

“Where are the Romas?”

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Participation Day Budapest (2017): Empowering Roma through participation.

Let us stop looking up to best practices models for a moment. Talking about the integration of the Roma community in Europe and the many challenges that are faced during this process acknowledging and learning from failure may bring a better perspective to the situation.

During the Participation Day in Budapest on the 19th of October in Budapest, countries from the Danube region gathered and tackled relevant topics for the future developments in the regions. One of the 5 main topics was Roma empowerment. A significant topic for Europe and a highly potential fruitful cooperation “space” for the countries of the Danube region. This common working ground was aimed to be created with the help of a “Participation Partnership” that would bring together local actors and NGOs, involving international and European organisations and institutions. This transnational cooperation should lead to policy proposal, projects and initiatives, furthering a change of cultures through dialogue.

When tackling the Roma integration topic, the handicaps and challenges that come along with the process it must not be forgotten that discrimination is one of the main barriers on the way. Nonetheless, the lack of new funds, institutions and laws for the Roma integration are also some of the key issues in this case. Furthermore the integration already takes places for centuries and it is still a very slow process.

Looking back into the history it is possible to define some characteristics about the life of the Roma community, but who are the Roma today? For centuries and until nowadays they have been seen as the outsiders and the other way around. Yet many transformations and events had a great impact on the Roma, which made their situation to develop a lot more complex. How did the industrialization, the Holocaust, the Communism changed their social structures and lives? Even though this happenings, “they and we” still remained outsiders. How is the barrier of “the outsiders” to be crossed?

Empowering Roma through participation and involving them is the solution. Many times the Roma have been not present in the integration process. The first steps to an approach are to build trust between Roma and the other communities, make their participation to be meaningful, understand that Romas should be involved as equals, empower Romas to claim their rights and finally acknowledging and learning from failure, not looking up only to best practice models.

Aim of the Participation Partnership is to bring all the stakeholders of the region under one umbrella to face together common challenges, discover opportunities and solutions. The main focus will be to gather as many Roma NGOs as possible at the same “table” with the other stakeholders and work together. In the end, Roma are not the problem but the solution.

Ressources:

- Workshop at the Participation Day 19th of October 2017 - Participation: Empowering Roma and vulnerable Groups.
- Benz, Wolfgang (2014): *Sinti und Roma: Die unerwünschte Minderheit. Über das Vorurteil Antiziganismus*, Metropol Verlag, Berlin.