, activities and priorities in its development.

The civic association Dúha Šimonovce originated in 2004. It has five members, and its activities are focused on community development, free-time activities, art and culture and charitable and humanitarian aid. It provides an information and consulting service, consultations, education, club activities, cultural events, food aid and others. It repeatedly obtains financial resources from different sources for activities which are held especially in the community centre (the community centre is under village administration). In 2005 it supported the cultural-social activities of the Nadácia Ekopolis (The Ecolopolis Foundation), with a sum of SKK 30,000. In 2007 it obtained SKK 50,000 from the Government Office of the Slovak Republic for activities in the community centre and in 2009 an amount of EUR 3,000 for the project "Activities in the Community Centre in the Village of Šimonovce". During the project training sessions were held for all Roma families. The mayor, members of the civic association and workers from the field social work programme in the village advised them how to use financial resources, how to apply oneself on the labour market, prepare children of preschool age for entry to school, organise different sporting and cultural activities in which parents could take part along with their children. One year later they obtained additional financial resources

(EUR 4,000) for the project “Activation of Roma residents in the village of Šimonovce”, which included activities focused on hygiene, health, cooking, ploughing the soil in gardens, and cultural and sporting activities. **With their activities they are aware that more significant change in the life style of disadvantaged groups can only be achieved by long-term, methodical and systematic health education adaptation. They have already achieved a positive change among Roma in the care of their own health (visiting paediatric surgeries more often, general practitioners, dentists, gynaecologists), personal hygiene and in the care of mothers for the health of their children (regular vaccinations, etc.).** The high measure of involvement of participants in the projects with the activities is notable. Aside from their own activities, they also get involved in the activities of other organizations and subjects in the region (a daily, summer, artistic camp for children and young people, etc.).

The most significant and most direct for socially disadvantaged families were the projects carried out in the village in 2006-2007 focused on ploughing and cultivation of potatoes and breeding of rabbits for slaughter. Both were financially supported in the programme “Programme for Integration of the Roma”, which was administered and managed by Nadácia Ekopolis in cooperation with PDCS (Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia). This involved a project of the American governmental agency US AID and was financed from resources of the Support for East European Democracy (SEED) programme, intended for the support and development of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. This was carried out in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia (localities in Kežmarok, Prešov, Rimavská Sobota) since 2003. The goal of the programme was to support cooperation of the majority and the Roma minority, the participation of the Roma in deciding the timely anticipation of possible conflicts and misunderstandings, to allow minorities to return to their cultural traditions, to develop talent, craft skills, to prepare Roma children and their parents for school attendance and for better integration into the surroundings they come into contact with every day.

The civic association Lúč Šimonovce – Sugár Simonyi originated in October 2005 with a focus on the development of the village, region and the travel industry (at present the activity is not developing). In 2006 it obtained resources (SKK 280,000) for the project **Production of rabbits for slaughter for the needs of socially dependent families.** A total of 30 families were involved in the project. Mainly families with many children and with small children were selected. At the beginning the families received materials on pens and two pairs of rabbits for breeding. The intent of the project was not only supplementing food for the family but also

expanding their own breeding and by the establishing of new breeding for other families by gifting one pair of rabbits to another family. The second project which ran in the given period simultaneously was a project of the civic association Dúha (Rainbow) – **Ploughing and cultivating potatoes** – supported by a sum of SKK 300,000. For cultivating of potatoes and vegetables selected families received land covering 330 square meters, seed potatoes and seeds. The 30 families involved successfully cultivated their crops and used them for their own needs. A positive, aside from ensuring stocks of food, was also the decline in the stealing of potatoes in the village which had been a regular problem before then. The programme of tilling the soil in the families actively continued for 2-3 years. **The residents, however, always ploughed the gardens by their own family houses. They devoted themselves primarily with cultivating of potatoes, vegetables and fruits for their own needs and became self-sufficient in these activities.** For ploughing (for payment of costs) they always used a small tractor, which remained in the ownership of the civic association. Two families who did not care for their own gardens got an “order” from the village mayor to clean their gardens and they again used them for cultivating of vegetables for their own needs.

In the village in the last year, after unsuccessful carrying out of a project of development of a fruit producer, the private entrepreneur liquidated the fruit orchard. Some 2,500 short-trunk apple trees had to be cut down and the land cleared. The village and the association decided with the families in the village and proposed to the entrepreneur that the apple trees be dug up and planted in their own gardens. The entire intention was realised and the trees were protected for the needs of the families. Even in this way they try to maintain in families a positive relation to the soil and to their own production of foodstuffs as a way of securing a living.

The raising of rabbits in the families was not a long-term success; the rabbits suffered from a “rabbit plague” and it was not possible to renew the breeding. Despite this, the families involved were left with positive experiences, the impact of which was discovered in the overall improvement of the social life in the village.

ROVIGA – Roviga Polgári Társulás – is another civic association, which originated in the village in May 2003. Its activities are, however, focused on the development of the village, region and travel industry in the context of cross-border cooperation. The association has for a long time now not shown any signs of activity.

The village of Šimonovce is also not passive as a subject. It successfully carried out a number of larger and smaller projects for development of the village with a direct impact on the Roma community.

An overview of project carried out by the village of Šimonovce, which had a direct impact on the local Roma community

- 2003 – Reconstruction of the nursery school
- 2004 – Government Office of the SR; Reconstruction of the school playground (SKK 50,000) Reconstruction of public lighting and local broadcast system (SKK 60,000) Support for founding of the community centre (SKK 633,867)
- 2005 – Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the SR; Infrastructure for Roma settlements - village of Šimonovce (SKK 25,543,436)
- 2005 – Open Society Fund Foundation; Club activities of the community centre in Šimonovce (SKK 46,560)
- 2005 – Government Office of the SR; Founding of the community centre (SKK 173,601)
- 2005 – Social Development Fund; Island of rest (SKK 255,239) – revitalisation of the square and creation of a leisure zone
- 2006 – Ministry of Finance of the SR; Reconstruction of public lighting (SKK 150,000), Gasification of boilers in the primary school (SKK 400,000)
- 2006 – Government Office of the SR; Activities in the community centre (SKK 35,000), Disinfestations, disinfection and elimination of biological refuse in the determined village - Šimonovce (SKK 42,000)
- 2006 – Social Development Fund; Programme of support for development of the community social work in villages (SKK 524,640)
- 2007 – Government Office of the SR; Strategy for improving the conditions for application of the local Roma community on the labour market (SKK 50,000)
- 2008 – Government Office of the SR; Activities in the community centre in Šimonovce (EUR 2,489.55)
- 2009 – Nadácia Ekopolis in the programme People for Trees, Project Trees for Today and the Future (EUR 1,760) – planting of village green spaces (56 new trees – hazelnuts, maples, sycamores, ginkgo) in the grounds of the primary and nursery school for aesthetic and functional division multipurpose sports grounds from the built-up part of the village and frequented communications.
- 2009 – Government Office of the SR; Safety roof (EUR 1,300)
- 2010 – Government Office of the SR; Connecting pavement (EUR 8,000)
- 2011 – Social Development Fund; Field social work in Šimonovce (EUR 45,105.29)

Since 2003 there has been a community centre in the village. It originated in the programme PHARE – Support for the Roma minority in the field of education with the goal of improving the education level of a national minority and supporting its integration into society, presenting positive results and experiences from programmes of assistant teachers, zero years, and others which were carried out. The reconstruction of the spaces of the community centre, supplemental activities and wages for social workers were financed from the state budget. After a one-year break (2004 – 2005) the village continued in those programme and activities of the community centre which are perceived in the village as appropriate and as instruments of social help for the majority and the minority. Continuity is secured through the Field social worker programme, financially covered by the Social Development Fund and the village budget. This programme has run continuously since 2005, and at present one field social worker and two assistants are working for the village of Šimonovce. Assistants are local, the field social worker from outside, because the village doesn't have a person with the required qualifications. The community centre in Šimonovce is a member of the Society of Community Centres and the Association of Community Centres.

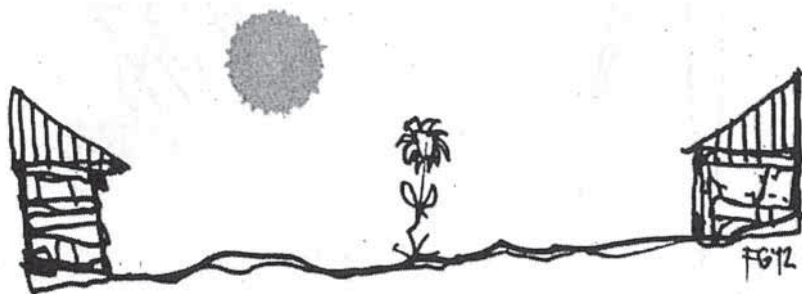
In 2008 43 selected families (Roma and non-Roma) from Šimonovce joined in, under the leadership of the community centre, to **a microloan programme focused on improving the environment and housing for socially disadvantaged families**. Families could obtain a non-guaranteed loan for a period of 4 years to a maximum amount of EUR 1,200. In order to connect to the programme, they had to fulfil certain criteria, e.g., to have any liabilities toward the village settled. Subsequently, with the cooperation of the village office and the community centre, the families planned a budget for the materials needed for reconstruction. After submitting a budget the financial resources were sent to the families at the village account. One member of the family handled the purchase of material with the assistance of a village worker or a community centre employee. From the financial resources the families carried out in their homes repairs of electricity and water, replacing of windows, the repair of facades, roofs and heating, the building of bathrooms or toilets. A component of the programme was mentoring from the organisation ETP Slovakia, which offered financial resources and training to a programme focused on managing finances – Plan for Your Future. At the course participant obtained awareness, skills and attitudes which are essential for adopting reliable techniques for good handling of money, related to earnings, outlays, savings, borrowing and investing.

Eight families joined with another programme **Let's Fulfil Our**

Dream – an 18-month savings programme, in which after saving the agreed portion the family obtained an amount matching the amount they saved. The families could use the money saved and obtained for a purpose agreed-upon in advance. They used it to repair or buy family houses, to get a driver's license or increase their education. A condition for obtaining the financial resources was also completing training focused on financial management. For example, the course Don't Be Afraid of Money was intended for bearers of social benefits. The course focused interactively on themes such as savings, loans, financial planning, and a household budget with interactive and used examples from everyday life. The programme was equally supported by the organisation ETP Slovakia.

The village obtained resources (2011, Ministry of Interior of the SR) for the support of safety and the elimination of potentially undesirable occurrences by building a security camera system.

The civic association Dúha (Rainbow) in Šimonovce is **the contact point for the Food Bank of Slovakia**. It shares in humanitarian aid, provides people in material need and multi-children families with food aid. This fact and good cooperation of the civic association with local administration were the reasons why Šimonovce (spaces unused in the village administration building) became the distribution centre for food aid provided from May of last year to citizens in material need in Slovakia. Mayors from the Districts of Rimavská Sobota, Poltár, Revúca and Rožňava, but also from villages in the Veľký Krtíš, Levice, Nové Zámky and Púchov Districts go to the distribution site according to a schedule. The village has no profit from this activity. Volunteers and activation workers regularly manually store tons of food which are brought in on lorries and store them into vans for the individual villages. From May 2011 to February 2012 they stored food aid for 40,000 people in material need.





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Good activities in the village of Rudňany

If in the framework of the Roma problem there are communities which are in general perceived as among the most problematic, certainly the village of Rudňany would be at or near the top of the table. With a Roma community of nearly two thousand in numbers, a portion of which lives in the abandoned buildings of a former mine (including the mining works themselves), it has been the “target” of numerous reports, newspaper articles and government visits have produced “disproportionally more promises than real acts”. With a certain measure of detachment the atypical village mayor Mr. Miroslav Bliščan once said that the number of visits in this village which have shown an interest in the Roma is certainly higher than the actual number of Roma in the village itself.

At first glance it can seem that in these conditions it is not even possible to carry out anything meaningful for this community, perhaps with the exception of urgent “extinguishing” of the most burning problems. The opposite is true, however. Miroslav Bliščan, despite many disappointments and failures, has never quit (and won't quit), the result of which is one of the most unique activities in the field of education which we could even come close to imagining in this place – a local Roma nursery school.

The beginnings of the village are recorded in the year 1354. In the 14th century this was a centre point of copper-mining activities in the Spiš region. The extraction of iron ore and mercury became important only in the 19th century. Rudňany became a sovereign customs location due to its profits from mining even before 1341. In 1787 the settlement has 33 houses and 187 residents. With further development extraction increased the number of residents nearly two-fold. In a register of residents as of 31 December 1869 Rudňany had 837 residents and 91 houses, 36% of whom were mining-related; however, 533 of them couldn't read and 742 of them couldn't write. At the end of the 19th century the mining and metallurgical industry from Vítkovice was concentrated here, predominately for the extraction of iron and modernisation of the mines. Rudňany became one of the largest producers of mercury in the state. The first mercury works were built here (at the end of the 19th century), and it operated until 1927. The construction of the metallurgical plants, where the copper and mercury ores could be processed, sorted and smelted, was of great importance. The local mines were nationalised in 1946 and were added to the state's national Iron-ore mine enterprise. The state-wide development of mining began. The construction of flats and cultural facilities began and in 1964 the construction of a new industrial plant for processing ore was built.

Even though the history of education in Rudňany reaches back to the first half of the 19th century, the development of schools really began in the 1930s and after the Second World War. The primary school building was opened in 1936. In 1955 the building for the new primary school was put into operation.

The Roma in the village do not have a long tradition in terms of the village history. Their immigration here took place in the 1950s, with buildings from the housing fund and the development of the mining sector. They worked as assistants employees and the former Local National Committee and the ŽB plant built barracks for this purpose. Along with them, their wives and family members also arrived. Later the question arises, what further. In the 1960s a part of the Roma residents moved themselves into the abandoned flats in the Pătoraká neighbourhood in the landslide zone of the village. Another part moved into the houses in the Zabíjanec part, which members of their families received for working in the plant. For a comparison - in 1970 there were 260 Roma in the village; in 1992 this was already 859 and as of 31 January 2012 1,940 Roma are registered here.

Currently Rudňany has 3,944 residents, 1,940 of whom are Roma. About 390 Roma live in the Pătoraká settlement, about 680 in the 5RP II location, about 470 in the Zabíjanec settlement, 290 at the Rochus site and approximately 105 live integrated in the village. The village has 12 homeless people on record who have permanent residence in the village without an address. Out of all the Roma 949 are men and 991 are women. Children under the age of 15 years total 1,021 and up to age 18 the number is a bit higher at 1,155.

This demographic development is reflected also in the number of pupils in the local schools. The local primary school has 492 pupils, 371 of whom are Roma; an associated school is attended strictly by Roma pupils, of whom there are 214. Of the two nursery schools in the village, Roma attend mainly the one in 5RP II there are 51 Roma pupils (and no non-Roma), and in the other there are only 3 Roma from the 47 total children.

After 1989 the mining in the village gradually went quiet. In the new industrial plant the mercury and agglomeration works were gradually shut down along with the extraction from the shafts Zimné, 5RP II and Jama Mier. No one at that time could have predicted that this would mean a complete shutting down of mining in the village. The Iron-ore works in Rudňany employed around 2,500 people; today there are only about 100 employees. In 1999 a Mining Guild was established in the village and in 2004 a Mining Archive. In that same year the extraction tower of the Jama Mier shaft was saved and declared a technological monument. Many young people left

the village for work or to go work abroad and most of those who stayed are dependent on state help. Adding a gas main, reconstructing roads and mainly the construction and renovation of flats for families with children are the main priorities of the village. It has built and renovated 92 flats. Because the Roma community lives largely in two parts of the village, in the 5RP11 part there are 58 flat units and in the Rochus section 29 flat units. The nursery and primary schools have also undergone reconstruction.

The Roma nursery school in Rudňany

The mysterious name 5RP11 is used to describe a part of Rudňany where buildings of the former mine were built during the second 5-year plan under the communist regime (thus the name in Slovak: 5RP11), then reconstructed and renovated into 31 flats. This territorial part originated after the mining stopped. Shaft 5RP11 was the first operation where mining activities ceased and the buildings were left empty. With reconstruction of the former social building 31 flats originated, and the renters moved here in 2001. The site is about 2 kilometres from the centre of the village. And this was one of the reasons why its residents decided to carry out small projects in cooperation with the ETP Slovakia programme *Tvoj Spiš* (Your Spiš). The projects were implemented in 2001 – 2005 and were focused on improving quality of life. In the scope of these activities a nursery school in this location began to operate. Erika Sabová, a local activist and director of this school from 2004 – 2006 wrote the following about her own experiences and observations for this publication:

“In 2002 I got an offer to work in the pilot programme Tvoj Spiš (Your Spiš), which was financed from resources of the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, as well as from local sources. I decided to accept the offer as a community activist. I was already a pensioner and I wanted to pay interest on years of experience acquired working with Roma pupils with this work. I began to work in the 5RP11 location together with my colleague Karol Novák, who came to Slovakia from Czech Republic as an activist for the People in Need organisation. In the beginning the access pavements were built, the gutters were repaired, a wood shed was built, benches were prepared in the resting space. A course on wicker broom-making ran which were offered to citizens with their spring cleaning in the village. I knew the residents of this locality quite well; indeed, as a teacher I had dedicated myself to raising and educating Roma children for more than 20 years. Many of them had been my pupils. When I began to regularly go to them, their request was: “Help our children, too, so that they are prepared to go to school like other children”. A request from the side of parents meant a great success for me, because to feel that the parents want their children to have an

equal starting for entering into the 1st year of primary school was fantastic.

A classic nursery school couldn't be organised due to the lack of spaces and hygiene facilities. We did manage to establish a preschool club with the support of the village mayor and enthusiastic parents. The preschool club began its activities in November 2002, in two small unlined rooms in a flat where families lived. Thanks to Mr. Igor Horváth, who prepared tables and chairs for us, we opened the preschool club for 17 children on 13 November 2002. From the start the frightened eyes of children were stuck to me, wondering what was going to happen. From my own teaching practice I know how very hard it is for children to overcome this entry into the first year of school. I remember very well how my Roma assistant Milan upon first entering the first grade cried for nearly two weeks and his poor grandmother had to sit with him at the table. Milan gradually grew into a skilled pupil. I selected him from three candidates for the job of assistant at the preschool club because of his modesty and tenacious character.

The work of a Roma assistant is very necessary with the education of small children. Roma children can already handle their mother tongue at that age. But for preparedness to the first year of school, they need to manage at least partially the Slovak language. And here is where the Roma assistant plays a very large role. Our children in the preschool club showed their first successes to us and their parents on St. Nicholas' Day (6 December) after only one month. Their short programme was and everyone was surprised. Tears of emotion flowed from more than one parent. The children enjoyed the packages St. Nicholas brought to them. The children learned a lot with regular visits to the preschool club. They knew some very nice Romani and Slovak songs, poems, rhymes, colours, numbers and were pleased by their work sheets. They gradually obtained larger vocabularies in the Slovak language, spoke short sentences and gradually began to speak Slovak quite well. After their work activities were over there was a small playroom where they enjoyed the toys and dolls and building blocks. Even their fingers began to listen better and they made beautiful houses and cars from the building blocks. Our activities lasted two hours each day. The children received homework which they handled with the help of the assistant Milan and their parents. At the same time the Roma assistant taught the parents how to help the children at home with their homework. The preschool club was heated only with electric heaters.

With strong frosts, when due to winter the club spaces could not be used, parents of the children invited us into their homes. They created good conditions for the education of their children.

The first Christmas tree, a programme for parents, but mainly the lovely toys which the children received created a really beautiful first Christmas for us. We didn't forget Mother's Day either. This was the first large celebration for our

mothers and grandmothers. The preschool club operated during the holidays, too; the teaching was repeated and the children got to devote more time to games focused on developing rough and gentle motor skills. The children enjoyed the bicycles they received from the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, Mrs. Klára Orgovánová. Today some of them have already completed their compulsory school attendance and some are still pupils.

As I've already mentioned, the preschool facility was placed in the spaces of a residential block, where our children lived with their parents and small siblings. We often heard the banging around and crying of small children who wanted to come to us and play. We decided to help with these small children, too, and we organised the **Bábika Centre**, for children age 1-5 years. The assistant from the preschool facility visited Roma families and explained to them the conditions for using the centre. A basic condition was that children come with a parent. It was nice to observe how the mothers behaved with their children. They played together with toys, made different pictures and houses with the blocks. They often mentioned that when they grew up they wouldn't have such opportunities. They enjoyed the fact that their children at least have this chance and they were happy to use it.

The spaces of the preschool club were used in the afternoon hours for several purposes. With the desire to learn something new, a group of women came who expressed an interest in using the spaces of the club for a course on handiwork. Given the fact that they fulfilled the basic idea of the club, to work more with families, children and other members of the community, we decided to fully support this initiative. Mothers and young girls met here and began to devote themselves to different handiworks. Courses ran daily from 3 February 2003 with the purpose of teaching women basic skills in the fields of sewing, manually and by machine, knitting, needlework for the needs of their families. They learned to sew children's trousers, knit socks, repair clothing. In the pre-Christmas time a course ran on preparing non-baked pastries, chocolate and other sweets. The civic association ZORE (Association of Citizens of Regional Activities), under the leadership of Mrs. Danka Pustulková organised in the village different projects in which some young Roma girls and women also participated. They managed at the start bobbin lace as well as wire-working. They gave away their works to more than one visitor. **The preschool club, like all of the activities in the space, was finished on 4 April 2004 due to the completion of the beautiful new nursery school.**

The assigning of the village to the *Tvoj Spiš* (Your Spiš) programme, a visit from Dutch ambassador Mr. Laurent L. Stokvis in the preschool club in the spring of 2003, a visit from the Government Office of the Slovak Republic and a representative of the Open Society Foundation – OSF in the preschool club, the results of work with the children, but also a little luck during the interview

of the mayor with representatives of ambassadors and the government of the Slovak Republic at the 2nd annual conference of the Tvoj Spiš (Your Spiš) programme in Bratislava in April 2003, contributed to the fact that the village was visited by representative of the United States military and they offered the construction of the nursery school. After a tour of the 5RP11 location the building of the former boiler-room was selected for conversion into a nursery school. The entire conversion was paid for and carried out by a company selected by a representative of the US military. This company also employed during the conversion a number of local Roma. In this same time the village was assigned to the project of the Open Society Foundation Bratislava NOS – OSF – Roma Initiative in Education (REI). This new project was carried out in the 5RP11 nursery school and at the primary school in Rudňany.

The nursery school was assigned by the Slovak Ministry of Education to the network of schools and school facilities in 2004. The basic material furnishings of the nursery school, as well as most of the paper, coloured paper, work paper and writing implements we received as a gift from the US military. Still in this same year the MŠ 5RP11 started operations with 51 children who were categorised according to age into three classes in the age from 3 to 6 years. Four pedagogical workers, three Roma assistants and three Roma mothers via activation work and two volunteers from abroad shared in the educational process. Assigned to our MŠ in the Open Society Foundation Bratislava project NOS-OSF REI were pedagogical workers of the preschool method Step-by-Step, from the educational foundation Dokorán, which was led by PhDr. Eva Wágnerová. The Roma assistants who had an interest in working with children underwent training and final exams and obtained an **Assistant Teacher's Certificate**. For achieving improvements in educational results of Roma children in our nursery school we selected the Step-by-Step programme. Preparation and organizing of classes to the centre of activities also helped improved the educational results. Work in groups and mainly the individual approach to the child created the foundation of the educational programme.

The children completed their morning hygiene with the help of the Roma assistants. A variety of toys already awaited them in the classrooms, cars for the boys and dolls for the girls. For little builders there were different building blocks available. The children played freely for a while the cook brought them breakfast. The first of our work gatherings was in the morning circle. This is a circle of friendship when the children can give a toy, touch, shake hands but also offer nice greetings. This gathering in the morning circle is very beneficial for a child. The teacher can see how the children interact. This is a time for practicing the things they already know but also expanding communications, connecting with Romani and Slovak songs and poems. The child isn't even aware that he or she is learning. She works according to the thematic plans in which the children

develop their own personality. Worksheets are a part of the given learning. Each day is focused on a different activity. We can never forget the Roma culture; it is here we use the opportunity to help them and their parents. Cooperation with Roma mothers and assistants in the class is very necessary and their participation in the educational process is very important. The children who come mainly from the Pătoraká location can't handle even basic words in the Slovak language. It was often necessary to interpret into the Romani language.

The Roma assistants, as well as the mothers, were very helpful with teaching basic hygienic habits. They were very necessary for carrying out the entire health programme which ran in the nursery school. And thanks to financial support for this project, we could once a week shower the children with the participation of their mothers. From the start they all cried, later they grew nicely used to it. The close cooperation with the family, the involvement of the mothers or grandmothers in the many activities in the classroom helped improve the preparation of the children.

Psychological examination for determining maturity for school has confirmed the great difference between children who attend a preschool facility a second year, first year and those who don't attend one at all. The results of education of children in the preschool club and in the nursery school were evident upon their entry to primary school. The children were assigned to a primary school where they nicely joined into the teaching process. The MŠ 5RP11 cooperated with the MŠ and ZŠ in the village. During visits in open hours it was possible to monitor the success of the children from the preschool facility.

Thanks to the great financial support of the Open Society Foundation NOS – OSF in the REI programme the MŠ was equipped with new aids, teaching equipment, toys, furniture, materials necessary for preparing meals. The entire kitchen was equipped with all the necessary material needed to meet hygienic norms for preparing meals. Meals for the MŠ are delivered from the ZŠ via a transport vehicle. The children have breakfast and lunch provided and during the project they also had additional food, mainly fruits and yoghurts.

In the scope of these activities an informal group of 5RP11 parents eventually formed – For educated children – Vašo sikáde čhave, which worked also on the project aim of building a children's park which in the afternoon hours would serve the children of the MŠ and in the afternoon children in the company of their parents. All of the products were prepared by the parents in this informal group under the guidance of Mr. Igor Horváth – a small house for playing, a swinging bench, a swing, climbing frames, a swing for small children, a wooden train, as well as timber benches.

A very important component of all of these activities is the cooperation with parents, without which many things would not be possible to do or would only be carried out with difficulty. The involvement of parents to support

programmed leads to better school-family relations as well as to better care by parents for their children. In cooperation with parents a number of programmes outside of school were carried out, like baking potatoes in nature, flying kites, Respect for the Elderly meeting with a pleasant children's programme and the preparation of gifts, the baking of gingerbread, preparations for St. Nicholas' Day and a Christmas gathering, regular chats with a paediatrician, sledding, carnival, Mother's Day, Children's Day and other social activities.

Perhaps not everyone agrees with the fact that a nursery school was built directly in a Roma locality which is distant from the centre of the village or town. I know that this does not lead to the integration of Roma children. But what is better? To integrate a few Roma children (3-4 more with capacity reasons cannot be accepted) in a preschool facility in a village or to create a space for preschool preparation for 51 children directly in the settlement. My experiences confirm the need for building an MŠ directly in settlements which are at a distance from the centre of a village because in such a case is closer for connecting the family, and the school from a communication viewpoint leads to the creation of a feeling of safety for the child (mama is near, the children know each other), school attendance at the MŠ is increased (if the parent cannot, the older siblings or an assistant can take the child, or they come alone), they minimise costs for clothing, transport, parent participation is increased in activities outside the MŠ, brigades and the like.

In 2003 10 children from the preschool club entered primary school. During the 8 years MŠ SRPII has operated a total of some 256 children who attended the preschool facility for at least one year have entered into ZŠ. Some of these children, mainly those who attended MŠ SRPII for only one year or weakly communicated, attended in the afternoon hours also a preschool club in the community centre.

Pupils who complete primary school can study further in the Secondary Vocational School in Bijacovce, which has a branch in Rudňany. The girls' department is The Practical Woman, the boys' is Forestry Production, and the most skilled from these can get a sawyer's license. The combined school in Rudňany has two organizational elements, a special primary school and a vocational school. After finishing a special primary school, pupils can educate themselves further in a two-year Seamstress department for girls and a three-year Wood Processing and Wood Production course for boys. Study end with a vocational certificate. In 2011 a total of 6 girls completed this school, though only two completed their exams and have a vocational certificate. A total of 5 boys finished, but only 4 obtained the vocational certificate. Since 2004, since the village has had the secondary school branch, a total of 13 girls and 9 boys have completed SOŠ Bijacovce with a vocational certificate. In 2012 two more girls and two more boys are set to complete their studies here.

In 2012 a total of 25 pupils should complete their studies at the special primary school. The vocational department with the special primary school is attended by 31 pupils and in 2012 7 boys and 7 girls should finish here. Since its origins in 2005 with the two-year programme in sewing, 18 girls have completed the study of clothing repair with final exams. In the three-year programme on processing wood and wood production, a total of 4 boys have finished with final exams.

According to the statements of teachers at the ZŠ, doctors and different visitors, there is a notable difference between the community from the 5RP II locality with which work has been done for more than 11 years and the community from the Zabíjanec part of the village. This is not only manifest in the children, but in the adults as well, whether in communication with offices, cooperation of parents with schools, with a paediatrician, on the level of housing, hygiene, dependence on alcohol, or additional education of children who finish compulsory school attendance. For these reasons the village is trying to build a missing nursery school and community centre in the Rochus location. For this purpose it has already managed to obtain a warehouse building which needs to be reconstructed and converted. The village does not have the financial resources, however, and it is necessary to get help from the Slovak government. This is an important step toward integration of the Roma and making a change to their lives.

The Zabíjanec location lies near the entrance to the village and approximately 500 people live there. It is made up of 3 housing blocks which in the past served for mine workers but at present are in a state of devastation. In the Rochus area, which is located closer to the centre of the village there live approximately 300 people, who moved here from Zabíjanec do to the newly built lower-standard flats in 2009. In the building of MŠ 5RP II there is also a community centre. This was put into operation in July of 2006. Even though we waited longer for a community centre, we had versus other villages one large advantage in relation to the project, namely that the community centre is located directly in the Roma locality. It has never been and never is empty. A variety of activities take place here: meetings, clubs, spiritual meetings, social and cultural events, receptions for different domestic and foreign visits'.

During the 11 years of work with the community in Rudňany many projects, activities and programmes have been carried out. An overview of all would exceed the possibilities of this publication, but for illustrative purposes we present an overview of some of those which are perceived as being successful and which could be recommended to other communities.

In the 5RP II location in the years 2001-2005 the TVOJ SPIŠ programme was carried out, in which these projects were implemented – access pavement, courses on sewing and handiwork, construction of a woodshed,

construction of benches, a basic course on making lace, a basic course on wire-working, improving the services of medical field assistants, a course on the production of wicker brooms, a club for preschool children, the MŠ 5RP II, a children's park, Amen pes prindžaras – we know one another – presentation, establishing and furnishing of the community centre, Humanitarian and Social Aid (HSP) and others.

In the years 2003–2005 through the Open Society Foundation – OSF, the project Roma Initiative in Education (REI) was carried out. This involved training teachers in the Step-by-Step methodology, training Roma assistants and obtaining an Assistant Teacher's Certificate, a health programme, lecture activities with a paediatrician, the children's club Bábika, a women's programme, financial support for the preschool facility for the provision of furniture, needed teaching technology, teaching aids, toys, equipping of the kitchen for serving meals, the children's park Slniečko, as well as the computer centre in the village, finish furnishing of the community centre, support of a project in the primary school. In 2005 this same association also supported a smaller project – a Better Chance with Books.

In the years 2005–2008 the programme TVOJ SPIŠ II – Connecting Non-governmental organisations to the Social Economy – was carried out (a sponsor of the programme was ESF IS EQUAL). The programme was focused on support of employment and the creation of job opportunities for the Roma from 5RP II.

From 2006 to the present the IDA savings programme and the Microloans programme have been running. The sponsors of the programme are the OSI/OSF and Habitat for Humanity International in cooperation with ETP Slovakia. This involves connecting the Roma from the 5RP II location to saving with the goal of reconstructing housing and improving the living conditions for a family (heating and preparation of hot running water) in lower-standard flats.

In the **Zabíjanec** location these projects were carried out: in the years 1997– 1999 with financial help of the government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Government Office of the Slovak Republic a community centre was built. The civic association Dôstojný život (A Dignified Life) was established. Its activities were focused on the development of Roma traditions, education, instructional courses and hygiene and laundry. It completed its activities in 1999. Within the TVOJ SPIŠ (Your Spiš) programme (2001-2005) these projects were carried out – Liquidation of Waste from the Zabíjanec Settlement and Drinking Water for Zabíjanec. The Open Society Foundation within its REI project, 2003-2005, established a preschool club for preschoolers.

The primary school in Spišský Hrhov – an example of how to educate well

An independent activity and in some cases a unique activity is the activity of the primary school in Spišský Hrhov. From an organizational point of view this school is not anything exceptional and we find this type of school in many villages. Its activities are unique in this context. It's almost unbelievable how many projects and activities which are carried out in it, the majority of which are done on their own or from school resources, or from resources from different donation schemes, grants, foundations and the like. The school is very active in writing applications for donations and grants. This fact is, however, the result of the overall atmosphere at the school, which is for the pupils, but mainly for the school employees, remarkably motivational. If we should characterise this school in brief, perhaps it would be best characterised by the fact that thoughts of the type it can't be done are absent here. In fact, the opposite is true. Ideas and initiatives are here highly welcomed and in the case of any problems, solutions are sought and not justification for why things are not feasible. And this is in our opinion a foundation for success. We do not have to specially emphasise that this is not simply found alone in the Spišský Hrhov school, but is a result of hard work and good mutual relations in the whole school and in the village as a whole.

The primary school with a nursery school in Spišský Hrhov is a fully organised state countryside school with Slovak as its teaching language. The school has 9 grades and in accordance with international standards for classification of education (ISCED) offers a primary education for approximately 270 pupils and a pre-primary education for 60 pupils in a nursery school every school year. The educational process is provided by 20 fully qualified teachers and professional employees.

From the total number of pupils, more than half (exactly 51%) are of Roma origin, which to a significant measure influences the character of the school's educational programme with elements of inclusion and enrichment by a multicultural dimension and cooperation with non-profit and non-governmental organisations. This, which many schools in the region consider as a negative element in education and their existence, here in the School in Spišský Hrhov has become a positive example of problem-free co-existence, cooperation and the removal of minority tensions and barriers. In the following sections we will present a number of examples of good work from the viewpoint of school management. The Roma representation of pupils is created by children from Spišský Hrhov

and the marginalised community in Roškovce. These two communities are characterised diametrically by a different social environment, method of housing, the number of children in families, hygienic habits and the approach of pupils to school obligations. Despite this, the school environment accepts pupils from both communities and makes the effort for an individual approach.

It is perhaps banal to note the fact that the school director knows all of the pupils (currently 270) by name and obviously regardless of differences in origin and nationality, which contributes to the exceptionally personal approach and feeling of importance from the viewpoint of the self-confidence of the pupils. Pupils coming from marginalised communities in particular respect this fact and are aware of a position of equality among majority residents. This method of approach of the school leadership brings feedback with the solving of disputes, which are rare anyway. The Roma pupils visit the school director during breaks without bashfulness or fear, with a feeling of satisfaction that their problems and attitudes are accepted and resolved.

The primary school in Spišský Hrhov has earned the reputation as a modern, democratic and rapidly developing institution of the family type where school—pupil—parent relations are an elementary element in the process of management and communication. Regardless of nationality close contact is built especially with parents of Roma pupils, who regularly communicate with the school leadership and class teachers in person or by telephone and occasionally through e-mail. The school leadership and the pedagogical corps to a maximum extent respect the individuality of pupils, their social origin and the environment from which they come. Parents perceive the process of education at school positively, and they join directly in activities at school and outside of school, are in contact with the school and through their input and cooperation improve the educational process. A well-developed school educational programme with elements of inclusion ensure balanced personal development of the pupils.

The school ranks among its priorities the teaching of foreign languages, computer literacy, strengthening of the social and environmental awareness of pupils, respecting regional and folklore traditions, increasing reading literacy and a wide scale of different activities which are not commonly accessible at schools of the same type in this region. It places great emphasis on thorough preparation of pupils for studying at secondary schools. This is also shown in the excellent results of testing which the pupils achieved in Monitor 9 in the scope of the district during recent years. It's pleasing to note that each ninth class has a representation of Roma pupils who are not only finishing their

primary education with a successful percentage result in the monitor, but are continuing on to secondary school and vocational school in the district. Proof of the attractiveness and popularity of the school is also its unprecedented medialization both at home and abroad, when for the past two years it has appeared in some 30 contributions in print media and 20 television contributions in the primary news reports of Slovak and foreign television. Nearly 30% of media contributions, particularly in TV Markíza, were associated exclusively with programs and activities carried out especially for Roma pupils.

The study of foreign languages at the school, in addition to having qualified teachers, were also enriched by **two lecturers from the USA and a lecturer from Great Britain**, who during two school years improved the quality of the classrooms and English language circles and carried out many activities through which pupils deepened their knowledge of the language and the countries where English languages are spoken. Due to the origin of several religious primary schools in the close vicinity of the village and thus growing competition, the local school needed to make itself more attractive and differentiate itself from others. Foreign teachers were a brilliant example for improving the quality. From the viewpoint of the representation of Roma pupils and the fact that already at that time many of their parents worked in Great Britain, they used the presence of foreign lecturers to help Roma pupils focus on conversation, practice correspondence and simulate situations needed for travelling and working abroad. Roma pupils showed unexpected interest in attending afternoon activities and clubs with lecturers and even spend weekends with them through space provided at the school. The result of their work is expressed in the very distinct shift in the use of a foreign language and interest in improving it. The stay of these foreigners was financed from the school budget, and accommodation was provided to them free of charge. The lecturers provided education to the parents of our pupils, too, in afternoon and evening courses of different levels. Nearly half of the parents were of local Roma pupils at the school.

An interesting contribution exclusively for Roma children was the grant appeal by the Orange Foundation in the field of education, where a small project was submitted in the amount of EUR 3,000 with the name: **"Let's Give the Weak a Chance."** After its approval, a group of 50 Roma children were selected who during the summer holidays and under the leadership of teachers and volunteers from the ranks of secondary school Roma students from Spišský Hrhov took part in activities focused on increasing literacy in the English language. Each pupil received a bilingual dictionary, writing implements, paper and notebooks, which they used

during the project. Paradoxically, during the holidays the school was full, because these children didn't spend their summer time by the seaside or with their grandparents. The school livened up their summer boredom, which is a habit with Roma pupils. The brilliant outcome and positive element of the project was the interest in continuing in language activities even in September through the afternoon school clubs.

Through an appeal of the project **Comenius** an approved lecturer was approved at the school for teaching the German language. Upon writing the application itself, the school leadership declared the obligation for work at a school leading two club activities for Roma children. In addition to these, pupils of the first degree of primary school also can learn Italian. The school has available a modern language centre outfitted with audio technology for a modern system of learning languages. Roma pupils have unprecedented interest in translating the texts of songs, mainly hip hop tunes, which are currently mainstream for them and supported by the dance club at the school.

Keeping in mind the need for increasing reading literacy not only of Roma pupils, with the help of its own resources a new glassed-in library was built in the spaces of the school hallways where pupils have the opportunity to look over books during each break. The idea of building a library, which until then was situated in three cabinets in one classroom, was and still is to also increase interest in reading and working with texts through a large number of activities planned during the whole year on the plane of school work.

The director of the school likewise contributes a bit to increasing the visits to the library. Through his own activity called **"not-a-test"** where the pupils through breaks tell the contents of books they've read with the possibility of obtaining a small reward. A large number of guided activities at the library also support attendance here, which is the main goal with increasing the culture of reading. The project itself or the "not-a-test" activity from its own beginning has brought nonpareil and unexpected success. Pupils who borrow and read a book through the school library subsequently can during breaks see the director and bring the publication read to show, but mainly talk about the contents, interesting passages and respond to questions from the director. Subsequently, if the pupil fulfils the required criteria (thus far not a single case of cheating has been seen), he or she gets a ticket with the signature of the director confirming the reading of the book. This allows the pupil to evade an examination or a small assignment. It functions as a kind of "joker" which the pupil can use one time to evade an exam or assignment. The positive benefits are the hundreds of books read by Roma pupils who often with verbal difficulties

but without fear make reference to the literature read. It is interesting that some Roma come multiple times each week.

The primary school in Spišský Hrhov has in recent years been a successful applicant and initiator of projects from obtained from resources from the European Union, company philanthropy and foundations supporting education. Among the most important of these is the project titled **“Let’s Learn about the Slovak-Poland Border Region,”** where together with a partner school from the Polish Poronin pupils had the opportunity in the course of one year to visit tens of places, villages and natural sites on both sides of the Spiš region; they carried out many common crafts activities and published a tourism book and a dictionary in three languages. The project was supported through the Prešov VÚC by a sum of EUR 50,000. Roma pupils took part in each activity – excursion, craft workshops, or cultural activities – testimony of which is the number of photographs used in publications documenting all of the common gatherings with the Polish partner. Enjoyable is the fact that the Polish pupils from the partner schools without prejudice or other barriers made friends with Roma pupils from Spišský Hrhov and still communicate today via e-mail. This project helped to a significant measure knock down in our Roma prejudices toward themselves and put them in an equal space in the community.

Another international project in the cross-border cooperation programme is the grant obtained in which the school in Spišský Hrhov is the first leader of a project named **“Get to Know Your Friends”**. This activity brought pupils the opportunity to participate in an international school in nature and preparation of a presentational DVD about life at school. And here pupils from the Roma community were not in the background, because they participated in competitions in the scope of the project, partly for those aware regarding facts about Poland and Slovakia, and equally also for the filming of the video presentation about life in the village and at the school.

Together with a Czech partner from Moravany and a Polish school from Poronin pupils implemented the project **“Christmas Gathering”** supported by the Polish institute in Slovakia. The idea originated with school leadership, because they utilised the sponsor programme of the Polish institute in Bratislava. The project peaked with a rich Christmas cultural and folklore event in Spišský Hrhov with the presentation of traditional holiday customs and a tasting of international cuisine. An important aspect of the project was its multicultural and ethnic dimension, since Roma pupils successfully represented the Spišský Hrhov school and brought their own temperament to the stage through costume, music,

dance and the spoken word. Again, this isn't the first time that have walked away with great success and admiration. With these activities which were a continuation of previous performances the self-confidence of this community could be felt and seen.

With participation of partners from a Polish school the project **"Crafts Gathering"** was carried out, in which approximately 20 craftsmen from the Spiš were presented and these demonstrated and trained pupils in individual crafts and skills. The idea originated due to close cooperation with local craftsmen, many of whom are parents of pupils at the school. This entire activity was sponsored by small local businesses, and the school did not have to use any of its own resources. Roma children from the school were an important element of the entire event, because they demonstrated skills particularly in working with wood during the making of flutes and fujary (a woodwind instrument), but likewise with decoration of painted eggs and naïve paintings on glass. Through club activities we continue in maintaining the importance of traditional crafts creativity.

Subsequently, through an appeal of the Orange Foundation, applicants were successful regarding a small grant in the amount of EUR 3,000 with a project named **"Let's Teach Children the Traditions of our Forefathers – Crafts of the Spiš"**. With this project the school cooperated closely with local non-profit organisation and carried out over a six-month period hundreds of hours of crafts production of small objects with needlework, bobbin-lace, lace-making, wire-working, painting on glass, carving and others. Nearly all of the pupils in the school joined in, including those from special education classes. Again great involvement and interest was shown by Roma pupils regarding small artistic craft work. The exhibition which ended the official part of the project was proof of the skilfulness and adeptness of the Roma pupils. All of the invited guests in fact saw not only the products of Roma pupils but also their own work with the demonstration of products of crafted objects.

Among others, the school also became involved with the project **"An Equal Chance"** in the period from the start of 2008 up to the end of 2009, whose goal was the creation of a support system for the social integration of Roma pupils, reducing the number of segregated classes only with Roma pupils, creating a model of integrated (inclusive) school environment. Four educators and approximately 80 pupils joined in to the project at the primary school in Spišský Hrhov. The purpose of the project was also increasing the quality of education for minorities, eliminating stereotypes and prejudices in upbringing and education, increasing professional competency and adaptability of pedagogical workers for accepting intercultural diversity with the direct connection of Roma pupils

as partners during the creation of authentic teaching materials with the use of their new e-learning abilities acquired within the project.

In the project, which was exclusively an internal activity, schools without the opportunity of a grant or sponsor, brought an interesting innovative methodology to teaching in the second level of primary school. Through an activity with the name: **“Tourist Guide Services”** together with a lecturer from Sandwell College, University of Birmingham from Great Britain, the pupils from the school became a part of improvement of the intensive language and professional preparation for tour guide services in the region. Although only one Roma pupil from the seventh grade was connected to this activity, she today without any problems leads us through the village and describes all of the major landmarks in very good English.

The foundations Deťom Slovenska (To the Children of Slovakia) through the Hodiny deťom (Children’s Hour) offered the school a non-recurring financial grant in a project with the name **“An herbal mosaic – a step for the young toward health”**. Thanks to these supports (approx. EUR 5,000) pupils cultivate approximately 60 types of medicinal plants in the school grounds, process and dry them and prepare teas for their own consumption. Each pupil at the school took part regularly in a tea-tasting event.

Pupils from the school in the Slovak-wide **Medicinal plant olympics** won first place. Roma pupils in the second degree of primary school during their English classes looked over English translations and descriptions of herbs and medicaments which they subsequently processed into coloured posters and interactive presentations in the teaching of informatics. It is wonderful to follow pupils in the school’s herb garden, everyone without regard to origin, as they are able to name the herbs and describe their usage and medicinal effects.

It’s impossible to leave out the cooperation of the school with an Austrian volunteer and student of Roma cultural studies at university in Vienna **Barbara Tiefenbacher**. This philanthropist and activist, for the purpose of improving the social area of the Roma in Europe, regularly supports the school not only financially but mainly by the opportunity to participate in international meetings in the fields of culture, art and education. Many interesting activities have already been carried out in common. Thanks to her contacts the school obtained 10 computers from a Viennese bank, one condition of which is that they are used by Roma pupils.

A specific activity which to a certain measure intervenes above the framework of the school itself is the programme of the Regional

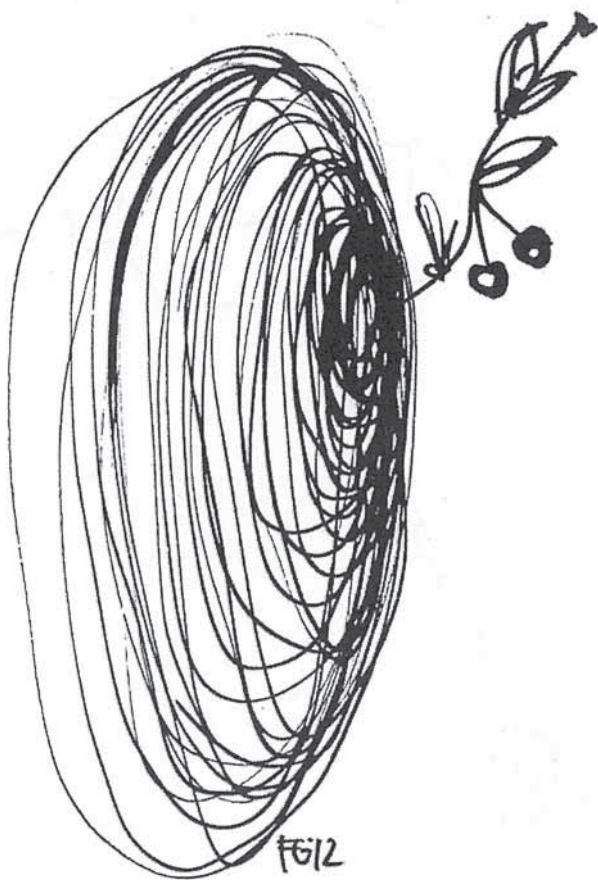
development partnership called the Roma Educational Development Fund (RED Fund). This involves tutoring of selected intellectually gifted Roma students under the guidance of the school director, financed by American donor and philanthropist Jarret Schecter from New York, who is known for activities in the process of supporting education of pupils coming from marginalised communities. Currently the fund supports three former pupils of the primary school who are at present participating in the language activities of the school and closely cooperating with the director as tutors. Two of the pupils are students at the gymnasium in Levoča and one is already an undergraduate at a university studying physiotherapy. This student helps the school in the form of volunteer work with the organising of summer educational activities.

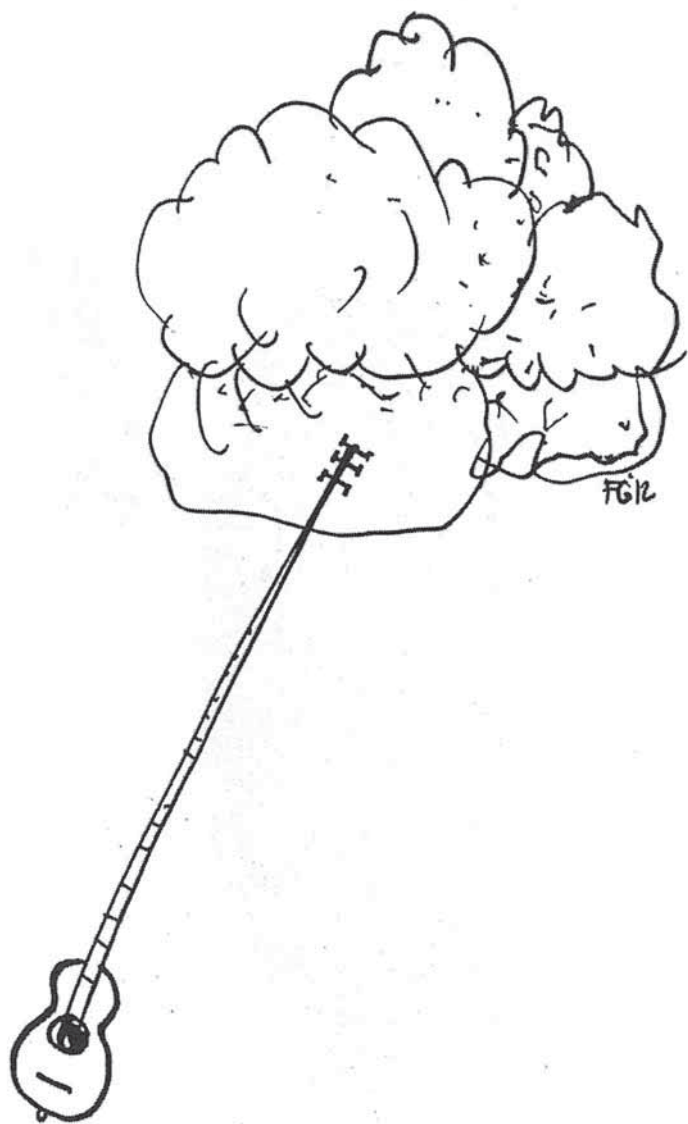
A significant agent of integration of Roma pupils and their social inclusion is also close cooperation with the organisation People in Need Slovakia with the organisation of afternoon activities in the segregated community in Rošovce. Together with volunteers from this organisation the school carries out so-called green days for all pupils of the school, with the aim of demonstrating the equality of people of different races, the needs for protecting the environment and many other subjects.

The school is at the moment carrying out a project called **“The World of Bread – Bread of the World”**. Its goal is the carrying out of non-traditional teaching strategies developing the pupil's relations to nature, crafts, traditions and subsequently the acquiring of certain competencies in entrepreneurship. The connecting theme will be **bread** – its production, traditions, different types of bread in the world, sales and advertising. **A part of the project is devoted exclusively to the Roma tradition of baking unleavened bread with the name *marikle*.** Pupils coming from the settlement in Rošovce in particular know the period when this unleavened bread was one of the few types of food in times of distress. It is an effort by the developers of the project – the teachers – that children coming from socially stronger environments have the possibility to follow this aspect of the life of the Roma. The pupils will deal with subjects in six blocks of interactive forms and experiential activities. The pupils with the help of experts will carry out activities in the form of discussion and case studies on the subject of business plan preparation, presenting, production, building of oven, baking, sales management and the like. They will try to “sell” their own handmade bread and baked goods with ingredients from their own herb garden. In the final phase of the project meetings will be organised in the village with the presentation of project outcomes and invited Roma and non-Roma residents of the village. A total of 120 Roma pupils and 30 Roma parents are involved in

the project.

In the following months the school, through cooperation with a methodological-pedagogical centre, is launching a day-long educational system for pupils from marginalised Roma communities, which in practice means that these pupils will have until approximately 5:00 p.m. each day during the work week the opportunity of selection a wide spectrum of free-time activities. The cost for computing and teaching technology for realizing this day-long educational system reached a total of EUR 12,000 from the resources of the project.





The Podsadek community centre in Stará Ľubovňa

We would in the present find many community centres all over Slovakia, and with a clean conscience we can say that many of them perform very quality and meritorious work in their communities. Their activities would deserve an independent publication in and of themselves, but for this publication we selected as an example of good work only of these many good community centres.

The town of Stará Ľubovňa is a district town located in the northern part of the Prešov Region. It is the historic centre of the region which has had for a long time many positive but also negative priorities. This is a region which probably has the most represented individual nationalities. In a relatively small area the Slovaks, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Roma, Germans, Gorals, Poles, Jews etc. have lived alongside one another. This is a region which ranges as one of the most heavily visited areas by tourists in Slovakia. In addition to the well-known castle in Stará Ľubovňa and the outdoor museum of architecture (skanzen) beneath it, here is also found such "jewellery" like the Pieniny Mountains with its rafting tradition, the spa Vyšné Ružbachy with its unique thermal crater and sand nearby is the well-known pilgrimage site Litmanová and others. At the same this region has for the long-term had the highest unemployment (and not only in recent years but also deep into the past), the result of which is the presence of such social phenomena like emigration (mainly to North America), the origin of tinkering, migration for work and the like.

The town of Stará Ľubovňa itself belongs from a demographic view among the medium-large towns in Slovakia. As of 31 December 2010 a total of 16,210 residents lived in it, of which 2,057 are considered to be Roma. According to data for the past years the number of residents of the town as well as the Roma community has shown a moderate rising trend. This is shown in more detail in Table no. 9.

Table no. 9 – Number of residents in the town of Stará Ľubovňa

Year	Number of residents in Stará Ľubovňa	Number of Roma in Stará Ľubovňa	Number of Roma in Podsadek
2007	16 213	1 833	959
2008	16 276	1 909	971
2008	16 296	1 961	1 021

The Roma community in the town makes up overall 12.69% of all residents and we can find it primarily in the town part known as

Podsadek, where approximately half of the town's Roma live (more exactly 1,083 people). A smaller community is also at Továrenská Street, where approximately 120 people live. A very positive phenomenon is the fact that a significant part of the Roma community (estimated at up to 854 people) lives in the town (partially) integrated or stated otherwise diffused among the majority population.

Both Roma communities in the town, at Továrenská Street as well as in the Podsadek area, are significantly different.

In the Podsadek settlement there are 35 address numbers. In the houses registered under those numbers there are 204 families. For one address number is also a number of buildings. The buildings are brick and there are no shacks in the settlement. The properties are to a predominate measure owned by the residents of the settlement; however, they do not typically have heritage actions settled. The settlement is supplied with electricity, water and last year began to install sewerage which is at present awaiting approval before completion.

The residents at Továrenská Street live in 17 container homes (18 families). These container homes have electricity, and water is available from one common source.

In view of the fact that the most numerous Roma concentration in the town is in Podsadek, it is only logical that work for a community centre is concentrated in this location. This, however, doesn't mean that others should have their access to the community centre limited. Like in other comparable communities, in Podsadek there is a significant representation of children and youth, which logically leads to the fact that the priority for activities are oriented on this target group. From the total number of 1,083 people in Podsadek, 497 are children to the age of 15 years, and an additional 68 are aged 16-18 years. Overall, there are 565 children under 18 years of age in this locality, which is 52.17% of all residents. People of productive age (18-60 years) number 509 and 9 residents of the settlement are age 60 years or older. In relation to employment, approximately 30 people in the settlement are employed. Half of them travel for work and the other half work in the forest and in anti-flooding measures. Approximately 5% of the residents are on a disability pension. Residents from Továrenská Street work only in the scope of activation work.

A total of 250 children from Podsadek attend the primary school in Podsadek. Ten children in Podsadek are assigned to a special class. A number of children attend the special school in town. A total of 95 Roma pupils attend this school, among them are all school-aged children from Továrenská Street. There are three primary schools in Stará Ľubovňa which children of Roma residents attend according to the place of residents

partially integrated in the town. To the present two students with a school-leaving certificate are registered in the community and two students are continuing their studies at university. More than 30 pupils study at the secondary school with no school-leaving certificate, three of whom have already successfully completed their studies and four of whom will finish in 2012.

The community centre (KC) itself originated in November 2003, as the result of cooperation of the town of Stará Ľubovňa and the civic association ETP Slovakia. A basic condition which has been applied with community centre activities from the start is the provision of complete services for the community – the working title was *From the Cradle to the Grave*. This is a set of activities focused on basic social, health, work, financial and legal advice, educational activities, activities related to housing, out-of-school activities, a preschool club and the like.

One of the first activities of OZ ETP in Stará Ľubovňa and in Podsadek was the project *Humanitarian and Social Aid* (HSP), which was financed by the IOM (International Organisation for Migration). Thirteen villages and two towns – Stará Ľubovňa and Podolíneč – were connected to this project in the Stará Ľubovňa District. The target group was made up of Roma who were born before 9 May 1945 (i.e., before the end of the Second World War). In the Stará Ľubovňa District this project helped 166 clients. In the first phase they were provided with material aid (food, wood, blankets, etc.) and socially weaker clients were offered emergency aid (stoves, prepaid electricity, gas and water, etc.).

Aside from the aid for the Roma, a positive of the Humanitarian and Social Aid project was also that these activities in a significant way helped start up the community centre's activities and partially provided for its material-technical furnishings. Social consulting is offered daily in the spaces of the community centre for clients of the project as well as for all members of the community. Regular club activities have begun to develop. On a regular basis – minimally twice a week – different social and cultural events are organised for clients, like: the showing of films, social games, lectures of different types, reading of books, celebrations, acquiring certain practical skills, cultural performances and excursions. A special type of aid was also in the form of health care. During the entire period of the project Humanitarian and Social Aid medicines were paid for, clients had regular meetings with a doctor and in the club they had the opportunity to measure their blood pressure. Many clients were offered health aids on the recommendation of a doctor. Activities of a similar type are very useful during the creation of mutual positive relations with the community and for knowledge of it.

During the course of the project contact with the entire Roma community was made and mainly with youth who found space in the club where they could regularly meet and develop club activities. The project at the time was done by one social worker and a coordinator for the entire Stará Ľubovňa District. The Humanitarian and Social Aid project itself officially ended on 31 January 2006, but during its implementation another project started in the Roma community in Podsadek. The project was supported from the initiative EQUAL in the scope of the European Social Fund and focused on the development of work activities and connecting non-governmental organisation to the social economy.

The above-mentioned projects of the community centre were not the only project focused on the Roma community in the town and their official completion did not mean the end of activities with this target group.

Projects of the town of Stará Ľubovňa focused on the Roma community

Poverty and especially generational poverty in Slovakia are among the most serious challenges facing our society, in which some people are still the ones socially excluded from participation in decisions, employment and material sources and from integration into the wider society. The Roma especially often experience a combination of disadvantaged housing, limited access to social and other services, infrastructure, geographic isolation associated with the low level of education, a high number of people who have not completed a primary education and with high unemployment. All of these factors lead to a poverty which is handed down from generation to generation. The town of Stará Ľubovňa pointed to this level of the problem and its seriousness in 2003 with a proposed Programme for Economic and Social Development in Individual Area – Romagende, the result of which was the origin of the above-described community centre.

From 1 May 2005 the project *Community in Motion – A program of support for the development of community social work (KSP) in villages*, which was financed from the European Social Fund and the Social Development Fund, began being implemented. This project was very suitably overlapped with activities of the already existing community centre, for activities which were logically linked and from which it factually emerged.

In this period continual, more intensive work with children and youth began along with regular meetings in the community centre, the monitoring of truancy, finishing studies, help with school selection, cooperation with the police, cooperation with UPSVaR – the rehabilitation

of families, intensive cooperation with the department of social affairs of the town of Stará Ľubovňa and the like. At this time two community social workers were working in the community along with four assistants to the community social workers, employed thanks to the KSP project.

In 2008 the project *Community in Motion* moved on to the second phase. Like in the first stage, six field social workers carried out the project. The change was only in the work positions (four field social workers and two assistant field social workers). Also as in the first phase, this time the main goal of the project was also improving the quality of life of socially disadvantaged residents of the town and their integration into society through renewal of their ability to live an independent life. Field social work (TSP) is realised here through an individual approach to individuals, families, groups in their natural surroundings. Social advice is provided daily in the community centre as well as in the field. It successfully connected to the organizing and continuing in all social and free-time activities for children and youth. Young people who study at secondary schools are worked with more intensively. In this period they began to organise summer camps for children and youths.

The Community in Motion – Phase II. officially ended on 30 April 2010. On the basis of its running results the town of Stará Ľubovňa had great interest in continuing with the TSP even after its completion and therefore responded to the current appeal of the Social Development Fund and consented also with the condition of financing two jobs. The project for continuing with TSP was submitted in 2009; however, for formal reasons it was not supported. Despite this, the town financed further the TSP activities and from its own budget paid for the wages for employees for an additional six months.

Because of the financial crisis, however, the town was forced to partially limit the activities of the community centre. Some activities did continue, however. Among others, it allowed the continuation of the activities of the already mentioned ETP Slovakia, which carried out in this community from October 2009 to April 2011 a project titled *Bridging the Communities in Central and Eastern Slovakia, which was supported financially from a Norwegian financial mechanism and the state budget of the Slovak Republic*. The target group was families and individuals experiencing generational poverty, predominately from the Roma community and also those who work with them. Educational, instructional and social activities were realised with a "from cradle to grave" approach. Three mutually connected modules responded to the need to strengthen human, social and economic capital.

In the period from May to October 2011 the activities of the community centre were significantly limited. Two part-time workers and two graduates in the scope of graduate practice provided only essential activities. Only basic social consulting was provided, while contact was maintained with cooperating institutions and work in the field was limited. Free-time activities for children and young people were no longer possible to provide regularly, but only sporadically with the help of volunteers.

In August 2011 the decision of the Social Development Fund was delivered to the town of Stará Ľubovňa regarding ratification of the repeatedly submitted project for continuing Field Social Work (TSP) Community in Motion – Phase III. Subsequently, in September, a selection process was held for four positions of field social worker (TSP) and two positions as assistant field social worker (ATSP). The selected workers began their jobs on 1 October 2011.

One interesting activity was the project *Bridging the Communities in Central and Eastern Slovakia*. In the scope of this project a broad spectrum of activities were carried out in the community centre focused on children and young people (e.g. Preschool preparation – for children age 4-5 years; Graphic imagination – developing motor skills, imagination and exercising of school knowledge in the form of playing for children age 6-10 years; Merry children – development of intellectual knowledge and development of manual and motor skills for children age 10-14 years; Young mother – for girls age 14-18 years; Creative hands – theoretical and practical preparation, baking, cooking and household skills for children age 11-16 years and others), for adults (e.g. Crossroads – support for personal development for obtaining life and social skills; We're not afraid of money – training focused on financial literacy for adults; Sexual and anti-drug education – six young people from the community are professionally trained so that they can perform as lecturers of their own generation; and others), but also cultural activities (e.g. Choral group – practicing songs and music for young people age 14-22 years; Roma animators – 3 groups lead young animators from the ranks of Roma youth; Culture and history of the Roma – young people trained by experts, a historian and a reporter, work as journalists to record the stories and memories of older people for future generations; and others), spiritual activities (e.g. Spiritual meetings – leading and guiding of Roma animators, help with internal growth and discovering the features of a health personality; and others); Process of transformation – in the scope of this seven mentors worked at the community centre, and each selected one protégé from the target group, set goals they could achieve and helped them achieve that goal – in our case the mentors devoted their protégés in the fields of education, employment and help with treating

dependencies) and other activities.

In what way was this project unique to a certain measure? It showed clearly that if broad-spectrum and intensive investment is made to a community (and not only financially, but also human capital, activities, real opportunities), the community begins to change and will show positive results. It is not possible, however, to relent in these activities or to do them unsystematically and formally.

Aside from the community centre and the projects already associated with them, activities were also carried out directly in the community focused on education, housing and improving the overall social situation. In this case the activities were not connected with “classic” educational activities (e.g. finishing education, stipends and the like) or the construction of lower-standard flats, but activities associated with the process of accumulation (saving) of finances aimed at improving the quality of existing building or achieving defined previously defined goals. This was the project *IDA – Individual Development Accounts* (financed by the Open Society Institute), whose intention is to help clients from families with low incomes to increase their standard of living. The goal of these savings activities are:

- personal development – obtaining a driver’s license, buying a PC, costs for achieving a university education,
- investment into housing – buying a house, flat, repairs, building a bathroom, installing water, repairs of windows and the like,
- starting up a business, expanding a trade license.

A client connected to the project after choosing a goal regularly saves a pre-determined sum for a certain period of time. After fulfilling the conditions the client is then offered a 1:1 matching bonus to the saved sum, which must be used for a pre-determined purpose. A total of 75 clients joined into the project in the first stage and 54 of them completed it successfully. Another 16 clients successfully completed the second phase, and currently there are 33 clients from the town of Stará Ľubovňa connected to the project. Even though the project was set up for socially disadvantaged citizens threatened by poverty, to a great measure residents of the Podsadok Roma settlement were involved in it. Clients who were successful in the savings programme can request the provision of a microloan.

Tied to the savings project was a microloan project called *Habitat*, in the scope of which purposeful loans are made tied to help with improving the living conditions of families with low incomes. The loans are provided with the consent of the town only to those clients who successfully finished the savings project. At the end of 2011 a total of 45 clients from

throughout the town were involved in the project (priority, however, was given to those from Podsadek). Three clients have already paid off their microloan.

We can also record similar examples in the plane of work with children and youth. And despite the fact that the community is still lacking positive models, in the scope of the activities provide in the community centre focused mainly on evoking positive changes and support for education, a group of young people have begun to be activated. As of the present two students with a school-leaving certificate have been registered in the community and two students are continuing their studies at university. Now more than 30 pupils study at secondary schools without a school-leaving certificate, three of whom have already successfully completed their studies and another four will finish in 2012.

Since 2005 the independent civic association **Humanita v komunitách (Humaneness in Communities)**, which originated for the support and development of outside-of-school, free-time and educational activities for children and young people in the Roma community in Podsadek, has worked with the community centre. This civic association obtained financial resources for its activities from private donors and grant schemes of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and the Government Office of the Slovak Republic. Since 2005 a great variety of activities took place in the community, from which we would like to present as an example the presentation of a book by Adam Bartoň "Don't be Afraid of Gypsy" (in 2006), at which its translator – Mgr. Peter Horváth – took part. This didn't just involve a common book presentation, but a common meeting of representatives of all institutions from the town which work in the social field and coming into contact with the Roma community. Perhaps also thanks to this, in June 2006 it led to the opening of the Ľubovňa branch library at the community centre in Podsadek. In the scope of cooperation between the Ľubovňa library and Humaneness in Communities, the civic association received a library fund which was available for local children and young people. They could thus borrow a book to read at home or in the club. For most of the children this was the first contact ever with a book (aside from textbooks). Another social activity was cooperation with the Ľubovňa library during summer holidays with free-time activities for children from the settlement. The library workers went regularly to the community centre and prepared activities for children and likewise children from the settlement went directly to the library.

In this same year reconstruction on a new culture house began in Podsadek in which the community centre and the Humaneness in Communities civic association were headquartered. Participation of the

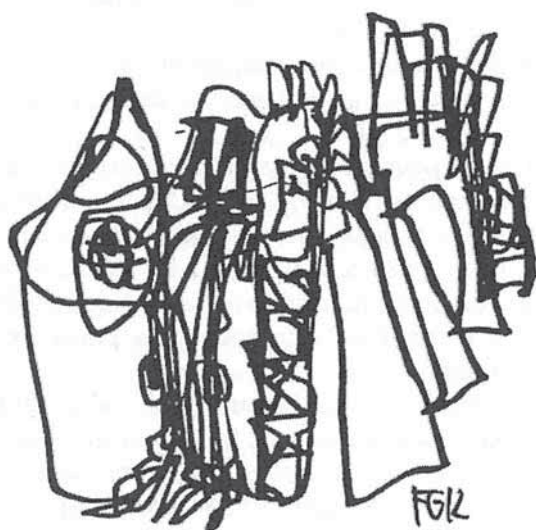
civic association in hooking up gas for the community centre was mainly volunteer work (residents of the settlement worked off more than 1,500 hours). A total of 13 volunteers from the Roma community took part in the voluntary work. They mainly assisted with work like excavating the gas hook up, demolition work, preparing the spaces for reconstruction and painting and cleaning up.

The civic association organises spiritual, cultural and sporting activities in the community centre. These involved regular meetings for children of different age groups. Filip, Daniel and Jozue together held evangelical courses to help prepare children and young people for their first communion and confirmation, and each year organizing of excursion for a Roma pilgrimage to Gaboltovo. Further, they co-organised a Roma gospel fest FestRom and are likewise organizing a football tournament for children and young people, a carnival gathering, the preparation and celebrations for holidays, rehearsals for theatrical presentations - performing in Gaboltovo, at FestRome, in nearby villages, different trips, summer camps and others.

What can we say at the conclusion? The activities of the community centre and its impact on the community is in most cases perceived positively. A community responds and to a full measure not only uses the complete services provided by the CC but also gets involved in its activities. After years of work with this community many things have been successful. But at the same time CC workers are aware that a great deal more work awaits them – with unfinished activities and those just getting started.

Work with the Roma community after long years of unresolved problems requires more attentions, mainly from the side of the competent authorities. Field social workers or the activities of community centres are not treated legislatively and the execution of the TSP activities is without competencies. Tomáš Hrustič pointed this out in his work *“The work of Field Social Workers in Marginalised Roma Communities”* (Social Development Fund – Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, 2009).

In general we can say that activities, *in a community and for a community* are for the town of Stará Ľubovňa suitable even despite the fact that financial conditions are not always so suitable. At the same time it is essential to remark that for financing the activities of the CC the town only rarely uses independent individual projects. To the maximum extent possible all existing projects and finances used are connected from several available resources (project of the town, OZ ETP Slovakia, OZ Humaneness in Communities and the like), which support the activities of the community centre and are a benefit for all residents of the Roma community.



Artfarm in Drienovec – connecting creative arts and the Roma community

In this publication we are also presenting a number of examples of activities orientated on the free-time and cultural activities of the Roma. In common with the naming of each of these activities is the fact that it is built on the work of local activist associations in different non-governmental organisations. It's not possible to simply determine the most ideal model for the legal foundation of these activities, but without local enthusiasts and people who are convinced about the need for these activities, they would only get done with great difficulty.

Another common sign which is clearly visible in the case of longer-term successful activities is the fact that almost always they involved groups whose activities are not defined primarily by nationality (i.e. that they primarily work only with Roma), but nearly always activities which are focused vocationally – i.e. they are orientated generally on artistic, folklore, sport or other activities.

And from this a third fact follows naturally, that in the case of these activities, the Roma do not form one target group on which these activities are orientated, but a broad-spectrum or wider built, multi-national group of which the Roma are just one part. Stated otherwise, the majority of them work together with the majority and with the Roma, which leads to a very significant integration element.

The village in such cases plays a very important, but in principle a secondary role, because in principle it is not the director or the implementer of these activities (even though this is possible), but is an institution which should (and often in fact does) create the conditions for the work of these local groups. The conditions at the same time do not have to mean only direct financial help, but also help with the provision of spaces, the provision of a work force (in the case of activation service or so-called small village services), administrative help with processing application or administration of projects and the like. All of this, however, emerges from specific local activities and local opportunities. The fact that this doesn't always occur in sufficient measure we need not emphasise very much – here there are limited possibilities of the village, somewhere unwillingness, somewhere orientation on other priorities.

An absolutely unique phenomenon of its type is an activity which is carried out by the non-governmental organisation **Tvorivý dom na vidieku, n.o., (ArtFarm, n.g.o.)** under the leadership of the director Mrs. Jana Zitová in the village of Drienovec, of the Košice – Suburbs District.

In the wider regional and artistic community, this activity is known as **ArtFarm** and more detailed information can be found at their Web site <http://artfarm.sk/>.

The creative space ArtFarm originated on the initiative of creative artists from Košice, who in 2004 brought their activities to the countryside. Specifically, they went to the village of Drienovec in the Košice – Suburbs District. They created here specifically a space for the development of countryside tourism – ART tourism, with creative and leisure-time activities in the fields of culture, art and crafts with an emphasis on health and creative ways of spending free time. Creative activities focused on propagating and developing the heritage of traditional country crafts, folk art and contemporary artistic creation through the form of stays, workshops, meetings, exhibitions and seminars were carried out in the space. Gradually in the creative space in the village an exhibition space was put into use – an alternative gallery, a collection of traditional country crafts was created, a small museum of pencils, a collection of classic cameras and the requisite “Things and small things” and the like. The non-profit organisation ArtFarm, n.g.o., originated itself in November 2007.

The priorities of this non-profit organisation are:

- support of the works of members of national minorities and disadvantaged groups of citizens,
- presentation and publication of the art and traditions of the region,
- the developing of activities for the protection and creation of the environment, threatened and endangered natural and cultural rarities,
- the creation of favourable conditions for the development of free-time and cultural activities in the countryside.

They built and created this space from the beginning with the help of the local Roma community. Roma activists created it together under the leadership of artists by which a non-traditional cultural environment originated which the local Roma community has contact with. Volunteers, parents of children from the community, also help with the realising of creative activities in the space for their own children.

The village of Drienovec borders the Slovak Karst National Park and is located approximately 3 km west of the town of Moldava nad Bodvou. The first written mention of the village dates from the year 1241. According to one local legend the name derived from the dogwood bushes which occur here in abundance. Aside from the Roma Catholic church, the dominant feature of the village is the classicist castle with a chapel, which was built in 1780 and which today houses the order of the Marian Sisters.

The village of Drienovec had as at 31 December 2010 1,882 residents, 927 of whom were men and 955 women. In the village is a large Roma community of approximately 700 members, which is just over one-third of the village's residents. Nearly the entire Roma community lives concentrated at the end of the village, which is locally called the settlement. Only a very small part of the Roma community is already integrated and included among residents of the village. The living standard in the settlement varies and the Roma here live in brick houses and residential blocks but also in shacks. In 2007 the village also completed construction of eight lower-standard flats. From a demographic point of view this community is nothing exceptional. Like other locations, here nearly half the Roma population is made up of children under the age of 15, a very low number of Roma of retirement age and very high unemployment, which is nearly 100%. The majority alternate in activation works organised by the village of Drienovec. At present 130 persons are involved in activation works. From an infrastructure point of view the local settlement is equipped very well. An asphalt access road runs through the settlement to the end of the village and the settlement has basic infrastructure like water, sewerage, electricity and gas.

Children from the marginalised local community in the settlement attend the Primary School in Drienovec (220 children age 6 to 15 years). Aside from the primary school, however, no one deals with the Roma youth and children in the village. They are threatened with social exclusion and general lethargy of "surviving" in the settlement. They are threatened by the danger using addictive substances, and if they don't have a goal or model of some other meaningful activity, they will succumb to these dangers without help.

Children from the community in the village have very few opportunities for meaningfully spending their free time. In general the area is lacking facilities which would be purposely devoted to the free time of children, the problems of Roma culture, education, or which would serve as real community centres. At the ArtFarm, gradually from 2007, they created with the help of local Roma volunteers a space for meeting, creativity, self-realisation, education as well as entertainment and rest. The space is functional for four years now and creative workshops for Roma children and adults are held here. It originated and functions with the help of grants, contributions of individuals and thanks to volunteers who provide its spirit. This is a non-traditional space which the Roma built themselves with the use of recycle materials and under the leadership of creative artists. The village has had no small measure of involved in the activities of ArtFarm, mainly with the carrying out of specific activities.

The creative village space is created and used for support of an experiment in creative arts, photography and new media, but also in the works of an endangered group – as an instrument of increasing the self-confidence of the project’s target group. With the help professional lecturers and Roma volunteers, its success in the scope integration to the community life and of use of the skills and capabilities of Roma youth is verified. The opening of the space at the ArtFarm for free-time creative activities of Roma children and youth saw the huge interest of children in painting and other creative activities.

In 2007 and 2008, two years of the project titled “Roma Culture in the Village” was carried out - creative works determined for Roma children and parents with a focus on developing traditional crafts and culture of the village. Approximately 60 children and about 20 parents took part in the creative workshops over the course of one year, for a total of about 120 children and 40 adults. The creative workshops with the possibility of sharing in the preparation of creative works so interested Roma children that the organisers had to allow participation of children who found out about painting from selected peers, and thus they fulfilled the goal of an “open” workshop and the children took turns.

The second year a great many more Roma children took part, even those older than the first time. There was great interest in participation and many very nice works suitable for presentation originated. The children made contact with art and culture in a specific space of the ArtFarm and lecturers tried to stimulate Roma children and youths toward their own approach and to developing their talent at their own initiative. During the course of the workshops promotional material with the recorded story of the workshops and the results of the works of children emerged which presented purposes of the project to the wide public at the concluding exhibition of works in the primary school with the participation of partners and representatives of the village office, which allowed the social acknowledgement and inclusion to the cultural life of the village.

In 2008 they completed the project “**Roma Gallery**”. This involved a multifunctional space for free-time creative activities for Roma children which started in the spring of 2007. They built the entire gallery together with young Roma and their parents in the scope of activation works. At the beginning of construction recycled materials which the Roma brought themselves were used exclusively – glass bottles, different types of sheet metal but also natural stone or different types of waste from demolished homes. Thanks to the financial help from a grant from the programme “Together for the Region” the project of creating a Roma gallery was possible to successfully complete, with which originated a meaningful

space for creative and educational activities with Roma youths and their parents, in which it is possible to continue even further in activities which are associated with creative and social activities of village children. The innovative resolution of the Roma gallery from recycled raw materials from local sources can serve, aside from others, as a good example, namely not only as an alternative space for culture and art but also as inspiration for broad-spectrum building activities. We believe that by carrying out this project, the construction, but at the same time also the use of the space which the project helped make a reality, the organisers strengthened the local community through self-help, support of the community spirit and creativity for resolving of local problems with the mobilization of local sources.

In May and June 2008 children with pedagogical oversight came to the multifunctional space for the last hour of the Art Education after the agreement of the primary school director in Drienovec. They could work with acrylic paints on large surfaces which would be impossible in a classroom. During the two months four classes took turns with approximately 15 children in a group, thus a total of some 60 children.

In 2009-2011 the non-profit organisation began to carry out the long-term project OPENROOM. Similarly as the previous activities, this project is also intended for the Roma community in the village, with priority on an endangered group of Roma children and youth from the settlement in Drienovec and it allows the children and young people to meaningfully spend free time and obtain creative skills. The goals of the project are:

- to allow the Roma community in the village to meaningfully use free time and to perform artistic creative and crafts activities under the leadership of professional lecturers – to open a creative space in the village for summer free-time activities of Roma youth,
- to support the talent and creativity of children and youths from the Roma community and to strengthen the trust in their own capabilities through educational activities led by professional lecturers – to acquire creative and manual skills which could be further developed,
- to allow children contact with art in a specific creative space in the village,
- to support trust in their own capabilities and conception of using their ideas in the real world,
- to connect Roma volunteers during the preparation and realization of creative activities in the space,
- to increase the chance for a full connection to society through the presentation of Roma culture.

After experiences and cooperation with selected Roma volunteers from the settlement, who helped with the building of the open space for creative activities in free time for Roma children and the great interest of children in painting and other creative activities, the non-governmental organisation opened and made available a space in the ArtFarm which was during the summer intended for regular free-time creative activities. These activities were focused on creative work, photographing, work with textiles, but also for obtaining crafting skills under the leadership of lecturers. During the course of the creative workshops, creative works and photographs capturing the course of individual creative workshops were exhibited on panels as a presentation of Roma culture for visitors to the space, but also as encouragement for the creative activities of the children, who found in the photographs support for their motivation to again participate in the creative workshops.

With the selection of children from the Roma community who are to become participants in the project the organisers cooperated with the Primary School in Drienovec. A portion of the children were selected by teachers in the school and another portion of the children and youths learned of it from siblings or parents who helped prepare the space in this facility. In the first year of the project "Openroom" the children from natural curiosity arrived in abundant numbers and all of them wanted to take part in creative activities. With the taming of their great interest the children were helped by adult Roma volunteers, parents who had the authority among the children and without them the creative workshops could not be run in peace. Volunteer work in the project, which is performed directly by members of the Roma community (parents of children who participate in creative activities), consists in the preparation of the environment, spaces and aids but also in supervision and help with the creative activities of children. Through the children they try to pull in to the project the adult portion of the Roma population in the village, at least those who are still willing to learn. It is very important to capture their interest and attention to allow the children additional education and perceive the value in what the children are learning.

The artists who often come to the ArtFarm space to work are prepared and willing to devote their time and work with Roma children at different creative activities, which in their own opinion not only help the Roma children but also offer the artists themselves new views on their own work. The selection of creative lecturers has long been in cooperation with Design Forum, an association of artists from Košice. The idea to support children and young people from the Roma community in their creativity, to allow them under the leadership of lecturers to work with painting and photographing, originated with the mutual meetings of both communities in a creative

space and knowledge of mutual cultural enhancement. Thematic creative workshops offer them creative learning and help them develop natural abilities and talents. They support self-confidence and motivation. The project is also intended for parents and relatives of Roma children and young people participating in the educational activities. Help with the carrying out of creative workshops helps them understand the importance of education of their own children for improving the future of their community. The organisers try to obtain active support of parents and their positive approach for further development and education of their children. They try to reinforce pride in the efforts of children, their talent and perception of their own Roma culture and cultural identity.

Last but not least are the outcomes of the project – exhibitions, also intended for the wider public in the Košice Region and in the scope of cross-border cooperation, given the nearness of the Hungarian border, also with foreign visitors.

In 2009 approximately 65 children and some 15 adults alternated in the individual creative workshops. In addition, some gifted children, selected by the artists, also came individually during times when residential stays of creative artists were taking place in the space. It was possible to carry out the entire project also thanks to financial support from the Government Office of the Slovak Republic. The creation of the space and carrying out of creative activities with the Roma community confirmed the notion that culture and art know no barriers or prejudices, or social or cultural differences. The opposite, in fact; the creative process is the consolidation of elements which allow communication in the form of creative and cultural expression between all groups of people.

In 2010 the project Openroom – “Free-time Creative and Educational Activities for Children and Young People from the Roma Settlement in the Village” was held in the months of August, September and October. Always twice each week, the days in which children came to the open space was announced in advance. Twice weekly during the ten-week period a total of 20 creative workshops were held. Approximately 100 Roma children and young people and 20 Roma volunteers, parents and relatives took part in them. Six creative artists from the OZ Design Forum who came to the space and worked as lecturers, shared in the project. The best work from the individual creative workshops over the three-year period are exhibited in the “Roma Gallery” in the space of the ArtFarm and thanks to the number of visitors to the ArtFarm, at least some 300 visitors have looked over them. A colour publication was printed about the project and the Internet presentation of the project was created and located on the Web pages of the non-profit organisation. The project still continues into the present.

A great many visitors from different professions (artists, teachers, psychologists, sociologists) come to space of the ArtFarm. After looking over the outcomes of the project and the open creative workshops for children and young people from Roma settlements, their opinion on the realizing of free-time activities for Roma children and young people from the village of Drienovec and its surroundings is very favourable and supportive of the idea of this activity in the village for children continuing further.

Individuals, but also entire groups of visitors who are looking for a creative way of spending free time and relaxation in an aesthetically interesting and stimulating environment also come to the ArtFarm. Not only school-aged children come in groups, but also seniors. The number of visitors increases from year to year. Since the origin of the non-profit organisation the ArtFarm has welcomed more than 1,000 visitors. Among the well-known guests who have visited this creative and interesting environment it's worth mentioning, for example, the ambassador from the USA in Slovakia, Mr. Theodor Sedgwick, and writer and one of the leaders of the revolution in 1989, Mr. Fedor Gál. The regional and even nationwide media regularly inform about projects and activities taking place at ArtFarm and information about these activities is gradually spreading into the broader artistic awareness.

We believe that the space for creative workshops and creative activities at ArtFarm in the village will long serve for carrying out free-time activities for Roma children and youth from Drienovec and its surroundings, because there is obviously great interest among the children for whom a visit to this place is often a unique cultural event. These children don't get to the galleries in the city and don't have other cultural nourishment in the countryside.

The creation of the space and carrying out of creative activities with the Roma community clearly shows that culture and art do not know borders and prejudices, be they social or cultural differences. On the contrary – the creative process is very synthesising element which allows all groups of people to communicate via creative and cultural expression.

As in the case of many other activities (and not only in the field of working with the Roma community), the non-profit organisation ArtFarm does not have any employees. All of its activities are done on a volunteer basis. Resources are obtained only for individual projects which the people from this organisation acquire from different grants, foundations, appeals and the like. They write the applications themselves and as has been shown by the above-mentioned activities, it appears they do it very well. Thus far they have been supported by the Carpathian Foundation, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, the Orange Foundation, the PwC Beneficiary Fund and the Government Office of the Slovak Republic.

The Pro Tornensis Civic Association from Turňa nad Bodvou

Somewhat unusually for this publication, we have also chosen the example of the southern Slovak village, Turňa nad Bodvou. It's an unusual choice because since the year 2000, the civic association of Pro Tornensis, founded by the then village mayor, Ing. Ladislav Bartók, has been active here. Although Ing. Bartók is no longer the mayor, he still leads the organization, which has brought a lot of positive changes to the village and has worked very closely with the local council. Although this collaboration has slightly decreased since a new mayor was elected, both the council and the civic association remain active in the work they are doing.

The village of Turňa nad Bodvou (in the Košice – Suburbs District and the Košice Region) is one of the largest villages in the southern part of East Slovakia, with a population of 3,551 as of 31 December 2010. The village lies in the western part of the Košice valley below the great castle of Turňa. The village was settled in prehistoric times and later became an important centre of the region. This happened after the arrival of the Slavs, who built an early Christian church here in the 11th century. Three hundred years later, the Roman Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was built on the same site and has survived to this day. The first written record of Turňa, which dates back to the 13th century, clearly reveals long-term activity in the village even before that time. Another notable building in the village is its Renaissance manor house built in the 17th century, probably after demolition of the castle in 1685. The current manor house, like the church, was built on the foundations of an old building: the Magócsy manor. The village's history is so rich, in fact, that we could devote a whole book to it. It is the situation of the Roma living there, however, which we would like to address.

Thanks to its size, the village has excellent infrastructure with electricity and gas networks, connection to the water mains, sewage pipes, a nursery school, a primary school, a post office, shops, pubs, restaurants, a library, a clinic with its own GPs and a pharmacy. It has a population of 3,551, with 1,751 men and 1,800 women. Those not yet of "productive age" (children up to the age of 14) number 783, while 2,225 people are of productive age (women from 15 to 54; men from 15 to 59) and 543 are of retirement age.

We do not know the exact number of Roma in the village but estimates put it at over 1,400, which is almost 40% of the village's overall population. Many Roma families live in houses surrounded by houses

belonging to the majority population; there are, however, a few Roman enclaves in the village, one of the largest being at Kvetná Street, where about 400 Roma live. This is a locality dominated by substandard housing and even slums. As well as identifying problems common to similar areas, social workers here have noticed high levels of truancy, poor care of children's health (mainly as far as compulsory vaccinations are concerned) and a high incidence of underage mothers. Another Roma enclave is at Vodná Street, where 12 families live in low-quality rented social housing. At this street social workers most often have to deal with the problem of placing children into foster care. A third locality is at Školská Street, where until recently Roma lived in three 12-flat tenement blocks. The quality of these building is falling fast, however, despite the fact that two of them have residents who now own their flats. In 2010 the village sold one of the blocks to a businessman, who then converted it into office spaces. As mentioned above, social workers have been working in the village for a long time and are financed – and will be to the end of 2012 – by money from the Social Development Fund; at present there are five social workers there. Unemployment is a very serious problem in the village, with a rate of over 25%. As well as Roma, middle-aged and older women and young people, who have just finished their compulsory schooling, are the groups worst affected by this problem.

There is a very low educational level among the local Roma, though there are two in the village who have the university education and several who have completed their secondary schooling. The majority of Roma do not study beyond primary school, though the opening of a detached class of the Secondary Vocational School in Medzev has improved the situation.

Since 2010 police specialists focusing on closer work with the local Roma community have been working here. This measure forms part of efforts at strengthening public order, another being the training of specialists who will be acceptable to the Roma community. Their task is to ensure preservation of public order and to solve minor conflicts between Roma.

In Turňa nad Bodvou there are two other active Roma civic associations as well as *Pro Tornensis*. These are called *Romane kole jakha* – Roma Dark Eyes and Roma Heart. Among other things, they work to keep law and order in the village and guard village property, and it is their members who work closely with the police specialists mentioned above.

Without wishing in any way to detract from the efforts of the other two associations or of the village itself in working with the local Roma community, however, we would like to focus more closely here on the activities of the *Pro Tornensis* civic association.

Ing. Ladislav Bartók (Local Councillor and Deputy of the Košice Self-governing Region) told us about the activities of the association he chairs:

“Our civic association, PRO TORNENSIS, was registered at the Ministry of Interior on 1 June 2000. As is stated in the association's statutes, our aim is to strengthen the cultural, social and economic identity of Turňa nad Bodvou, to work to ensure its full integration into the wider regional unit and to take the initiative in implementing various development programmes in the community and/or region. The association achieves its aims mainly through involving a wide number of local citizens in the creation and preparation of decisions in the area of communal and regional development, through mobilizing local resources (human, natural and cultural), through looking for outside developmental resources (investments, funds, grants), through efficient and effective cooperation with state administration, local administration, the non-governmental sector, economic partners, and through encouraging young people to be active in the community, stimulating their interest in public issues and useful spare-time activities.

In order to fulfil these aims, we started with what we saw as a logical step, which was creating, or helping to create, a development strategy – The Plan for Commercial and Social Development of the Village. Today this serves as the blueprint for most of our activities.

The association started its activities by creating conditions for the revival of certain folk crafts. Such crafts not only enable us to find out more about how our ancestors lived but also help develop the skills and dexterity of children and young people. Thanks to help from the Carpathian Foundation, we obtained our first looms and organised a crafts camp both for interested parties from Turňa and from Košice in collaboration with KOK (the Košice Civic Club). We subsequently organised, with help from the NPOA project, monthly weekend craft meetings which taught participants basket-weaving, textile weaving, pottery and making leather goods. The first publicity about the association started at the same time.”

In 2003 the association started to rent a house in the village for its activities. Since then the building has been converted and now offers a multi-purpose space for various activities involving the Roma community. The association has invested both considerable money into the building's reconstruction (from various grants) and a lot of energy in the form of voluntary work. As well as other repairs, the roof and windows of the building have been replaced and the interior equipped with new toilets and showers etc.

The centre is a place where over the years, a large variety of activities and events have been organised, many of which have involved long-term work with the community. These have mainly comprised different kinds

of courses, educational activities, community service for the unemployed and extracurricular activities for students. As well as these, the association has also organised various meetings, discussions on different topics, exhibitions of children's handiwork and meetings of the Turňa civic club etc. In compliance with the terms of the contract, the association allows primary school pupils to use the rooms for extra tuition and for out-of-school activities. As with other things, it is not the quantity which is important but the quality and the wide spectrum of the activities which are available here.

In the same year, work began on the basket-weaving project mentioned above. At the start there were six keen participants who learned not only the craft itself but also the basics of marketing so that they could then sell their products. Several of them are still doing this seasonal activity, earning for themselves not just additional income but also greater social contact. In 2006 the standard of the courses was raised and what had been a non-governmental activity became more of a working and social "incubator". Dozens of local enthusiasts have now completed the courses.

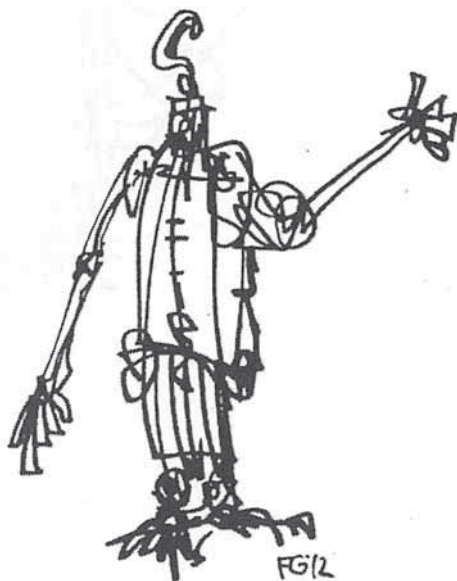
From 2004 to 2006 the association led a very interesting project supported by the Social Development Fund and called *Podme spolu (Let's Go Together)* in which a target group of 24 participants worked together three times a week. The project focused mainly on growing domestic crops and keeping rabbits but also aimed to increase the craftsmanship of the participants. Different family members were involved in the project, part of which is still running; at least fourteen families still work on growing their own crops, though rabbit keeping has discontinued following mass death of the animals by disease a few years ago.

From 2006 the association led community service programmes in the village, employing several dozen unemployed local people. The work involved tidying and maintaining public spaces in the village, cutting the grass, etc.

The association continues with many of these activities today, though limited space here prevents us from giving more details. We should mention, however, their collaboration with other organisations, mostly on a regional level (ArtFarm Drienovec, ETP Slovakia, the Carpathian Foundation and many others) and how they have extended their activities beyond their own community – at present, for instance, they are collaborating with the town of Moldava nad Bodvou and the villages of Drienovec, Turňa nad Bodvou and Dvorníky on a public service project: the education of the citizen-volunteers of the PRO TORNENSIS civic association and local council employees. The project provides English lessons to two

groups of participants, lessons in computer skills (35 participants) and training in financial and social skills as part of the project *Napredovanie – Boj proti chudobe (Making Progress – Fight Against Poverty)* (15 participants).

We hope the activity of the association can serve as inspiration and an example to other communities in how to use local activists for long-term work with the Roma community.





Lots of talent - but it has to be fostered **(Vladimír Sendrei from Kokava nad Rimavicou)**

Possibly the most famous example of good practice can be found in the village of Kokava nad Rimavicou with the activities of a native of the village, Vladimír Sendrei, and his music group, *Kokavakére Lavutára*. Vladimír Sendrei is an ordinary Roma from the local community who nobody knew much about ten or fifteen years ago. He is no “child prodigy” or “genius” born with a talent guaranteeing him success and fame. Instead he has worked hard and practised every day to gradually reach the level he is at today, one which has without question made him a celebrity here. His activities in the civic association and his group have long since transcended the village and the region, his involvement in the music for the film “Sherlock Holmes”, directed by Guy Ritchie, making him famous both in and outside of Slovakia.

What is remarkable about Vladimír Sendrei is the fact that despite his successes, he has never turned his back on the village where he comes from and still lives and works in. He still transfers all of his performance fees to the activity of the civic association. We have chosen Vladimír Sendrei for this publication because we believe there are many such people like him in the Roma community; the important thing is to find them and work with them to foster their talent. Not only will their success be beneficial for the communities they live in but they can also serve as positive role models for Roma everywhere. Anybody who works in the field will know that there are few things better than a living and tangible role model which other people are able to identify with.

The village of Kokava nad Rimavicou lies on the southern slopes of *Slovenské Rudohorie (Slovak Ore Mountains)* beneath the national reservation of Klenovský Vepor, at the confluence of the Rimavica and Kokavka rivers. Administratively it is part of the Poltár District (in the Banská Bystrica Region). The community is a medium-sized one for the region; as of 31 December 2010 its population was 3,043, with 1,507 women and 1,536 men. The village covers an area of 6,627 hectares and has a long and rich history. The first written records of the area, once called “KOKOV” (Kochou), date from 1279, when two brothers, Etruch and Mikuláš, divided their inheritance.

Given the size and population of the village, we can say it is adequately provided for in terms of utility networks and public facilities. The village has access to all utilities, has its own wastewater treatment plant, a post office, library, and even, until recently, its own cinema. There is

a nursery school and primary school here, a grocery shop and a hardware store. The well-known ski resort of Háj is nearby. In the past the village was famous for its timber industry; wood from here was used for the regional glassworks and paper production (in the 17th – 18th centuries there were four paper mills in the village alone). There were also iron ore and non-ferrous metal (mainly copper) mines in the area.

At present there are more than 600 Roma living in Kokava nad Rimavicou. Since 2001, the civic association of *Láčo drom (Good Way)*, which is led by Vladimír Sendrei, has been working in the village. During its 10-year-plus existence, it has carried out a large number of activities and set up a local community centre.

The great interest in the services of the KC not just in the village but also outside it has resulted in the centre now serving the needs of the whole Novohrad Region. The community centre functions mainly thanks to grant support and private contributions. One big breakthrough came when the community centre was joined to the activities of the ETP Slovakia organization, which has been supporting the centre since 2007. Thanks to this support, it became possible to gain new clients not only from the Roma but also from the non-Roma community; through the successful common activities of the two communities, the centre has been able to create a direction and vision that can benefit clients from socially disadvantaged backgrounds not just in the village but in the whole Novohrad – Gemer Region.

Like many other community centres, this one offers a very wide range of activities and services. Thanks to cooperation with a lawyer, the centre offers regular free legal aid to all socially disadvantaged clients (dealing with insolvency issues, instalment payments, court hearings, lectures etc.). Pre-school preparation activity at the KC has helped parents prepare their children for starting primary school; parents themselves attend their children's lessons and welcome not only the quality of teaching but also the fact that they are free of the financial demands they would face if their children attended nursery school.

One of the association's special activities is supporting a 12-strong children's singing club from the local community. The club, which is an extracurricular activity of the children, is led by Janka Sendreiová, a famous Roma singer both in Slovakia and abroad (she has performed at Carnegie Hall in New York, in Oslo and Tilburg, at the Lucerne in Prague, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, etc.). Since the very start of the project, the children have been part of the fifty-member YRAEF choir, which performs every year in the Gipsy Spirit programme at the Slovak Radio building in Bratislava, conducted by Vladimír Sendrei.

In January 2010 the association signed a partner contract with the so-called Food Bank thanks to which it has become a regional contact point for this activity.

In 2011 the *Láčho drom* association was nominated for the Gipsy Spirit award for its project called *Activating communities to improve their quality of life and stimulate employment*, thanks to which more than 30 unemployed Roma from the Poltár Region found new work. The association has also trained other Roma in renovating and maintaining their own housing, work which they carried out as a community service. Within this project, unemployed people were also taught how to husband their resources better and how to fill in forms in offices, etc. Approximately 2,000 unemployed people from the towns and villages covered by the project were either directly or indirectly involved in this project.

One very positive example is the fact that since 2010, the local council in Kokava nad Rimavicou has changed its attitude both to the civic association and to the community centre and has signed a contract with them on closer cooperation and co-financing. Working meetings are held at least once a month at the village hall to assess the latest results of the KC and to inform people about activities in preparation.

Since 2005 the association has managed a private free-time activity centre, which in 2006 officially became part of the schools network as a Roma youth educational centre teaching participants how to use their free time constructively. Since 2009 the association has been a member of the Slovak anti-poverty network, a member of the SPOLU international network of organizations and a partner with the People Against Racism civic association.

It is logical that the Roma musical group Sendreiovci and Kokavakére Lavutára, founded in 2001, works very closely with the association. The group is made up of singers Vlado Sendrei and Janka Sendreiová, guitarist Jaroslav Berky, double bassist Milan Deme, accordionist Tibor Kököny, violinist Martin Horváth, cimbalom player Ondrej Radič and clarinetist Roland Horváth. The accordionist, violinist and clarinetist are all also music teachers, and Janka teaches singing. The group regularly performs not only locally but also all over Slovakia and abroad. Of all their concerts, we should mention their performances at the *Khamóro World Festival* in Prague, the *City Days* event in Limanowa (Poland), the *Antiracistfest* in Bologna (Italy), the *Gipsyfest* in Tilburg (Holland), *Pohoda* festival in Trenčín, the *Jagóri* fest in Oslo (Norway), the *Gipsy Celebration* of Svojanov (Czech Republic), the *Gipsy Spirit* concert in Carnegie Hall in New York (USA), the *Sziget* fest in Budapest (Hungary), the *Lubljanafest* in Ljubljana (Slovenia),

the *Gipsy Spirit* concerts in Bratislava and Trebišov, the *Polish folk festival* in Wergozevo (Poland), the *Days of Czechoslovak Culture* in Nowy Szacz (Poland), their performance at the premiere of the film "*Sherlock Holmes*" in London and many others. They have so far released three albums.

The group together with the civic association are the main organisers of one of the oldest and most famous festivals of Roma traditional and modern culture, the *Balva fest*, which was held for the eleventh time in the summer of 2011. Several thousand visitors regularly attend the festival.

The main dynamo behind all these activities is the aforementioned Vladimír Sendrei, a local man born here on 5 May 1964 into a miner's family. He is married and has three adult children. From his childhood he was keen on sport and played football for the village. At the age of 21, he started playing professionally, first for Malacký later for Rimavská Sobota, who he helped gain promotion to the Slovak second division. He completed his secondary school education, taking graduation exams in Mechanical Engineering. Since 1997 he has been a Roma leader in the Gemer - Novohrad Region, organising many activities especially in the fields of sport and culture. As well as establishing the *Láčho drom* association and his musical group, he also founded the local Roma ensemble called *Romani Luludí* (Roma flower), the forerunner of his current group.

Since 2009, he has served as member of the village schools and culture committee, one of his biggest honours in this area coming in 2010 when he became an ambassador for the Struggle against Poverty and Social Exclusion organisation. The following year he again became an ambassador for the Year of Voluntary Work. He also works as advisor to the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and the plenipotentiary for a civic society. He regularly presents the results of his work at conferences both in Slovakia and abroad (Vienna, Barcelona, Warsaw, Sofia, Kragujavec etc.). Vladimír Sendrei has also been involved in two documentary films about the life of Roma: *Malá domov*; and a film about his efforts at getting elected to the regional parliament – *Cigáni idú do volieb* (*Gypsies Go to Vote*) (both directed by Jaroslav Vojtek).

Podbrezová - the STREET ELEMENT break formation

Another interesting community we would like to introduce in this overview is Podbrezová (District of Brezno, Banská Bystrica Region). An interesting feature of the village is that although there is a Roma community here (approx. 150-200 members in different parts of the village), the community does not pay any special attention to them. This is not a result of ignorance on the part of the local council but the result of a process which started decades ago and which has led to almost complete integration of the Roma community within the village and Roma here being perceived like any other village inhabitants. Despite this, the village realises this state need not go on forever and is now initiating activities enabling the Roma to present themselves in a positive light. Given the nature of the village and the region, these activities are primarily cultural and are organised through the non-government sector.

Podbrezová lies in the north-eastern part of the Banská Bystrica Region, on the road between the regional capital of Banská Bystrica (34 km away) and the district town of Brezno (9 km), in the valley of the River Hron, which forms a natural boundary between the Slovak Rudohorie mountains and the Low Tatras. It is made up of 6 parts. These are, from west to east, Lopej, Vajsková (formerly part of Lopej), Skalica, Podbrezová, Štiavnička and Chvatimech. The first written record of the village is from 1358 and reveals there were just small settlements here back then. The locals worked as lumberjacks and iron ore miners; later they transported firewood by river. Chvatimech, Vajsková and Podbrezová are inextricably linked to the building of the huge ironworks here, the origins of which date back to the 18th century. The complex mostly lies beneath the mountain called Brezová, hence the name of the village.

The settlement of Podbrezová and its neighbouring parts quickly grew thanks to the ironworks and the shortage of labour in the region (in 1900, for instance, the works had a workforce of around 2,300). Originally the people of Lopej had mostly worked in agriculture. For many inhabitants, however (given the shortage of agricultural land) the opportunity to work in the ironworks was one which they welcomed. The number of “metalfarmers” increased, the character of their life changed and the population of Lopej changed with the arrival of new people from the industrial settlement of Podbrezová.

Thanks to the growth of the ironworks, Podbrezová quickly became a social centre and sought-after place of fun and entertainment. This dynamic period and the new way of life in an industrial settlement

determined the character of the village, which can still be seen today. It led to an increase in the living and social standard of people from the rural part of Lopej (development of cultural life, sport, clubs etc.), which in 1959 joined with the community of Podbrezová.

Today Podbrezová has 3,975 inhabitants, is the industrial centre of the Upper Hron and a village with some of the features of a town. In some ways it is unique in the whole of Slovakia. The village is supplied by all the utility networks plus a complex civic infrastructure. Healthcare is provided by GP clinics both for adults and children, by dentists and by a gynaecologist. There are three nursery schools (Lopej, Kolkáreň, Štiavnička), a small-scale (one-class) primary school at Štiavnička (of family type) and a fully equipped primary school in Podbrezová, which also takes pupils from the villages of Horná and Dolná Lehota. A special needs primary school is in the neighbouring village of Valaská. In the village there are two private secondary schools: the Vocational School of Podbrezová Ironworks and the Podbrezová Ironworks Private Grammar School.

The structure of the community means that there is often more than one village facility of the same type. There are three multipurpose sports grounds, for instance, three cemeteries, two parishes (Podbrezová, Lopej) and two Houses of Mourning.

As we have already, Podbrezová as a village has certain peculiarities. It is made up of six parts, some of which are more rural in character (Lopej, Skalica, Vajsková), others more urban (the housing estates in Štiavnička and Kolkáreň). The industrial character of the village, its social trends during the Socialist era and the migration of inhabitants in the village and region as a result of new work opportunities all had a major effect on the way of life of people living in Podbrezová, the Roma community included. Originally this community lived in Lopej, in a settlement on a hill called Lašťok. In the 1950s, this settlement started to grow and become overpopulated, however. This situation was partly solved by the building of new family houses along the state highway, thanks to which several families from the settlement could move to family houses they had bought in the centre of Lopej. Another outflow of people from the settlement came with new work opportunities and the chance for them to get their own flats in blocks in the housing estates of Kolkáreň and Štiavnička in Podbrezová, or in nearby Brezno. At the end of the 1980s a process of Roma integration took place during which the village provided families with housing assistance. This led to the complete disappearance of the Roma settlement at Lopej.

The situation in most families is not favourable at present; many are struggling with unemployment and a shortage of money. Despite this, however, many Roma children study at secondary school, young people

work and help their families and their parents do community service work within the village. Thanks to the social ties which have been created, the availability of services, education and better work opportunities, their standard of living is incomparably higher than that of Roma living in separated and segregated settlements in other parts of the region.

As well as more integrated areas with Roma families living in them, there are also three areas where there are high concentrations of Roma in the village (although the Slovak Office of Statistics states that the number of Roma in the village is minimal). In Vajsková, the village became owners of the company flats of the Ore Mines state concern, where two Roma families live. A second locality is a family house close to where the village borders the neighbouring village of Horná Lehota, where a family of three has lived since the 1990s. The family uses basic services in Horná Lehota, which is closer to their home than Podbrezová (approx. 4 km).

The most problematic locality for the village is a large family house close to the railway line, at the edge of the community in Chvatimech. The house is privately owned (bought by a family from Brezno) and is currently home to about 70 people, only a few of whom are registered as permanent or temporary residents of Podbrezová. Whole families live in the house in very poor conditions (without water or electricity). A new "Roma settlement" is forming here, which is an unwelcome development for the village given the long-term positive trends and the fact that hitherto it hasn't been necessary to devote special efforts to Roma families living here. At present the village has no information about the size of its Roma community and its distribution in terms of age and education because so far it has not been necessary to address the question. Evidence of this is the fact that Podbrezová has still not drawn from national and European funds which are available for programmes aimed at helping marginalised Roma communities. The village has not elaborated a "local strategy" for this nor has it carried out work in the field such has been carried out in other villages around Slovakia.

Now as in the past, the community offers a relatively rich cultural, social and sporting life. Even before the First World War, Podbrezová was a popular centre of social activities and entertainment, with its cinema and its famous brass bands. Popular events in the village today include the Spring Festival of St. George, the Halušky festival, the Lopej and Podbrezová market (in the past many of the locals were market sellers) among others. All these events are co-organised by the village and by local associations and clubs. For many years, the most active of these have been the Pensioners' Union (with clubs in Lopej, Štiavničk and, Podbrezová – Kolkáreň) and the Slovak Union of the Physically Handicapped. Podbrezová

also has a chess club and a table-tennis club as well as a civic association called Slniečko (Sun) which organises activities for primary school children. The youngest association focussing on development of cultural, social and sporting activities in the village (especially in the Štiavnička estate) is a youth association called Timo.

The local children's folk ensemble called Klások has gone through some interesting developments since 1995. It was founded as part of the Podbrezová factory club and later performed under the auspices of the village. Its dancers are made up mostly of children from the Kolkáreň estate, from Štiavnička, and Lopej, and of children from the neighbouring communities of Valaská and Brezno. Its founder and long-serving leader is Lenka Špiriaková. At present there are 48 children dancing in Klások aged from 4 to 15; during its existence, over 600 children from the region have been members. There are currently 6 Roma children who are active members of the ensemble. For many years Klások has been in a partnership with a folk ensemble from the Hungarian town of Bekes (a Slovak community); the two groups meet regularly, present to one another their folk traditions and organise dance workshops. Klások has enjoyed its greatest success at events in France, Switzerland, Italy and at the international festival in the Czech town of Kunovice. The ensemble has coached young dancers who are now continuing their studies at conservatories in Slovakia and abroad. It is an organisation which requires high levels of commitment from its members and enjoys a very strong volunteer base (made up of parents, the children themselves and other supporters).

In terms of its organisation, Klások is a typical folklore ensemble devoted to the preservation and promotion of traditional folk culture. What is unusual about it though is its approach to its members, one result of which are positive changes affecting the Roma community. All its work is based on adopting an individual approach to each child (including their family) and treating children like partners. A key milestone for the organisation came in 2004, when out of the Klások folk ensemble, the Klások cultural and social centre civic association was formed. In 2005, representatives of the organisation submitted to the village a project for opening a new cultural and social centre. In response, the village granted them the building of the former primary and nursery school rent-free for five years. During the next two years, the association, with help from volunteers, used its own funds and gifts from sponsors to refurbish the building, creating in the process both a large and small dancing salon with mirrors, new toilets and a room for sewing and keeping costumes. On 28 September 2007, the new centre was ceremonially opened to provide a place for its children's ensemble to practise and for people from all over the

region who like dancing and creativity in various areas to come and take part. Since its opening, the Klások Cultural and Social Centre has hosted several dancing events, courses, seminars and dancing formations. The association works on a purely voluntary basis, its management, children and parents all helping to create the right conditions so that they can carry out dancing and educational projects not just for the inhabitants of Podbrezová, but also for interested people from the surrounding villages of the lower Horehronie (folk courses, oriental and ballroom dancing, flower arrangement, languages etc.).

The activities of the Klások folk ensemble and their own dance formations from Podbrezová are still uppermost, however. Their approach helps break down cultural and ethnic barriers, Klások being the only ensemble in the region which has Roma children but which is not exclusively Roma. Using innovative methods, it is preserving folk traditions and using dance as a part of young children's education (through the educational concerts at primary schools given by Klások members and members of STREET ELEMENT, Christmas customs in the streets of Podbrezová etc.); the association looks for ways of stimulating interest in children. At the Klások Cultural and Social Centre, clear and exact rules are in place, work is systematic and reacts flexibly to the needs of individual groups and their members, parents are regularly informed about any changes or new proposals. As well as offering the right facilities for visitors, the centre organises its work in such a way that it can guarantee an individual and equal approach to all children, instructors and colleagues.

One of several "little miracles" that has come out of Klások is the STREET ELEMENT breakdance formation. These are four young men who started with street dancing as children and are now able to compete with semi-professional dance outfits from all over the country. They are boys without dancing education or long-term expert guidance but who, through their own effort, creativity and persistence and through caring support from Klások, have made a real impact. Janko Pokoš (16 years old) is a pupil of the Secondary Apprentice School in Valaská; Robo Biba – the only non-Roma in the group (20) is a student of the Technical University in Zvolen. Lukáš Daško (20) and Radko Kliment (21) both completed their studies at the Private Secondary Vocational School of the Podbrezová Ironworks and now work at the plant. All four members live in the housing estates of Kolkáreň and Štiavnička in Podbrezová and are from modest family backgrounds. Originally the group had one more member, Tonko Štajer (19). He unfortunately had to leave the group, however, after an injury.

The leader of the Klások folk ensemble remembers how they first started:

"A small group of boys used to dance regularly on the concrete surface in front of the club (as they call the House of Culture in Podbrezová). I used to see them as we were going to the gym of the primary school to rehearse with the children's ensemble. I knew Lukáš and Radko because they had danced in Klások but not really got the hang of folk dancing. One day the boys came up to me and asked if they could practise in the gym with us at the same time we practise but in the other half of the gym. When Lukáš Daško did a somersault from the wall bars for the first time, I wanted to bend him over my knee and throw him out because I didn't want to be responsible for him breaking his neck. They practised at the same as we did once a week and when we started with conversion of the building into a cultural and social centre, we agreed that if the boys helped us with it, we would go on giving them a space in which they could train.

While we were doing up the old school, they were scraping off plaster, carrying out building debris and cleaning the yard; they helped in all kinds of ways. At the time, they were between 10 and 15 years old. These 'breakers' became members of the Klások family.

When we opened the cultural and social centre, they started training in the 'dancehall' 3 to 5 times per week. They used the space free of charge; there were just a few basic organisational rules which we had to agree on. They trained alone the whole time, with no expert dancing instructor guiding them, only a supervisor and occasional methodical guidance from me. For 3 years they exercised without any music at all. They copied movements from videos which they found. Later (2007 – 2008) we managed to arrange some local performances for them (at the St. George's Day celebrations and Town Days of Brezno). They were very well received.

Then there was a lull for quite a long time. We went on with the rebuilding of the other part of the school and had no time for the boys. Unsurprisingly, there was a crisis: they had nowhere to perform; they were at the age when interests change quickly, when schoolwork becomes more demanding, boys discover alcohol etc. – so the group broke up. It wasn't easy; they lacked motivation and someone who could push them forwards. They carried on training but it was sporadic. We tried to motivate them and talked together a lot, sometimes as a group, sometimes just in pairs. We encouraged them to work on their technique and create new choreography. We talked about their opportunities in life, about what the future might bring, about what dance meant to them and what they would like to do in life.

Meanwhile the activities of the cultural and social centre started to grow. A new African drums and rhythm formation was started called Bosá

noha (barefoot) (two Roma girl dancers: Kika from Podbrezová and Miška from Nemecká; and J. Kriváň, who plays the bongo); a creative writing group for younger children was started along with ballroom and folk dancing courses, dance workshops, batik courses using silk, flower arranging etc. The children from Klások noticed the 'breakers' and enjoyed watching them train. A small group of Roma girls – dancers from Klások, girls from the Kolkáreň estate – joined the boys along with a few other younger boys. The group expanded and suddenly there were new ideas, new enthusiasm and renewed interest in training. Together and separately in groups (girls together and boys together) they started practising new choreography. The older boys performed at the local disco club and danced at a number of regional events. They had great success, especially among young people, because they are the only group of their kind in the region, and have got both good technique and stage presence. For a time this success motivated them again but then a second crisis came and the group broke up; the same thing happened all over again. The boys finished secondary school and started work or university. Their priorities changed but more than that, their time became limited”.

In 2008, the Social Inclusion Partnership scheme in the Brezno District created for Podbrezová a social services community plan for the 2008 – 2013 period. Two years later the same organisation managed to gain funds for a project which involved, among other things, the mobilization of community resources. In practice this meant creation of a working group which would plan, prepare and carry out a small project (drawn from the community plan) and could receive up to EUR 1,000 in financial support. At the time many different intentions and circumstances seemed to come together the STREET ELEMENT dance group was in crisis but was invited to perform at the Roma Bašavel event in Senec – a public gala programme featuring talented Roma children from the Wild Poppies civic association and their guests. It was an opportunity to gain financial support for activities which could mobilise disadvantaged groups in Podbrezová, fulfil measures laid out in the community plan and bring about some effective change. And for the young people in Klások it was a welcome opportunity to gain new experience at a small event of their own.

A period of hard work began for the association. The boys and girls in the group began an intensive fortnight of training (often lasting four hours a day) while another group worked on preparation of the project and gaining funds to cover the costs of performances, organising a dance workshop and holding an open day at the Klások Social and Community Centre. All the hard work paid off: the performance at the Roma Bašavel in Senec in August 2011 was a great success and the dancers gained new impetus and self-confidence. They also made some new contacts and took

part in a dance workshop with some other children from the region which was held in Podbrezová and led by the professional dancers Ladislav Cmorej and David Schimer. They later performed using a shared choreography at the Klások open day and the friendly relations between Klások, Street Element and Laco and David grew stronger. After years of hard work, the young dancers had finally cultivated the right appearance and image which they needed and gained the experience and direction they had previously lacked. It helped them come through their crisis, strengthened them both individually and as a unit and gave them direction for their further development. The group was shaken up and its core remained strong. The members could rely on support not just from their family and friends but also from the management of the Klások centre which could guarantee them the conditions they needed for the period ahead:

"It really changed the boys (and girls). They have gained new energy and started to see the point of what they are doing and what it can bring them in the future. They train for hours every day, are much more responsible, independent and active because they realise that the backing they get at Klások is not something they can just take for granted. They have started to get involved in the running and planning of the centre, help at events and with the maintenance of the rooms – that way they don't have to pay us any rent. After the success which they have achieved, interest in hip-hop has grown in the village and in the region.

In autumn last year, we auditioned for members of a new hip-hop group and now have STREET ELEMENT 2, which is a mixed, twenty-strong group of boys and girls (Roma and non-Roma) from Podbrezová, Valaská, Predajná and Čierny Balog and aged from 6 to 16. Some of the children have already attended a summer dance workshop and performed at some smaller events.

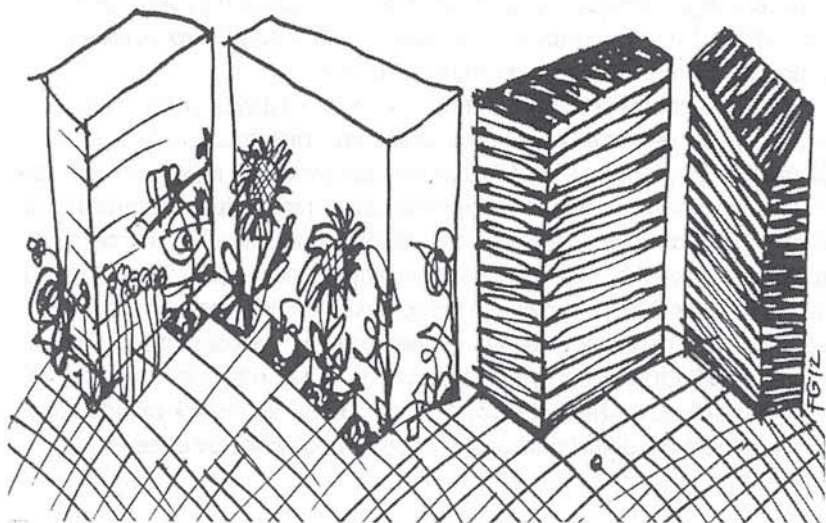
The children are taught by the boys from the original STREET ELEMENT. Together with children from Klások and the 'breakers', we organise concerts in the district for children from primary school in which we try to show them what both folk dance and street dance are about. So it is children sharing their experience with other children, talking with them about how street dance is created and how they dress, telling them what it is that dance gives to them. On March 3rd this year, STREET ELEMENT took part in an all-Slovakia competition in Bratislava called Movement without Barriers (a competition for children from leisure time centres, dancing schools and primary art schools). It was their first major competition and a big success and they came second in the over 18s 'Street Dance' competition with their 'Dream' choreography.

The breakers have had a positive influence on all the children in Klások and are an example of what can be achieved. Together they share their

experiences, their relationships have improved and the last barriers between them have been removed. The boys join the folk dancers for stretching exercises; they learn from each other and give each other encouragement. Thanks to their successes, the members of STREET ELEMENT have become more ambitious and self-confident. Lukáš has started rapping while Radko is considering studying at university”.

The activity of the dance group and the management of the cultural and social centre are on a voluntary basis and rely on mutual support and trust, willingness to help and openness. Running the centre and looking after its equipment is a result of cooperation on various levels as well as the effective use of human and material resources. The village of Podbrezová provided the association with use of the building for 5 years free of charge; in return, the association has taken care of renovation and maintenance of the building.

The running of the centre has been financed for a long time by the association itself (membership fees, 2% of income tax, renting out of spaces to third parties, course participation fees), gifts from private and legal entities (from the private entrepreneur, Lenka Špiriaková) as well as through small projects. The association gained part of the money spent on building alterations and equipment for the cultural club from smaller projects (Ekopolis Foundation – yard improvement, VUC BB – equipment for the dance salon). In the village, many services and favours are done on a reciprocal basis. The association and the people in it are a driving force in Podbrezová and have shown initiative and a great wish to progress and develop as an organisation. Without support from the local council for non-government organisations in the village, however, none of it would have been possible.



Church Activities in the Village of Čičava

As the final example of activities done on a village level which can serve as an example to other, we would like to describe the village of Čičava and the activities of the local Greek-Catholic priest, Martin Mekel. As in the previous cases, these are not activities directly run by the community but are ones which the community has been greatly involved in. Elsewhere, the villages themselves may be the initiators. In almost every village there is a priest or church community (in many cases there are a number of them) which can actively work with the Roma community. We could find an abundance of such examples of church activities today but it is unnecessary to mention them in detail here given that not long ago a wonderful book written by Tatiana Podolinská and Tomáš Hruštič came out which is the result of their research focussing on the work of all churches in Slovakia within the Roma community. The book is called *Boh medzi bariérami (God Between Barriers)* [Podolinská, T. – Hruštič, T.: Boh medzi bariérami. Sociálna inklúzia náboženskou cestou. Bratislava, ÚEt SAV, 2010, 175 p., It is also available at this address: http://www.uet.sav.sk/download/socialna_inkluzia_Romov_nabozenskou_cestou.pdf]. This publication offers an overview of all church activities within the Roma community and a detailed description of the best.

The village of Čičava is situated in the District of Vranov nad Topľou (Prešov Region) and is a fairly typical village for the region. In March 2012, the village had a population of 1,151, 702 of whom are Roma. Of the overall population, 582 are women; there are 514 children up to the age of 18, 391 people from 19 to 40 and 246 over the age of 41. There are two churches in the village: the Greek-Catholic Church of St. Cosmas and Damian is a cultural monument, while the village's Roman Catholics worship at the Church of the Virgin Mary. There has been a school in the village since 1856. The building of a modern multipurpose sports ground is helping with the development of sport in the village. In the area of culture, we should mention the activity of the folklore ensemble, Kňahinka, which is part of a civic association of the same name. In Čičava there are two grocery shops and a pub.

The current mayor of the village, Ing. Ladislav Kalafa, has been in the job since 2006. The village has all necessary utilities: electricity, sewage pipes, public water mains and a gas connection.

At present, the Roma in the village live in two concentrated areas at opposite ends of the village, the new and old settlements, though some also live among non-Roma within the village itself. It is not known when

Roma first came to Čičava; we do know, however, that they were already living here at the start of the 20th century. In 1938 there were 94 Roma in Čičava, at the time one fifth of the village's population. In 1991, the population census recorded 152 Roma households and 732 inhabitants, who made up 32.9%, or a third of the overall population. Today they make up more than a half of the village population. Both Roma settlements form part of the village plan and are within its boundaries.

The original slums in the old Roma settlement were gradually replaced by low-standard tenement blocks. The new Roma settlement first appeared in 1978 thanks to state support for individual housing projects. The development of the two settlements was, for this reason, quite different, as is the attitude of the inhabitants of the settlements towards their property.

At present there are currently 62 flats of a lower standard, most of which are in the old settlement, as well as 17 family houses in the new settlement. Thanks to the recent building of 25 village flats to rent, it was possible to demolish the last of the slums.

For many years, the village has been involved in the preparation and execution of various projects focussing mainly on village infrastructure. These are various state-subsidised schemes, or projects drawing from European structural funds; in the past they also involved pre-EU entry PHARE funds etc. Mária Nehilová, the former village mayor, set this trend and it has been continued by the current village administration.

As well as the lower-standard flats, a hygiene centre has also been built in the village. The basic school which only Roma pupils attend has also been renovated.

A community centre, frequented mostly by children and young people, has been open for some time now. There is also a Scouting club in the village, the I 133rd unit of Čičva – Čičava., which is led by local priests. The work of community social workers, who as in other communities help the Roma with everyday problems ranging from school attendance to legal matters, is a very valuable resource for the local Roma community.

In terms of education, there is not one Roma in the village who is a university graduate. A few (2 or 3) have completed their secondary education with their leaving exam certificate and about ten have finished their apprentice education without taking the leaving exam. Approximately twenty children attend the one-class nursery school in the village, twelve of whom are Roma. In the village there is a first-level primary school (for children aged 6-10) which 96 children attend, all of whom are Roma. Given the closeness of the district town of Vranov nad Topľou, non-Roma parents choose to place their children in primary schools there. There is a zero year

at the school which sixteen pupils attend. After completion of the first level of primary school, pupils then attend schools in Vranov nad Topľou. There are two teaching assistants working at the primary school in Čičava.

As in other villages, the problem of Roma unemployment here is very acute. Some of them do paid community service in the village; a few have business licences and work in the building industry or as traders.

What is interesting about Čičava is the fact that there is a Roma pastoral centre here, led by the local Greek-Catholic priest, Martin Mekel. Most of the Roma are christened as Greek-Catholics; there are, however, also Roma here who belong to the Roman Catholic church, which is the strongest denomination among the village's non-Roma population. The pastoral centre was founded in 2005 by the Prešov archbishop, Ján Babjak. The same year, Martin Mekel, who had been chosen for work with Roma by the Prešov bishop, started to work here. At first activities of the centre were carried out through two small groups, with about fifteen men involved. Meetings took place in a converted garage in the village of Hlinné, where Martin Mekel worked at the time, (i.e. before 2005).

According to Martin Mekel, the activity of the centre springs from four basic principles:

"The basic principle underpinning our work with the Roma is: not quantity but quality; this means a change in life, the need for moral principles and service to one's community. To achieve this aim, we have regular weekly meetings with a certain (fixed) group of people. These meetings are generally formative with the emphasis on the importance of spiritual growth. The group is made up of a maximum of 12 people and may only be led by someone who has been through a similar 'formation'. Another principle is taking people out of their natural background: in order to make a serious positive impact on the lives of those living in settlements, many of whom are closed to anything new, it is important that both young and adult Roma have the chance to leave their settlement for some time. We have therefore established in our centre accommodation and catering facilities for around 25 people so that we can plan effective and low-cost overnight educational activities (for weekends or longer). The third principle is to make up a team of pastoral helpers from the lay population, ideally of Roma themselves. This is why the bulk of our work at present involves looking for and training such people – people who can then be leaders themselves. If we have a team of good helpers who are not only enthusiastic but also competent and able to lead, they will be able to serve in a settlement by themselves. At present most of the service and coordination work is done by a small team based in Čičava.

Only a few Roma know the Gospels, texts which have the power to change a person from inside and influence his outward behaviour. Our fourth

principle, therefore, is evangelization – in the settlements, in the streets, at railway stations, in hypermarkets we are basically trying to spreading the good news of the Gospels so that everyone might hear it.”

Part of their activity is carried out in the detached family house in Čičava which they first rented (from 2005) and later (in 2008) bought and gradually refurbished. The building now is made up of the old house and an extension which the Roma involved in the project built themselves and which they finished in 2011. The two buildings are joined; on the ground floor there are the pastoral centre's rooms for accommodation and catering. There is the pastoral room, a kitchen, dining room, five bedrooms with a total of 25 berths, two toilets, showers and a storeroom. The first and second floor of the old house are now flats for the two priests who work with the Roma while the third floor of the house is currently serving as an informal dormitory for Roma boys (who are also, to some extent, co-workers) aged from 14 to 18. The dormitory has a capacity of eight places and the boys share the rooms with a theology student who is gaining work experience prior to ordination.

The pastoral centre does not confine its ministry merely to the village of Čičava but also serves six other villages in the Vranov District. These are the villages: of Hlinné, Soľ, Čaklov, Bystré, Jastrabie nad Topľou and Zámutov. The Roma pastoral centre in Čičava works independently of the local Greek-Catholic parish and is officially administered by the Horúci tím (Hot Team) civic association led by Martin Mekel.

Since 2006 the centre has been preparing its own activists through its so-called “formative schools” (for young people also, separately, for adults) which are held in the form of weekend meetings. One interesting fact is that those boys who attended the first formation in 2006 now form the basis of the F6 group (www.kapelaf6.sk), which at present is the only Roma group of its kind and performs at events all over Slovakia. The aim of these activities is to find and train people with leadership skills from the ranks of the Roma who can work in their communities to develop people's spiritual, cultural and social lives in a positive way.

Most of the activities in the Roma pastoral centre take place during the weekend (while activities for inhabitants of Čičava take place during the week). Events for the whole community include, of course, regular Sunday services. In November 2007 these moved from a converted garage in Hlinné (which held a maximum of 30 people) to the former House of Culture in Vranov nad Topľou. These services have become so well attended that since 2009 they have been held not only in Čičava (House of Culture) and Hlinné (House of Culture) but also in Soľ (within the actual settlement).

As well as holding church services, the centre also organises a regular Roma gospel festival called FESTROM. An audience of about 1,000 usually comes to support this unique event. The festival moves from place to place and is a platform not just for Roma singers but also for groups and choirs from non-Roma communities. The aim of its organisers is to stage an ecumenical event featuring the best of modern Roma music.

As well as music, the pastoral centre also encourages dramatic and visual art. DIK is the name of a group of young people who have composed and rehearsed a musical about a Roma wedding with the title "Džaha Tuha". Most of them are also involved in the well-known "Divé maky" (Wild Poppy) programme. As well as this, these young musicians and actors also work with younger children, devoting their free time to them and organising art clubs for their benefit. As well as the teenage music groups of F6 and GPS, there are another three adult music formations in the pastoral centre which also write their own songs. As well as the DIK theatre club, another one called NNN is also taking shape. Visual artists have presented their work in exhibitions held in the local primary school and also at the Municipal House of Culture in Vranov. In December 2011, following long-term preparatory activity, a protected workplace producing artistic wooden products was set up. Many of these products are well worth seeing.

Martin Mekel has a few more things to say about the Romal Pastoral Centre:

"Work with young people opened the doors to us working with adults, too. We also meet with them at weekly formative meetings and organise for them a range of spiritual courses. We can then be witnesses to changes in their attitudes, can see how many of them find new meaning and value in their lives. They work on themselves and bring positive changes to their families and to the settlements.

We have managed to set up a Private Leisure Time Centre. It has been open since September 2010 and is where we have our youth activities. In future we want to have a dormitory there, possibly even a second-level (aged 10-15) primary school for talented Roma children. We are grateful for the help given to us by the villages of Čičava, Bystré, Sol' and Hlinné and the premises which they let us use. We value our collaboration with and help from the parish offices, both Roman and Greek-Catholic, in Rudlov, Vranov n/T, Čaklov a Čičava as well as financial support from many organisations thanks to which we have been able to carry out many activities. Of course, without the help of many volunteers, both Roma and non-Roma, who have spent literally hundreds of hours serving other people, we would not have been able to use this financial support effectively."

Four people are currently employed in the protected workplace, both Roma and non-Roma. Their main working remit is artistic carving, an activity which has brought a new dimension to the project and greatly helped the local community. It is no surprise that organisers of the workplace plan to expand this activity in the future.

And what is the point of these activities? Martin Mekel is very clear in his answer:

"We can see very distinct changes in those Roma who have started to work with us and have allowed us to lead (and form) them in some way. They have improved markedly: their marriages have become stronger as have their relationships with their children. They have fewer problems with the majority population and have overcome their addictions to gaming machines and to alcohol, which we can see reflected in lower crime and better interpersonal relationships. They no longer feel the need to curse and swear; their thinking, attitudes and behaviour are all changing; their children's school attendance is better than before, people in the community have started to help one another in terms of looking for work etc. Relationships between children and their parents are much better. We could give so many examples of all these things. We are not speaking about all Roma in the mentioned settlements, however, but about those who we work with"

We think that the activity of this centre, within the context of our publication and in terms of inspiration for similar activities in other localities, is best summed up by Tatiana Podolinská and Tomáš Hruštič, authors of the "God Between Barriers" book mentioned above. In the book they state that: *"Mekel's work as a priest who has been specially commissioned to do work among Roma separate from parochial duties has proven to be a successful model for service between Roma. In this case his work seems to be more effective than the work a priest would do with Roma within his own parish."* (p. 75). There is nothing we would like to add to this assessment of his work.

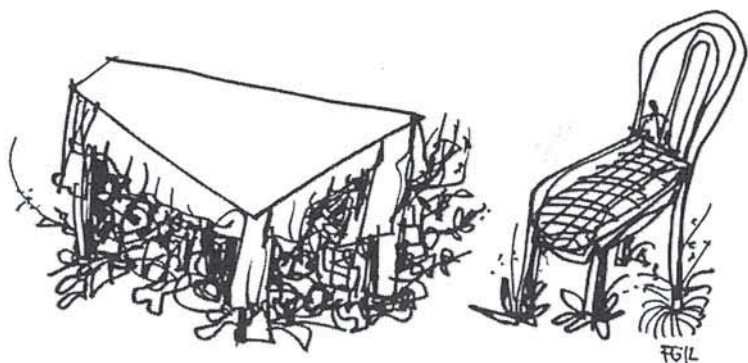


FIG 14

Author: Mgr. Alexander Mušíinka, PhD.
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About the publication “The Things That Worked”

There are nearly 3,000 towns and villages in Slovakia, and Roma live in a great many of them. And in many of them activities benefitting not only the Roma but ultimately all citizens of the community are successfully taking place. And nearly always standing behind these successful examples are the mayors or village councillors themselves and always enthusiastic individuals – the residents of the community. Every successful act in these communities is inconceivable without their good ideas, great willingness and courage to do things themselves.

Even if the plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities were to have full pockets of money to hand out, his efforts would be in vain without the good ideas of local people, their great willingness and courage and their relentless enthusiasm.

This publication presents some selected examples of successful activities on the local level and is proof that when someone really wants something, then it really can be done.

I wish in particular for the mayors of villages and towns a great many great ideas and the great willingness and courage needed to carry out of useful activities performed on behalf of co-existence of the majority and the Roma community in Slovakia.

Miroslav Pollák

plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities

