

## **IMPROVING EDUCATION FOR ROMA CHILDREN – FOCUS ON ROMANIA**

“Each child has a talent; unfortunately, quite often it remains unexplored. What can the educator do? The educator can help children discover their inner world.”

Alexandru Crisan, Ph.D.

Executive President, Education 2000+ Bucharest

## **IMPROVING EDUCATION FOR ROMA CHILDREN – FOCUS ON ROMANIA**

Project Chart – “Together for a Soul School...”

### **Improving the Learning Environment for Roma Children Focus on Romania**

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#### **▪ Context**

The program is co-financed by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DEZA Agency from Switzerland and Center Education 2000+ within the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Now at its final stage, the program has been aimed at developing the educational models for Roma children by using the experience of the non-governmental organizations active in the field of educational programs from South-Eastern Europe.

#### **▪ Objective**

Improving the educational processes by continuously training the teachers, developing and implementing own projects, developing teaching materials and – gradually – disseminating the results in all South-Eastern European countries.

#### **▪ Target Group:**

The teachers from five schools from Romania, students, members of the local communities, representatives of various NGOs from Romania and the neighbouring countries. The project has been implemented and is being developed in five pilot schools from Dolhasca (Suceava), Crisan Criscior (Hunedoara), Chiliseni (Suceava), Tecuci (Galati), Brahasesti (Galati).

#### **▪ Duration**

The programme has a two year duration, out of which 2001 was entirely financed under the Stability Pact and 2002 – entirely financed by Center Education 2000+.

#### **▪ Activities**

The activities of the programme were organised at school and at central level. The schools developed projects and received equipment in form of donations. The teachers attended training seminars and the students had the opportunity to meet their colleagues

from the neighbouring countries during an international summer camp. All project activities were presented on a dedicated web page hosted by the general site of Center Education 2000+. Besides the investment in education, the funds offered by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs cover activities for the improvement of the pilot school infrastructure according to their needs. Thus, the toilet facilities, the heating and lighting systems and the sewer and water supply systems were rebuilt.

▪ **Outcomes**

The outcomes of the seminars and of the summer camp were presented as action plans for the benefit and the improvement of the education for Roma children, within the Working Group no. 1, section “Education and Youth” from the Stability Pact. The project called “Improving the Learning Conditions for Roma Children – Focus on Romania” falls within the general strategy of the Center Education 2000+ whose contribution to the reform of the Romanian education system is officially acknowledged by the Ministry of Education and research.

Sinaia, July 12<sup>th</sup> 2002

Anamaria Cincu  
Program Co-ordinator

## **Project Chronicle**

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“...the project, like a breath  
of fresh air for the school...”

## **School No. 1, Brahasesti – Galati**

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### ▪ **School and Community**

School No. 1 is located in the *comuna* of Brahasesti, in the northern part of the county of Galati, 35 kilometers away from the nearest town, Tecuci, and 120 kilometers away from Galati – the capital city of the county.

The comuna encompasses 4 villages: Brahasesti, Cositeni, Corcioveni and Toflea.

The comuna has 8,306 permanent inhabitants, most of them Roma (4,176 declared as such) according to the census from March 18<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> 2002.

Their main activities are land work and animal breeding. Besides the farmers, traders, teachers and engineers also develop their activity in this comuna.

On the occasion of the census from March 18<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> 2002, the teachers from the comuna got in touch with the Roma families from Brahasesti, with their way of living, their attitude towards the official authorities...

The Roma population from Brahasesti is part of the “ursarii” folk. In 1990 they used to be Orthodox but today, according to the last census, 1,507 of them were converted to the Pentecostal cult, most of them having a precarious financial status.

The Roma population is very well represented at the level of the Brahasesti Local Council. Out of the 16 local counselors, 5 are of Roma origin and they are very good at promoting the interests of their constituents.

Not all the members of the Roma community from Brahasesti are poor. There also are very rich people among them, prosperous business men developing commercial and manufacturing activities in other localities from the country and, thus, not being able to provide jobs for the poor inhabitants of Brahasesti.

The poor families usually have odd jobs, helping some of their neighbours with the agricultural work. Some of them (about 300) collect social welfare, granted based on Law no. 416, and develop community work service.

As a specificity for Brahasesti, the members of this community are used to move around the country to develop seasonal activities and this is the reason for children missing classes and even for drop outs.

### ▪ **Beginning of the Project**

#### **The targets...**

In order to implement the education reform and to provide the environment necessary for a modern education system, the project envisages the following targets:

1. Ensuring the necessary environment for a modern education system in the rural school with a Romanian – Roma population;
2. Training the teachers with a view to using the interactive methods and developing the school – community relations;
3. Streamlining the relationship between school and community;

4. Increasing the active involvement of the children in the teaching process and improving their school results.

**The Steps...**

Steps taken in order to involve the local authorities in the development of the project activities:

- Elaborating the school needs analysis together with the Mayor's Office representatives (Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Roma parents, local counselors);
- Establishing the Mayor's Office contribution in order to reach targets 1 and 3, by Local Council debates, and assigning the responsibilities;
- Training the Mayor and obtaining his participation to curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Steps taken in order to involve the parents in the development of the project activities:

- Presenting the needs analysis and the targets during the meetings of the Parent Advisory Council and establishing precise actions and the volunteer activities to be developed by the parents in the pursuit of target 1. These activities include: loading, unloading, transporting the materials necessary for building the stoves; building 2 of the 12 stoves; interior repairing for the school building, varnishing, refinishing;
- Organising informational meetings for parents in order to announce the intention of providing an equal opportunities studying environment.

Steps taken in order to involve the children in the development of the project activities:

- Presenting various materials (albums, video tapes) with images from other schools that depict modern studying conditions, students' preoccupations for school life and ways of getting involved in school activities;
- Motivating the students to present their achievements in various fields of study and posting informative materials on extracurricular activities.

▪ **Project Activities:**

1. Modernising activities based on the Kultur Kontakt donations, in collaboration with Center Education 2000+; Mayor's Office contribution; volunteer parent participation. Works: building 12 wall electric sockets, switches, key sockets.
2. The training Seminar "Interactive Methods" organised by Center Education 2000+ took place on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2001 and was attended by 6 teachers.
3. Active summer camp organised by Center Education 2000+, attended by 10 children and 3 teachers impressed and raised the interest of the children who became more confident in their own forces.

4. “Students in Action” represents an activity developed by the Students Council – 18 students – which met on a monthly basis. Thus, the students learned to organise themselves, to undertake responsibilities, to make decisions that would solve the problems they faced. The outcome of this activity is the Code of Conduct that the students wish to implement starting with next school year. The teacher in charge with monitoring this activity is Mrs. Liliana Malache.
5. “Learning Together” is a dissemination activity realised during the second stage with school teachers and developed during October and December 2001. The trained teacher providing the dissemination is Mrs. Corina Patrascu.
6. “We are All Children” is an activity designed for forms I-A and III-B. This activity is to take place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2002 with the aim of stimulating the communication between classes that have Roma and Romanian students. The teachers in charge with this activity are Mrs. Adina Fertu and Mrs. Diana Apostu.

### **“Oltea Doamna” School Group - Dolhasca**

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#### **▪ School and Community**

The “Oltea Doamna” School group (from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade) is located in the village of Gulia, *comuna* Dolhasca, the county of Suceava. The *comuna* of Dolhasca has over 12,000 inhabitants and 2,000 are integrated in the educational system. 340 of them attend the School Gulia, the second largest from the *comuna* from the point of view of the number of students and teaching staff.

In the village of Gulia, there is compact Roma community of about 1,300 individuals who coexist peacefully with the Romanian inhabitants. Unlike other Roma communities, the one from Gulia is not enjoying a good financial status. More than half of the community members live under the subsistence limit. Only a very small number of Romas obtain income from trading activities. They are small shop owners or “salesmen” who travel from one village to another in order to sell various goods. Part of the Romas play a music instrument for a living and others manufacture brooms, locks, metal rings, carpentry tools, and various other tools.

They live in small houses, sometimes with no fence, windows or doors. In the small village streets, one can see them with their dogs, pigs, maybe a horse or a cart, living together surrounded by a lot of dust but also a lot of joy. There are dwelling that host three or four families under the same roof.

#### **▪ School description, its needs and expectations – before the beginning of the project**

In this school, most of the students are of Roma origin (80%). There are 26 teaching staff members, 3 are titular educators (two of them are Roma), 7 teachers (5 are titular), 16 school professors (5 are titular). Half of the teaching staff members are not titular and the

grades are awarded at the beginning of each school year. This generates a lot of confusion and interferes with the successful implementation of the school development plan that the school has under consideration. During this school year, the school has received another category of students, children with special needs coming from the placement centers. This diversity of student categories led to the appearance of new needs and expectations.

▪ **Targets**

- The need to facilitate the pro-social training of the Roma and Romanian children as well as of the children coming from placement centers;
- Creating a favourable learning environment;
- Using methods that would generate good school performance and would help children acquire fundamental skills and abilities;
- Improving the school's teaching material base.

▪ **Expectances**

- Determining the children to graduate from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and to further their education;
- Persuading teachers to live in the community, so that they could have continuity in their teaching activity and become specialized in working with children with special needs;
- Improving the school – community – Church – Mayor's Office partnership, with the aim of increasing the school attendance rate and improving the education quality;
- Attracting co-financers in order to support teachers' efforts of improving the material base;
- Changing the unfavourable perception parents have with regard to school values.

▪ **Beginning of the project**

**Targets:**

- Acquiring new learning techniques that allow the Roma children to integrate in the collectivity, facilitate the learning process, develop communication and cooperation capacities, and help children to feel useful and to be eager to come to school;
- Disseminating new learning techniques among all teaching staff members;
- Improving the environmental conditions in order to create a pleasant ambience, inspiring physical and spiritual safety.

**Implementation Steps:**

- Involving the local authorities (especially the Mayor's Office) in the development of project activities;
- Involving the parents in the development of project activities;
- Editing news letters for the community and inviting the community members to attend round tables and various debates;
- Initiating dialogues with the parents, in order to establish a connection between school and family.

### **In which way where the children involved?**

The members of the Representative Student Council were involved in the decision making process with regard to the life and needs of children.

The students were involved in elaborating class projects. Student opinion polls and information campaigns were developed for the benefit of the children.

The desires expressed by the students were included in the extra-curricular activities.

The student activities promoted cross-curricular approaches focused on the personal and social development of the students.

#### **▪ Project Activities:**

Three seminars and an international summer camp were organised at central level.

#### **Local level activities:**

- Training seminars for the teachers;
- Training seminars for the parents, “Open Gates” days;
- Involving the prominent personalities of the local Roma community – such as representatives of the Suceava prefecture, members of the “Ciprian Porumbescu” music band – in the development of the project activities. The audience received with enthusiasm the theatre play contest based on I.L. Caragiale’s work.

A successful school experience is represented by the increase in the school attendance rate as a consequence of applying the new teaching techniques and of developing extra-curricular activities.

### **“Crisan” School Group, from Ciscior – Hunedoara**

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#### **▪ Good thoughts for a common future**

#### **Needs and expectations:**

In the history of the education system from Hunedoara, it is well known that the comuna of Ciscior has a school group called “Crisan”, founded almost 100 years ago, where young people learn various trades. In fact, this is the only school group from this region. For a long time, it was a high school where students were prepared to become miners, as that was the labour force needed at that time. But, in time, the school group adjusted to the change in society and offered new educational opportunities for the young people, starting with a kindergarten, a primary and secondary school, a vocational school, a high school (day and night school) and an undergraduate college.

#### **Community:**

The community used to be a prosperous one but, once the gold deposits were wasted, the community members and the people from the neighbouring regions became very poor.



At present, the local community is mainly composed of unemployed and collect social welfare and this has lead to an exodus of young people towards other regions or even other countries.

A significant part of this community is represented by the Roma population, well integrated in the community but with a precarious financial status. Most of them are unemployed, have low or no income at all and most of the time is the women who earn this money by working in small tailoring shops.

▪ **Beginning of the project:**

**Targets:**

1. Teachers:

- generating alternative teaching – learning methods;
- exchange of experience.

2. Students:

- modern material basis;
- exchange of information;
- differential approach.

**Implementation Steps:**

- establishing a dialogue (connection) with the Mayor's Office and the local economic units in order to attract and to involve them in the development of project activities;
- attempts were made to involve the parents in the development of school activities by inviting them to attend various common meetings and actions (open lessons, parent-teacher meetings, artistic activities organised on diverse festive occasions; involving the parent committees in the class cleaning activities etc.);
- the students were involved in the development of school activities through: Busteni summer camp (July 2001), pavement drawing contest called "Windows Opened towards the World"; an exhibition with the works realised by the students during the summer camp; glass painting exhibition called "The Icon from a Child's Soul" realised by students from the 1<sup>st</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> forms; founding a students council.

▪ **Project Activities:**

- Training sessions organised by Center Education 2000+;
- Information dissemination through the activity of the methodical commissions and the exchange of information with teachers from the county;
- Open lessons using various alternative teaching – learning methods presented during the training sessions organised by Center Education 2000+.

▪ **Project Outcomes**

- Exchange of experience with teachers from the county – open lessons and methodical-scientific account;
- Exchange of experience within the Methodical Teachers Commission;
- Counseling office;
- Modernly equipped kitchen.

## **School No. 7 – Tecuci**

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School No. 7 from Tecuci is located in the “Nicolae Balcescu” neighbourhood, in the western part of Tecuci. Near by there is another neighbourhood mostly inhabited by Romas. Forced by their precarious financial status, they live in insalubrious barracks and live on social welfare and child allocations.

School No. 7 from Tecuci, a neighbourhood school, lacked the necessary equipment and a lot of repairing was needed in order to ensure a proper learning environment.

The project has represented a “breath of fresh air” for a school floating adrift, and provided training for the school staff, improved the school attendance rate and the learning conditions.

### **Targets:**

- Training the teaching staff members to use active teaching - learning methods;
- Involving all students in school activities through the Students Council.

### **Approaches:**

- Actively involving the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor in the project activities aimed at providing an electric installation and toilet facilities for the school;
- Organising a parent school through specific seminars;
- Involving the school mediator in school activities;
- Cleaning activities.

### **Outcomes:**

Founding a computer science lab.

## **School of Chiliseni – Suceava**

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The Chiliseni community is part of the comuna of Udesti, county of Suceava, and is one of the 11 villages that form this comuna. People from Chiliseni are hard working and eager to get actively involved in the life of their community. From a social and economic point of view, this is a region where, besides agriculture and animal breeding, there are no other job opportunities.

The Romanian majority from the village of Chiliseni coexist peacefully with the Roma community. The latter consists of 80 families that together have around 240 members. They have a precarious financial situation and their main source of income comes from the copper cauldrons they manufacture and sell or trade for food in various regions of the country. This Roma community causes no problems in the village, both parents and children live in harmony with their neighbours.

The Chiliseni School is located in the very middle of the locality, near the village parish and, between these two, there is a good collaboration especially in their efforts of helping

and supporting the Romas. The school has been included in Center Education 2000+ programs for three years now and this led to a good institutional development. Before the beginning of the KulturKontakt project, the school was lacking the facilities and the equipment necessary for a good educational environment. But, the financial support offered by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs correlated with the help of the parents and the involvement of the Mayor's Office enabled the school to reach Western educational standards.

The parents played an active part in the repairing activities, providing volunteer work at digging the well, repairing the school fence, cleaning the building and, the Mayor's Office decided to contribute to these efforts by buying a liquid soap dispenser which was placed in the hallway of the school, near the sink, and they also covered the cost for the installation of the linoleum bought by Center Education 2000+.

▪ **Targets**

- The ability of the teachers to elaborate and develop activities based on active training and cooperative learning;
- Elaborating and applying classroom strategies for the introduction of active training and cooperative learning methods;
- Counseling the parents with regard to the changes occurred at the class management level;
- Obtaining feed-back and feed-forward information;
- Evaluating the success obtained by the teachers in using the active training and cooperative learning methods.

▪ **Implementation Steps**

Based on these targets, the students were encouraged to work in groups and pairs (this was made possible by the modular school furniture existing now in each classroom) and to communicate openly. The differences were permanently observed and capitalised on and the children were taught to be responsible community members.

- The teachers promoted cooperative learning by using interactive teaching and learning methods and by adapting their pedagogical methods so as to make sure that every child has the possibility to evolve according to his or her specificity and age group.
- The parents met with the teachers in order to obtain information with regard to the development of class activities, the behaviour of their children during these activities and the way in which they could support these educational activities. There are contact groups (Romanian and Roma parents) that are permanently in touch with the teachers and convey information on the school needs to the community and, in its turn, the school tries to support the development of the community. All this led to an improvement in the school – community relationship and increased the self-esteem of the Roma parents and children, these being now proud to assume their identity.

▪ **Success Stories**

- In order to ensure the proper development of the children, class management underwent a series of changes in order to help children feel secure at school. Children's work is exhibited in a specially designed part of the classroom, the classroom rules (developed by the children) are posted in plain view, there is a mini – library that stimulates children's love for books. The classrooms are personalised by using the class mascot, the friendship tree and the birthdays calendar.
- Another successful experience of this school was the meeting from November 2001 with the teachers from the comuna and those from the nearby town. The meeting was the proper occasion for disseminating information on the active teaching – learning methods and the teachers had the opportunity to discuss with the school Board members, with the members of the Consultative Parents Committee and the evaluation charts reflect an interesting and useful activity as they identified the changes that can be operated at class level in order to provide for an optimum development of the children.
- Materials elaborated during the project: photo album, class project portfolios etc.

### **Feedback on Busteni Summer Camp**

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*Like little elves with bright eye, we appeared, with a lot of noise, at the base of Bucegi Mountains, and we started to explore every corner of Hotel Alexandros, which was to become our home for one week. We hummed all over like little bees and, full of joy and curiosity, we discovered the pleasures of childhood. In the evening we used to meet, to get to know each other and to start building "A Better School". But, without even knowing it, the first day of the summer camp, with its big drops of rain that did not bother us at all, passed in a blink of an eye. We felt "high", because we made new friends, we played and we got carried away with excitement.*

(Oana, 7<sup>th</sup> grade)

#### **▪ What did we do during the summer camp?**

*We played together with our new friends, we drew, we learnt how to express ourselves, how to be self-confident and we discovered the artist inside us together with: Camelia, Letitia, Lucian, Ioana, Tibi, Andrei, Anamaria and, last but not least, Roman and Pia, our guests from abroad.*

*After being a bit shy during the first day, we already started to feel that we belonged there, we knew what to do with ourselves and, above all, we made new friends. A living proof of this was the dance contest organised during that very evening when it wasn't very difficult for us to choose a partner. So, our school started to take shape and was founded on friendship and mutual respect.*

*I think the sun must have seen all this because it started to send his friendly sunbeams in the room, inspiring the activity of the working groups. It was there that we proved that, come rain or come shine, in the woods, in the yard or inside a room, we were able to have fun, to work and to learn together, as each of us was eager to make our schools, together, even better.*

(Adelina, 6<sup>th</sup> grade)

▪ **Our Impressions**

*The greatest benefit was the fact that we had the possibility to meet children from various regions of the country and of the world, that we enjoyed sunny days, we played a lot of interesting games, the hotel was perfect and we learnt a lot of new things.*

*I think this summer camp gave us all the hope that, together, students and teachers, can build a better school, a more friendly and open school – a place where we could come gladly in order to learn new things about life, about the others and, not least, about us.*

*(Ana-Maria, 6<sup>th</sup> grade)*

*The Busteni Summer Camp took place between July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2001 – July 28<sup>th</sup> 2001 and gathered together children from various counties and countries. During the first day, we made new friends with whom we got along perfectly all along. In all this time, we attended different activities, such as: painting workshops, where we learnt to paint on glass, to make masks. In the conference room, we talked about the activities of the Students Council and about other school issues. We went to the woods where we played a lot and during the communication session we talked about school, we drew various characters, we learnt to better understand each – other.*

*In the mornings, between 7.30 and 8.00 we had the warm-up session, at 8 o'clock we ate breakfast and at 9 o'clock we started different activities. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon we ate lunch then we continue our activities. In the evenings, at about 7.30 we used to go dancing. There we organised many dancing contests. During the third day we visited the Peles Castle. We got the chance to visit only the ground floor of the Castle, but it was huge. We saw very interesting and beautiful things, we were also very surprised. We took photos of the castle and of its surroundings. When we went back, we saw a very nice little bear.*

*Back at the hotel, we ate supper, then we went up to our rooms. Next day we organised a dance and poetry contest where we got to represent our respective schools. When everything was over we felt very sad, as we were very sorry to part from our new friends. When I arrived home, I told my parents, friends and relatives about this summer camp, about what I saw there and they were very pleased to have me back.*

*I hope that we'll have other summer camps as beautiful as this one and I hope we'll make new friends and learn even more things.*

*(Victor, 5<sup>th</sup> grade)*

*“My name is Chelu Mia Gabriela and I am a student in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade at School No. 1 from Brahasesti. I am glad I was one of the participants at the Busteni Summer Camp. There are a lot of good things to be said about this summer camp, but I only want to say that I am glad I had the opportunity to make new friends, who now have become my pen-pals.*

*Everything was great! I could have never afforded a summer like this, because we have a poor financial situation. Those who organised the activities taught us new, interesting and wonderful things. I enjoyed all activities, but I was particularly fascinated by the painting workshop, where we learnt to paint on glass and I also like the dancing classes organised by Ioana.*

*(Mia, 4<sup>th</sup> grade)*

## **DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL**

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“Learn for the others”

## **Directions of Action for the School**

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1. To form the skills and abilities necessary for a good community member/to form the community spirit/ to educate the community spirit;
2. To open itself towards the community by initiating actions for the community and by establishing a collaboration with the community;
3. To attract and involve community partners (with mutual interests) in school activities.

### **▪ The Teacher – Protector and Mentor**

- Avoids favoritism, sarcasm and does not place the students in an embarrassing situation;
- Does not undermine students' dignity and self-confidence;
- Encourages relations that open students to his/her positive influence;
- Supports students in obtaining good school results;
- Respects students' points of view and creates a proper discussion framework in order to encourage communication and expression of students' concerns;
- Does not make speeches but constitutes a living example;
- Does not inspire fear but respect;
- Does not coerce but persuades;
- Knows him/herself and is eager to improve;
- Stimulates students to appreciate moral values;
- Has very strict principles but is flexible in their application;
- Is a good citizen and gets involved in the life of the community.

### **▪ The Teacher – questions for thought**

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- Do I feel comfortable among my students?
- Do I smile during classes?
- Do I treat all my students as unique individuals?
- Do I apologize when I'm wrong?
- Am I upset when a student fails to complete a task?
- Am I able to laugh with my students?
- Am I able to dream with them?
- Do I allow my students to make suggestions with regard to class activities and content?
- Am I patient enough to rediscover the world through their eyes?
- What more do I know about the young generations?
- Do my students trust me?
- Have I selected the latest information for tomorrow's class?
- Congratulations and cooperation, understanding and involvement or just academic activities?
- Am I afraid of classroom noise even when it is generated by students developing their class activity?

### **Procedures and practices that enable the school to create a democratic inside culture and the students to get involved in school activities**

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1. Founding a Students Council – a democratically elected body that reflects and represents the interests of the students. In order to work efficiently, the Students Council needs a certain position in school, and its authority needs to be acknowledged and respected by the teachers.
2. Elaborating a School Code of Conduct that reflects school requirements so as that the classroom becomes a place where students feel safe and happy. The parents and the students express their opinion with regard to this Code and sign a declaration based according to which they undertake to observe it.
3. Organising regular meetings with the students, on a daily basis for students from primary school and on a weekly basis for students from secondary and high school, in order to debate various problems, to strengthen relationships between them and to help them feel that they belong to that class. For such debates, it is recommended that the students sit in circle.
4. Organising regular meetings with students from all grades – in order to stimulate their interest for general school issues and to develop connections and relations between grades and student groups, as this shall help students feel that they belong to school and shall assert the identity of the school.
5. Allotting class and school responsibilities in order for the students to contribute to the well functioning of school life, such as: students in charge with extracurricular activities, school conduct, school/class magazine, environment protection group, radio shows etc. It is recommended that the students compete for the respective position, presenting their own “managerial programme”.
6. Asking students’ opinion in order to elaborate a school regulation, thus providing a good incentive for them to observe this regulation. The rules must be fair and in accordance with students’ needs. If the students consider that certain rules are not necessary or are discriminatory, the school management and the teaching staff must allow them to propose a change to even to amend the rules.
7. Create a trustful environment by using approaches that allow students to work together, to develop their self-esteem, to communicate, to express their opinion on various school issues.
8. Permanently inform the students on everything that is being planned or happens within the school – a good school information flow is not only supporting the development of school activities but also helps students feeling that they play an active part in school life. There are several communication optimization methods, among which:



- placing billboards in the hallways and in every classroom in order to post information regarding school life;
  - editing and distributing school newsletters;
  - placing a flipchart for daily news in the hallway.
9. Creating an agreeable school environment – it is important that school offers a clean, well-maintained, cheerful and pleasant environment that can improve school atmosphere. It is advisable that the students be involved in school environment improvement activities in order to:
- be able to appreciate the efforts and the changes;
  - make them feel the “owners” of the school;
  - allow them to put their own ideas into practice.

### **Stages of a Community Needs Identification Project**

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- **Getting to know a community/What is a community**
  - identifying the physical, social, economic and political dimensions of a community;
  - exploring the past, present and future of that community.
- **Exploring the community needs/What problems does it face?**
  - opinion polls among community members;
  - discussions with experts and community leaders;
  - research activity.
- **Positioning various players with regard to the community/What is being done and for what purpose?**
  - gathering information on the existing programmes.
- **The role played by the school in the community/What could young people do?**
  - alternatives for action;
  - analysis of the success stories accomplished by young people.
- **Civic action/What shall we do and how shall we do it?**
  - identifying specific problems;
  - analysing the existing resources and policies;
  - establishing a list for action options;
  - preparing action plans;
  - implementing the projects/plans;
  - evaluation and consideration – to what extent were we successful in our action?

### **Community Support Service**

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- These services presuppose that a period of time from the school year be allotted for concrete community actions.
- The actions can be:
  - charity actions (taking care of old persons, sick people, orphans etc.);
  - environment protection actions (cleaning certain areas, monument restoration, waste recycling etc.);
  - surrounding recognition actions (resources, needs, particularities, history, human impact);
  - volunteer activities for various community institutions.
- This service helps understand and respect the individual differences;
- The impact of this service is increased when the actions are integrated in the school curricula (continuing various classes, optional subjects),
- It forms positive attitudes - devotion, self-confidence, self evaluation of owns weaknesses and strengths;
- The actions are planned based on an approach similar to a community needs identification project.

### **Civic Action Plan**

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1. The problem that has been identified;
2. The objectives for action;
3. Participants;
4. Information source;
5. Attributing the responsibilities;
6. Planned activities;
7. Data analysis;
8. Presenting the action results;
9. Action evaluation;
10. Follow-up – possibilities for continuing the action.

### **Puzzle**

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As a cooperative learning not only as a cooperating group

#### **▪ A Puzzle Activity – Definition**

The puzzle activity represents a set of group tasks within a structure where each individual from each group:

- a. has at least one pre-defined task, a set of information and/or resources that, at a certain point, no other group member has, and that are going to contribute to reaching the target of the group;
- b. has to cover one or more tasks, associated with this information and/or resources, and
- c. shares with the other group members the information, the abilities and/or resources related to his/her task so that they can reach the group objective.

▪ **Each puzzle activity presupposes that:**

- A. One or more common objectives have been attributed or selected by the group;
- B. The group members are aware that they must support or fulfil these tasks in a reasonable period of time;
- C. There is a division of labour among the group members;
- D. Two or more sets of distinct tasks, information and/or resources are involved in reaching the objectives;
- E. All group members constantly have a positive civic behaviour, both within the group and with the members of other groups;
- F. All group members use types, adequate interactions that significantly increase the chances of the group in reaching or completing their objective;
- G. All group members positively and continuously collaborate with each other at least in order to reach the group objective;
- H. There is a positive interdependency between group members at least in order to reach or complete the final objective;
- I. There needs to be conclusive evidence that the group reached or completed part of or all final objectives.

▪ **Yet, one needs to pay a great deal of attention, because:**

The above mentioned aspects should occur in most of the cases, but it does not necessarily mean that they are all going to occur or exist in a group or group activity in your class.

In other words, while all these are supposed to occur, you as a teacher should work as such and in due time, to make sure that they actually occur or exist in your class.

Also, please note that...

Learning, especially a maximum quantity and quality of academic learning that is result-oriented is not what it is expected from all puzzle activities and it is by no means an intrinsic result of one/all puzzle activities.

▪ **For teachers, the most important thing is the answer to questions such as:**

If we wish to obtain a maximum quantity and quality of result-oriented academic learning as a final outcome of a puzzle activity, what do we need to do?

The answer to this question needs:

- A. a set of corresponding definitions;
- B. a set of descriptions referring to puzzle activities as a structure (activity) for a cooperative learning group;
- C. a set of guidelines regarding the essential elements of cooperative learning.

In order for the group members to be successful in acquiring school abilities, the teachers must see to the followings:

- A. involvement in order to maximize the quantity and the quality of result-oriented learning activity;
- B. realizing elements that are essential for cooperative learning;
- C. completing all tasks attributed to a puzzle group.

Let's start with....

▪ **Adequate definitions for key terms**

**Cooperation**

It represents a group interaction and teamwork aimed at reaching and completing a group objective in an interdependent and friendly manner.

**Cooperative Learning**

It represents productive interaction and work in an interdependent and cooperative manner in order to maximize the result-oriented academic learning both for the respective individual and for the other group members.

In other words, during the activities that are not labeled “cooperative learning”.

The main task of each group member is not to go through the entire content but rather to make sure that he/she is going to obtain a maximum of result-oriented information and abilities and that all group members acquire the same quantity of information and knowledge.

In order to meet the requirements of cooperative learning activities

Each decision, action and processing activity must be conceived so as to enable all the members of the group to master the constructs and abilities set as objectives.

**Thinking...**

All neuronal activities that take place in the brain and involve the use of constructs.

These activities include construct processing, constructing and implementation.

**Learning**

Storing in long-term memory the new and reviewed constructs (including new information), arrangements or constructs or “the use” of one or several constructs so that one or several constructs remain in the memory 23 hours after the moment or the circumstances that lead to their construction or use.

### **Resulting Abilities**

They represent the process and the action that everyone can develop by him/herself in a particular situation and context based on a set of criteria and standards and following all the instructions of a unit, session, academic term or program.

### **Resulting Information Base**

This represents the information that remains in the memory after all the instructions for a unit, session, academic term or program ended.

### **Result-Oriented Construct**

This is a unit and a product invented based on information that the students need to permanently store in their memory and that is necessary and used for abilities set as durable training results.

### **Labels for Possible Result-Oriented Constructs**

Moreover, in addition to each piece of information invented by the learner in his/her own neural system, the learner can also invent other constructs, such as: concepts, beliefs, conceptions, impressions, misconcepts, perspectives, stereotypes, points of view, global images.

### **Result-Oriented Information**

It represents the invented, transported, stored and processed neural constructs that a person needs to be stored in the long-term storage area from the brain or/and is necessary and used for abilities that are set as durable training results of a unit, session, term or program.

### **Possible Labels for Result-Oriented Information**

- presuppositions
- characteristics
- consequences
- contributing factors
- criteria
- event data
- definitions
- essential attributions
- laws, principles
- predisposition
- properties
- reasons
- outcomes
- steps of a method

- steps of a procedure.

▪ **In an Optimum Cooperative Learning Activity**

The main objective and the purpose of all individual or group efforts is to build, reach and maintain, at least at the end of the unit or of the class, the constructs and abilities corresponding to the ones set as durable results of participation, cooperation, study and learning in group activities.

Due to these main objectives and purposes, the final targets of these group activities are the result-oriented outcomes that should not be regarded as indicators for the progress achieved.

The most accurate success measurements for the group cooperative learning activity are the abilities acquired by the student after the group concluded its activity.

▪ **Group Structure**

The particular arrangement of each/all group member(s), that is conceived, described and structured in order for the group to achieve or to complete one or several targets.

▪ **Activity Structure**

The particular set of planned, described and structured sub-tasks that involve the activity of each group member and of the entire group in order to achieve or to complete one or several targets.

We continue with...

A set of puzzle related descriptions as a structure and activity of a cooperative group. They are attributed to a number of different group structures or activities.

A “puzzle” group involves:

- two or several persons working together rather than individually;
- one or several targets the group has to achieve or complete;
- two or several sub-tasks that must be fulfilled in a certain sequence;
- one or several tasks that the individual has to fulfill as an individual contribution to the achievement or completion of the group’s target.

Each individual has at least one task, set of information and/or resources that, at a certain point, no other group member has, and this is going to contribute to the achievement of the group’s target:

- each individual is supposed to fulfil one or several tasks associated with the particular information and/or resource;
- each individual shares with the other group members the information and abilities related to the task and/or resource, so that the group’s target is reached;
- the group members work together in a polite manner;
- the group members achieve or complete the group’ target.

An “intact puzzle structure”

This appears when all group members are required by the sub-task sequence to fulfill all sub-task without needing to work with one or several sub-groups.

▪ **An “Expert Group”**

A temporarily detached group, consisting of one or several individuals from one or several different groups, who gather together and cooperate in order to reach the primary target:

- it guarantees that each individual shall become an “expert” in the target constructs (including information) and abilities attributed to the group;
- it makes sure that all other members of these temporary groups become experts in these abilities and constructs;
- it helps training each member in order for him/her to become capable of “guiding” the members of the mother-group so that they become experts in the same abilities and constructs.

▪ **A “Puzzle with Expert Groups”**

This is a set of required sub-tasks that must be completed by the members of a group and each sub-task must be approached by each member for a certain period of time within and as part of the “expert group”; subsequently, they return to their mother-group in order to guide its members in the respective field of expertise.

## **Practices for the Active Involvement of Students in School Life**

Ten moments of the classroom meeting:

1. Gather in a circle. Form a perfectly round circle and ask the students to pay attention to this activity.
2. Set the working agenda: point out the objectives and the purposes of this meeting.
3. Establish the ground rules for this meeting: set or remind the students the rules for discussion during the meeting (we do not interrupt our colleagues, do not laugh at what they say etc.).
4. Identify the partners: establish pairs of students for discussions.
5. Start discussing the topic: for instance – “There are complaints with regard to the fact that, lately, there is a lot of noise on the playground. What can we do in this respect?”
6. Grant a certain period for reflection: one minute, during which time children should consider this issue individually.

7. Warning (information) sign – “silence”: establish a sign (for instance, raise your hand) in order to signal the end of the discussion with the partner and the beginning of the group discussion (the entire class).
8. Pair discussions: ask the students, while working in pairs, to share their point of views with each other (for 3 to 5 minutes) and monitor the activity in order to be able to help those who interact with some difficulties.
9. The group/class discussion: invite a few pairs to share their ideas with the entire class; invite the other students to comment on these ideas, to ask questions; if an agreement is reached, establish and list the actions to be taken, plan their implementation and, finally, set the date for the next meeting.
10. Close the meeting: there are a lot ways to close a class meeting.



## **Essential Concepts of Roma Culture**

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## Roma History Breviary

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- 1385** - first written record of the Roma slavery on Romanian territory;
- 1712** - first written record of the Roma slavery in Transylvania;
- 1760** - beginning of the program for forced assimilation for Transylvanian Romas;
- 1766** - “Sobornicescul Hrisov” (ecumenical official decision) reiterates the interdiction of mixed marriages;
- 1767** - in Transylvania, beginning of colonization of the Romas from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, as “neubanater” and “ujmaghiar”;
- 1783** - abolition of Roma slavery in Bucovina;
- 1784** - Iosif, the “Gypsy from the Cris”, from the village of Cioara, was martyred alongside Horea, Closca and the 40 leaders of the Peasantry Revolt;
- 1785** - Iosif the Second abolished slavery in Transylvania;
- 1814** - the Calimach Code strengthens the interdiction of mixed marriages;
- 1839** - Barbu Constantinescu is born (died in 1891), Ph.D., speaker of Roma language, author of the first anthology of Roma literary texts from Romania;
- 1855** - abolition of Roma slavery in Moldavia;
- 1856** - abolition of Roma slavery in Tara Romaneasca;
- 1861** - abolition of Roma slavery in Basarabia;
- 1878** - Barbu Constantinescu published the “Probe de limba si literatura tiganilor din Romania” volume
- 1919** - founding of the National Assembly of the Transylvanian Gypsies, in the county of Sibiu;
- 1926** - Naftanaila Lazar founds the Mutual Aid Association “Infratirea Neorustica” (Neorustical Twinning) in Calbor/Fagaras and published the journal “Neamul tiganesc” (Gypsy Folk);
- 1930** - the orthodox abbot Calinic Popp Serboianu publishes the volume “Les tsiganes” at the Payot Publishing House from Paris;
- 1933** - founding of the General Association of the Gypsies from Romania, led by the orthodox abbot Calinic Pop Serboianu;
- 1933** - founding of the General Association of the Romas from Romania, led by G. A. Lazureanu-Lazurica;
- 1933/1938** - founding of the “Time” newspaper edited by the Romas from Craiova;
- 1934** - founding of the Roma General Union - reuniting the Roma associations - led by Gheorghe Niculescu;
- 1934/1941** - founding of the “Glasul romilor” newspaper (The Voice of the Romas) edited in Bucharest;
- 1934** - September – October, founding of the “O Rom” newspaper edited by the Romas from Craiova;

- 1934** - C.S. Nicolaescu Plopsor publishes two Roma folklore anthologies “Gilla rromane” and “Paramisa rromane”;
- 1941/1944** - Holocaust – tens of thousands of Romas are deported in Transnistria and exterminated;
- 1948** - the Roma General Union is officially closed (in fact, it had stopped its activities since 1941);
- 1977/1983** - development of the Programme of the Romanian Communist Party called “The Integration of the Gypsies”
- 1979** - the first Roma translation of the “Gospel according to John” (republished in 1994)’
- 1985** - founding, with the approval of the official authorities but without a legal statute, the Roma Association “Phralipe”.

### **The Main Roma Sub-Groups/Folks from Romania**

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- Rupunara (silversmiths)** - Romas who, traditionally, work with silver and gold and manufacture jewelry and other adornments;
- Kikavara (cauldron makers)** - Romas who, traditionally, work with copper/brass and produce cauldrons, boiling vessels, pans, kettles etc.;
- Boldena (flower merchants)** - Romas that used to manufacture artificial flowers and that now sell flowers and are general merchants;
- Gabora (gabori)** - Hungarian Romas, Hungarian speakers who, traditionally, manufacture tin objects but who, more recently, trade in carpets, rugs, electric home appliances etc.’
- Xoraxané (Turks)** - Muslim Turk Romas, Turkish speakers, who assumed Turkish identity, living mainly in Dobrogea;
- Xanotara (tinsmiths)** - Romas who, in the past, used to apply tin layers on metal vessels and today collect scrap nonferrous materials;
- Music players** - Roma musicians playing various music instruments;
- Lovara (lovari)** - Hungarian Romas, Hungarian speakers who, traditionally, trade in horses;
- Rromungre (romungre)** - Hungarian Romas, Hungarian speakers who, assumed Hungarian identity;
- Kastale (wood-workers)** - Romas who no longer speak Roma language and work with wood, producing wooden spoons, forks, spindles, furniture etc., who assumed Romanian identity;

<b>Richinara (ursari)</b>	- Romas who used to go to various fairs “displaying” a bear and, later on, they started to manufacture bone and horn objects (“pieptanari”), to process animal skin and manufacture sieves and strains (“ciurari”) and also to play music instruments (“lautari”);
<b>Vatrasi (homesteaders)</b>	- Assimilated Romas who assumed Romanian identity.

### **Essential Concepts of the Roma Culture**

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<b>Phralipe</b>	- fraternity
<b>Pakiv</b>	- trust, belief, honesty/honour, reconciliation;
<b>Uzo</b>	- pure
<b>Maxrime</b>	- impure
<b>Cacipe</b>	-truth, justice
<b>Baxt</b>	-fortune, faith
<b>Del</b>	- God, good
<b>Beng</b>	- devil, evil
<b>Laavipe</b>	- shame

### **Moral Universe – Pure and Impure**

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The entire life philosophy of the Roma traditional culture is based on the opposition between pure – “uzo” and impure – “maxrime”. The ritual purity is achieved by observing the universal order and harmony, by following the ideal, and the ritual impurity, invisible, but spiritually present, is represented by the deviation from the ideal, thus disrupting the intra-communitary balance achieved through a series of behaviour and conduct laws whose viability has been long tested through direct experience.

Divided in two parts, the upper, pure part and the lower, impure part, the human body is an important element in the Roma culture.

The head - the center of fortune, and the hat are pure, so they belong to the sacred and this is why nothing human is allowed to pass over them. If a woman steps over a man's hat, the hat is thrown away. When someone touches his/her head he/she must immediately shake his/her hands in order to get rid of the negative influence a lower part of the body could have on the head.

The shirts are washed separately from skirts or trousers, in different vessels, special for item of clothing, covering the upper or the lower part of the body. Also, the vessel and the dishes are washed separately from the clothes.

The legs, feet and footwear are considered impure because they touch the ground and they belong to the lower part of the body. When a woman steps on a man's hat or throws her shoe over his head, or when she even threatens the man with these gestures, the man becomes "maxrime".

Both men and women must permanently cover the lower part of their body. The Roma women wear long skirts in order to strictly delimitate between the upper and the lower part of the body, and they never wear trousers or short skirts; the Roma men wear long trousers, never short ones, as the knees are considered one of the most indecent parts of the human body.

### **Ethical Values - Respect and Shame**

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If a woman's skirt touches a vessel or if she steps over a vessel no one is ever going to eat from that vessel. This is why vessels are never placed on the ground. The wife is not allowed to give her husband water with bare hands, she must cover them with a towel or, even better, with her own scarf (rr. "dikhlo"), out of respect (rr. "pakiv") and shame (rr. "la?ipe").

To be pure means to have honour ("uzo aj pakivalo" = pure and honest) and to hide any behaviour that could compromise one's honour. The feeling of shame is associated mainly with a woman's sexuality, which must be hidden in order to avoid impurity.

There are a lot of purity norms and they can be classified based on several criteria: bodily purity and moral law, prohibition of mixed marriages, customs observance, taboo code, accountability in front of the community, law of honour and brotherhood – "pakiv" and "phralipe".

In the Roma traditional culture, the "purity" concept involves both the physical and the spiritual side, the former presupposing the latter as the bodily purity is nothing else but a reflection – cause and effect at the same time – of the moral purity. The observance of these norms is one's individual responsibility as well as the responsibility of the entire collectivity, based on the sense of shame – "la?avo"/"la?ipe", this is how children, especially girls, are educated, and the norms are never to be broken.

### **Community Values – Fraternity and Solidarity**

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Only when all these purity norms are observed we can talk about another essential concept for the traditional Roma family: "phralipe" (fraternity). This concept could be defined by making a comparison to the relationships existing within the extended family,

where “sa phrala si kathe” (all are brothers), the responsibility being equally distributed among the members of the community seen as a large family.

The collective responsibility and mutual help, joined by the sense of fraternity are the basic elements of the “phralipe” concept, the very essence of the Roma traditional society. The code of ritual behaviour includes greeting and approaching manners, where affection is displayed by phrases such as “murro phral” (my brother) or “murri phen” (my sister).

In fact, the Roma men and women consider themselves brothers and sisters and this is why, when they meet, they never have status troubling relations: “ame na keras sar e ga?e” (we never worry like the gajos do).

### **Education Models - Honour and Responsibility**

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In Roma culture, a great importance is given to the belief in fate, the equivalent of fortune, both concepts being included in the more complex concept of “baxt”. This concept encompasses long-lost beliefs, such as reincarnation, one’s fortune being explained based on his/her acts from a previous life: “bari baxt si les! Kana maj sas kathe, p-i phuv, sas rrom pakivalo!” The personal fortune is also connected to the state of purity – “uzipen” – based on which he is a person of honour, integrity and good faith – “pakivalo rrom”.

The educational model in a Roma traditional family is experiential – intuitive, based on equality between children and adults but also on accountability in relation with the others – collective responsibility – and on the feeling of shame – “lazavo” – and of preserving the Roma tradition.

This tradition, through its sacred, inalienable and indubitable character has the force of a dogma centered on three essential concepts: “phralipe”, the revelation of fraternal relations within the community, relations of mutual help and shared fate; “pakiv”, faith, respect and mutual trust, as well as preservation of spiritual and bodily purity; “baxt”, the cult of fortune, of chance appearing in the life of those who abide by the norms of the “phralipe” and “pakiv”, as opposed to the “bibaxt”, the misfortune and lack of chance that appears if “phralipe” and “pakiv” are not observed.

### **Behavioural Norms - Pure or Impure**

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The cultural link family – community that defines identity: “ame sam rroma” (we are Romas) does not allow the admixture of blood, because of a type of relation similar to the religious one – we, believers, they – non-believers – this “ame aj kolavera” (we and the others) including the “maxrim” laws, the series of taboos and ritual recommendations of the opposition between pure and impure.

If “pakiv” means communion: “te xas, te pias, te rovas khetanes” (let’s eat, drink and cry together), the access to initiation supposes the preservation of purity, and any failure in observing the norms leads to excommunication, if we were to draw a parallel to the religious world.

When one is declared “maxrime” (soiled, impure) and excluded from among one’s folk this is not directly related to the idea of sin (in fact, the word and the basic notion “bezăx” = sin is not very relevant in the Roma culture), but rather to the idea of shame = “lazavo”; those who “na den pakiv e nămosque” (do not respect their own folk) are considered impure and no longer have access to their family.

### **The Dualism of the Roma Cosmology – Perception of Time and Space**

The vault key of the Roma way of thinking with regard to the spatial and temporal structure of the universe is the faith in the harmony of cosmos and of the continuous present. The first one is reflected in the belief that each object has its own, well-defined and definitive place in the world. For instance, the stars belong in the sky and the animals belong on the ground. Any superposition of the spaces is regarded as a discontinuation of the natural balance or as a deviation and any passage from one space to another (birth, death) must be accompanied by a complex of rituals meant to protect the individual and the community from possible spiritual interferences or impurities.

The birds, for instance the pigeon, as they cross from the celestial to the terrestrial space and vice versa, getting in contact with human, angels and unborn spirits alike, are seen as having special powers, as they get in contact with the sacred, but also malefic powers, if they get in contact with humans non-protected from the invasion of sacred, for which the former is not ready.

Thus, birds are considered “maxrime” or soiled/impure, as they bear the mark of a contamination of spaces and of an intrinsic disharmony. The interdiction of getting into contact with these birds is reflected in the interdiction of ever eating such birds.

The binary vision on the world, that includes the opposition between pure – “uzo” and impure – “maxrime” can be identified, in what the relation with the supernatural is concerned, in a Manichean belief, similar to the Persian dualism where the forces of good, represented by God – “o Del” or “o Devel” and the forces of evil, represented by the Devil – “o Beng” are necessary for world harmony.

Both the Roma language and the Roma traditional way of thinking prove the fact that the Romas conceive the year divided in two main seasons: “o milaj” – summer and “o ivend” – winter, the other two seasons being defined only in relation to the two main ones: “o pasmilaj” – spring, and “o dusmilaj” or “o pas ivend” – autumn. This corresponds to a dual way of thinking in dividing the world according to the principles of good and evil, each having the same value and status.

## **Love and the Ways of the World**

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The dualism is also reflected in the roles played by man and woman within a family. The woman takes care of the children, the household activities and the man earns a living and establishes the connection with the outside world.

To go even further, one could say that the sense of time is more developed in women, they are more conservative, transmit the traditional culture, including the mother tongue – “i dejaki chib” – and, as time passes by and leaves visible marks, the woman is more strongly anchored in the reality of this passage, she is the hand that acts, while the man is the will behind this action, the creative thinking, including in proposing the new.

The acute sense of space is more developed in men, unsecured in the nomad travelling, and yet, well determined by the social command of the purity laws, he makes the rules governing the intracommunity behaviour, control and social sanctions. He represents the virtuality, the way that must be walked, because he establishes a direct contact with perishability, but in close connection with the woman, who preserves the community memory.

## **The Philosophy of the Roma Travelling – The Sky for a Roof**

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The Roma travelling is somewhere in the middle between ethnical identity and economic category (such as: the trade travelling due to social marginalization) or a survival strategy. The latter gives a social status to the community and creates something that could be called the cycle cause – effect – cause. The community is nomad because they have certain trades and it has a marginal status because they are nomads, but, in its turn, this travelling is caused, besides the ethno-psychological dimension, by the social marginalization.

From the point of view of intra-group relationships, the nomad way of living is characterized by a more accentuated dynamics and by a far greater cohesion: living in the open air, in direct and permanent contact with nature but also with any possible danger, the need for communication and mutual help developed the collective life dimension. While the sedentary individual built himself as a relatively isolated person, independent from the community he belongs to, the nomad individual reasserted his position as part of a collectivity, this is the difference between “I” and “us”.

One should not bring to absolute the idea of nomad Romas or the idea that the “real” Romas are nomad: as proved during history, a great part of the Romas became sedentary, not always unwillingly, because we can also talk about willing settling down, the phenomenon is much more complex than it looks at a first glance. What remains is the great mobility of Romas, perhaps the psychological feature that predisposes to travelling, and it is the duty of the society to protect it as an authentic cultural value.



## **Freedom of Movement – Pilgrim School**

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Motivated by forced expulsions and settling interdictions, in search for a job, driven by interior impulses or maybe because of all these together, the travelling was wrongly interpreted as a cause for the “maladjustment” of the Romas to the modern society, as if the sedentary way of living is the superior one and education must be represented by school in its classical form.

Behind this concept of “adjustment” there is not only the non-recognition of the Roma cultural values and a tendency of ethnical assimilation, but also, and this is even more serious, a profoundly racist vision according to which the main issues to be approached are poverty, diseases and school enrolment, namely social issues and not ethnical ones.

If one tried to describe, even roughly, this state of mind, it would include another type of order, norms different from those of the stable life: for instance, freedom of movement, mobility in space, refusal of arbitrary temporary norms, existence of a personalized working rhythm. All these represent laws, but different from the ones of the sedentary system. As if a counterbalance was needed for this idea of freedom, within the community the individual independence is replaced by the emotional and customs group dependence. For the Romas, the dwelling and the common space form a whole, a continuum. The tent, and later on the caravan are spaces open to the entire community; as there is no property feeling for land, there is no private space in the sense given by the gajikano model. For an individual who, instead of a personal room, prefers a space shared with the entire community and who calls the members of his ethnic group “brothers” and “sister”, the experience of solitude is one of the most terrible things that could happen to him. Thus, freedom in relation with the others and fraternal collective spirit in relation with his own people, represent two principles closely related to travelling.

The attitude of the sedentary people towards the nomad model has, in both ways, a stereotypical character: perceived as a deviation, the nomad life of the Romas should be counteracted by a settling policy; perceived as a distinctive mark of the Roma culture, it should be preserved, thus settling is out of the question even when willingly accepted. In both cases, the Romas are urged to conform to a way of living that is not necessarily theirs. The diversity and the complexity of the Romas is manifested in a wide range of identity expressions and this shows that any kind of exclusive attitude is contrary to the Roma nature.

At the same time ancestral practice and attempt of escaping the stigma by self-exclusion, the travelling has its own flexibility with regard to sedentary life, being able to alternate, in certain circumstances, with relatively long periods of settling in a hospitable place. As cultural and psychological heritage, Roma travelling is an existential alternative, in conditions of marginalization and exclusion, and not an atavistic way of living. Resulting from the combination of various factors inherent to family economic and social life, “the travelling, like the settling, represents circumstantial modalities for exploiting the existing resources, conditioned by flexibility, fundamental engine of the Roma society”.

## Travelling and Identity

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In what the travelling as an identity value is concerned, there are two perspectives: self-identification, as assumption, and hetero-identification, as perception of differences. Identity is a relation value through interaction: the other denies or confirms what I feel or claim as mine. In the case of the Romas, travelling has this status because it reflected a stereotypical expectance of the non-Romas, which, in its turn, influenced the Roma psychological way of thinking, thus reiterating this identity mark. Together with this positive cliché, appeared a negative stereotype – the stigma, that, in its turn, increased travelling through exclusion. The Romas themselves preserved, at least at a virtual level, the nomadic model as a refuge of ethnicity endangered by the assimilation process. All this and many others prove that travelling is more than a state of mind, more than a state of fact.

Now we shall see the extent to which the Roma ethnic profile was influenced by travelling. First of all, the type of habitat: living in a tent presupposes a certain relation with the environment and a certain conception of property and dwelling. While the sedentary acutely lives the feeling of land ownership and builds an entire existential philosophy around it, the nomad does not experience this feeling of getting attached to a place, is free of such need and completely detached from the idea of territory, and this gives specific characteristics to his mental structure.

A man of nature, the nomad has a special relation with the cosmos, he does not want to be separated from the natural environment, not even by a dwelling: for him, the tent is not a dwelling but a coat meant to protect him from cold, not to separate him from nature. The tent as a coat, as a prolongation of his own being, has all the features of an anthropomorphic being (the mouth of the tent, the soles of the tent, the head of the tent etc.) develops a philosophy of freedom and of unity with nature, the harmony of the habitat reduced to essence, simplified to the maximum in order to drive the individual in his relation with the natural environment.

Besides the fact that there are nomadic Romas and sedentary Romas, the nomadic spirit could be interpreted, speculatively, as a unifying factor, based on several characteristics: the pride of being different, the travelling nostalgia (“wandering desire”), reticence towards strangers, myth-building mental structure, lack of interest for the past, for own history (like the Indians), not because of a laziness of the mind but because of a Epicurean existential philosophy according to which, similar to the Bible: the past is of no importance, it vanished, the future should not worry you for you cannot know it and, anyway, it is in God’s hands, only the present is important (“Carpe Diem”); the strong feeling of belonging to the community expressed through mutual help and folk solidarity, economic flexibility and cultural resiliency, the capacity to adapt to circumstances, the great mobility and pragmatic spirit.

## **A Community on the Wheels**

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The nomad spirit imposed cohesion and a deep feeling of community hegemony – the importance of the family and the privilege of parental relations, the feeling of belonging and of solidarity reflected in the type of education, independence in exerting one's trade, professional polyvalence, subsistence economy adaptable to any circumstances, mental mobility. All elements adopted during the migration periods are reinterpreted up to a mutation that makes them almost unrecognizable, in order to be integrated in the aggregate configuration. In a culture where flexibility generates strength, we witness an adaptation of the borrowings rather than an adaptation to the borrowings.

The fundamental family value, as a community's form of defense against the invasion of the outside elements and as a survival strategy of the traditional society, also derives from the nomadic way of living. The peripatetic community protects its own identity values, by establishing rituals around the "pure" and "impure" concepts and by proposing endogamy/intra-group marriage (the Romas do not mix their blood with other Roma folks – the "căldărari", "ursari", "gabori", "lovari" marry only from their own folk, and never with gajii) as a social control and identity preservation factor.

There is a psychical and cultural barrier between the community and the rest of the world, destined to safeguard the self-defining ethnical marks, preserving, at the same time, the balance in the relation with the natural environment and attempting to gain capital in the relation with the outsiders. The nomadic spirit imposed cohesion and a deep sense of community hegemony, the importance of the family and the privilege of parental relations, the responsibility of being part of the community and fraternal solidarity (rr. "phralipe") being reflected at a custom – education level.

## **Together and Alone**

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As if a counterbalance was needed for this idea of mobility, for the refusal of arbitrary norms imposed from outside and for the freedom of movement, within the community/family the individual independence is replaced by the emotional and customs group dependence. The extended family lives together and, most of the time, the entire neighborhood is inhabited by relatives: usually, when two young people get married, an extra room is added to the groom's father's house or another house is built for them within the same yard. The cohabitation principles are mutual help and collective responsibility. The space of the individual dwelling and the common space form a continuum: the tent, and later on the caravan, are spaces open to the entire community. As in the traditional Roma culture there is no property feeling for land, there is no private space in the sense given by the gajikano model. For an individual who, instead of a personal room, prefers a space shared with the entire community and who calls the members of his ethnic group "brothers" and "sister", the experience of solitude is worse than death and his exclusion from the family and community, if an important norm is broken, is the equivalent of his spiritual extinction and the dissolution of his ego: the

individual would become an amorphous element, without any identity and sense of belonging.

This proves the importance of the family in individual life: a person exists only if recognized by the community and granted a status with well-defined rights and obligations. Thus, freedom controlled in relation with the outsiders (ga?ii) and the fraternal collective spirit in relation with the insiders (the Romas) represent the two types of relations in the Roma family.

If we were to define the extended family/stock/folk as an enlarged family, within the nomadic community we could define it by opposition with the core family of “pattern gajikano”.

Supposing a life-long sedentary pattern, on a strictly delimited territory whose owner is known and has the instinct and the obligation to defend it from outside cultural interference and from any possible economic crises/resource loss, the “gajikano” type core family is a cell of the social body: close, autarchic, economically independent inasmuch as possible (they own a house, land and own subsistence means), autonomous in relation with society, neighbour and partner for other families but opposed to them in what the structure, function and interests (battle for resources) are concerned. By preserving the nomadic mental pattern in the ancestral collective memory, without any feeling of territorial ownership, therefore lacking territorial defense techniques, but developing complex strategies in order to protect their folk from any possible customs or structural imbalances, the Roma extended family is a social organism composed of interdependent cells where kin relationships – be them consanguine or in-laws – are completely fraternal, based on equality and cooperation at all levels: labour division, relation with external elements, family relationships and matrimony, socialisation and division of economic resources.

## **Folk Law**

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It is only natural for a nomadic community or a community that has a nomadic state of mind to hold fraternity – “phralipe” – as a survival strategy during this permanent travelling or existence in foreign environments.

From one’s marriage to one’s children’s marriage and beyond, each family member undertakes responsibility for the others and they guarantee moral protection and economic safety, provide integrity for one’s identity and offer the proper answers during dire straits. “Rromanipen” – the folk law – represents their religion and, by extension of feelings, the desire to stay together is reflected in their socialization pattern: any Roma they come across, even if a complete stranger, is considered a brother (rr. “phral”) and treated as such, from the perspective family – offspring, which multiplies indefinitely and permanently gains new kin relationships. Possible travelling companion for the nomadic community, with which, if he wants to survive, he needs to establish amiable relations,

this spiritual brother is verified in two ways – by the conservation instinct of the community, which became a kind of an identity confirmation ritual.

The first one tested is the sense of belonging to the Roma folk, the essential question being “kaqar san? kasqo namo san?/ so vica si tut?” (Where are you from? To what folk do you belong?/What’s your stock?), important when establishing future relations, maybe through endogamous marriage is the respective individual is part of the same folk (“caldarari”, “ursari”, “gabori”, “lovvari” etc.) or exogamous marriage, if the individual belongs to another folk. The next question refers to the family: “kasqo san?” (To whom do you belong?), the importance of the stock being reflected in a series of ritual obligations: questions reflecting customary politeness, such as – “sar si tiro dad? Sar si tiri daj?” (How’s your mother? How’s your father?) – and then sharing the same table (to sit at the table, to eat and drink together) as a sign of trust and respect - “del pakiv” (to show respect), possibly accompanied by gift exchanges.

## **Children Cult**

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The God of a Roma family is their child, the embodiment of absolute purity, guarantee of folk continuity. The norms of honor and “pakiv” forbid a woman to pass by a man, she has to announce her arrival with “arakh!” (step back!) or “ambold!” (turn around!) and the man must look to the other side in order to allow her pass by. But, if a woman carries a baby in her arms, she is considered to be purified by the presence of the baby and she can pass by any man.

The children are brought up in the spirit of fraternity and mutual help but also of responsibility for the other community members. The siblings take care of each other in order to become responsible, the girls start to take care of the household from the age of 5 or 6, the boys learn trades and take part in grown-up assemblies from the age of 7 or 8. Because they are pure, thus not under the influence of the “maxrime” law, the children enjoy a great freedom, counterbalanced by the sense of responsibility.

The children, recently detached from the pure space of the unborn souls, are the bearers of a purity endowment, but they are going to lose it in time because of their very existence on Earth. They are allowed to do things that are forbidden to adults because they are considered to be “maxrime”, they are even allowed to eat flying birds, to wear clothes that do not delimitate between the two parts of the body – the pure (upper) from the impure (lower) part.

Considered equal by the grown-ups, capable of understanding everything they are told, the children are exposed, from the very beginning of their existence, to the same stimuli as their parents. The parents educate their children’s capability of defense, moral strength and frustration endurance.

## **Child Education**

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As a member of the extended family and having numerous relatives, the child feels protected within the community, but he/she has to prove that they observe the folk laws. Although, being pure, the children have access to any type of information – adults talk freely about sex issues in their presence – especially the girls are brought up in the spirit of shame (“la?avo”): they hide away their sexuality, avoid contact with strangers (the “gajii”) and behave according to the restrictions and recommendations related to the concept of purity.

It is only natural that, in a culture where the family is extended at the level of a community, adoption is not something special, it is part of the normality according to which the child does not belong only to the core family but also to the entire community, to the entire folk: one day he/she could sleep at home, the other day at a relative and the parents have nothing against it.

Girls married at 15 - 16 and boys at 17 – 18 is a custom about to be given up, practiced only in very conservative families in order to control young people’s sexuality. From a medical point of view, these age intervals represent the period when sexual instincts arise and traditional culture is afraid of any deviation from the established model. In modern culture, the first sexual relations occur at the same age, but they are secret and uncontrolled and, thus, they could become hazardous.

The traditional culture intends to control this type of relations, to avoid any kind of deviations and this is why they are consecrated through marriage, under their parents’ blessing. In fact, sexual education begins at a very early age, the mothers being accountable for their daughters’ purity and responsible to teach them a behaviour adequate to their status.

In order to better understand the general fraternity feeling from a Roma community, it is necessary to analyze the sibling relationships from a family: no one is allowed to assume a position superior to the others or to be condescending with the others. The children may call their parents by their names, call them “mo” (you – 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular), “chave” (boy), “chaje” (girl) or “phrala” (brother), the latter being usually used by a son when talking to his father: “phrala”.

## **The Most Celebrated Holidays from the Old Traditional Calendar of the Romas from Romania**

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### **January 1<sup>st</sup>, Vasilica**

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- going caroling with the head of the sacrificed pig, on the eve or the morning of the New Year’s Day.

**February 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup>**

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- Bear's Holiday or the Winter Bears, the end of bear hibernation when the "ursari" started to display the bears at various fairs.

**April 23<sup>rd</sup>**

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- Saint George, a very important holiday especially for the "caldarari" and "lovari" Roma – a reconciliation and love ritual performed by young maids and young married women, who used to bake and give away magic tortes – "marikla"/"kamimasqe manre" (love bread) in order to speed up marriage or to keep by themselves their unfaithful husbands. Eloping also exists as a ritual – "o nasimos" or ravishment marriage/at the willow tree; after about one month the young couple returns and reparatory rituals are performed: parents' forgiveness, purification and material compensations.

**First Sunday after the Orthodox Easter**

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- "Herdelezi" or the Easter of the "Spoitori", a holiday celebrated by sacrificing a lamb, marking the children with the blood of the sacrificed lamb and initiating family ablution.

**First Thursday after the Orthodox Easter and/or on St. George**

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- the Green Thursday, a celebration of the renewal, of spring arrival, with premarital initiating rituals.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday after the Orthodox Easter or the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday after the "Rusalii"**

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- Paparuda, reparatory singing and dancing ritual, in order to invoke rain and eradicate drought, performed by pure girls.

**Three Weeks after the Orthodox Easter, on a Tuesday or a Thursday**

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- The "Caloian", a reparatory ritual with funerary aspect, destined to eradicate drought and invoke rain.

**June 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>, the Summer Feast or the "Rusalii"**

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- Girl Fair/girl bestowal, a selecting ceremony, ritual of striking a bargain and exchanging gifts between future in-laws – "xanamika" – for their children's marriage, "bestowing the girl" or the engagement and premarital initiating rituals, such as "the most beautiful skirt" – for girls, or "horse harnessing" – for boys.

**June 24<sup>th</sup>, "Sanzaienele"**

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- The “Sanzaienele”/Girl fair/Girl Bestowal and Baxt Luluga, rituals of premonitory and determinative – premarital magic (to speed up marriage and determine the future husband), performed by young girls by burning lucky flowers bouquets at crossroads (“baxt luluga” – flowers picked up during the “Sanzaiene” night and kept under the pillow or between clothes in order to be safe from diseases, suffering or adulteration).

**July 20<sup>th</sup> - Saint Elijah; July 27<sup>th</sup> - St. Pantelimon and October 26<sup>th</sup> – St. Dumitru**

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- The return to the original family in the case of wrong girls – “dosale” (brides that proved not to be virgin), the rituals ranging, according to the choice of the family, from reparatory sacrifices (the girl has to cut open the neck of a pigeon and to leave its blood drain in a river), a compensatory ritual, similitude magic, accompanied by public opprobrium cast over the girl’s mother (she is humiliated and dishonored by being covered in sooth and sung to the owl song, a song usually sung to immoral women).

**September 8<sup>th</sup>, St. Mary**

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- The pilgrimage of the “caldarari” to Costesti, county of Valcea, a holiday destined to reestablish folk hierarchy and reconfirm family tradition, a purification ritual by church prayer and offering, a good opportunity for girl bestowal and premarital rituals and for establishing economic inter-community relationships.

**October 13<sup>th</sup>, St. Paraschiva**

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- The pilgrimage of the Moldavian Romas to Iasi, to the holy remains of St. Paraschiva, a reconfirmation and purification ritual for intracommunitary social control factors.

**November 30<sup>th</sup>, St. Andrew**

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- celebration of the saint patron of the “ursari”.

**Note**

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Unlike the agrarian cultures where the calendar is structured according to crop rotation, season succession and agricultural activities, the Roma nomadic culture structures its calendar either based on the dates of various fairs and pilgrimages as an opportunity for meetings between different nomadic groups, or by negotiating with the agrarian culture the reparatory magic function needed by the latter (in the case of Paparuda, Caloianul etc., destined to invoke rain which is indispensable in agriculture).



## **Family Customs**

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### **Marriage**

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Marriage is one of the most important events in the history of a community, generating new relationships and thus needing the public recognition of the newly assumed roles (husband, wife, in-laws) and the celebration of the moment by an integrative ritual act preceded by verifying the observance of prescriptions (hypergamy – through marriage, the wife accedes to a superior social status) and norms (virginity of the bride) and of acquiring the customs code through initiation rituals. The father gives away his daughter and the groom takes her to be his bride and the family is going to function by the same system, based on the essential role of the woman, namely to bear children and transmit culture.

As from the movement from the original/consanguine family (to which the individual belongs since birth) to the procreation family (starting with the marriage), the marriage is performed based on both families approval “xanamik” (in-law parents) without the need for an external official recognition, by observing the customs, that changes the status of the bride and groom for ever, including them, through this ritual act, in the community: from “chavo” (boy) and “chaj” (girl) they become “Roma man” (our man, husband, Roma) and “Roma woman” (our woman, wife, Roma); Romas who remain single do not have the right to raise their own tent or to build a house.

### **“Life without a Wife – Like a Violin without Strings”**

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If being a man means having a family and belonging to the community means being married (“Life without a wife is like a violin without strings”), this ritual humanization model is the very foundation of life: diachronically extended family, through parenting and genealogical and synchronic lineage, through alliance/in-laws (“xanamik”) and affinity/spiritual relationing/God-parenting (God-parent = rr. “kirvo”). The latter is a show off relation, sometimes the Romas have gajo Godparents with whom they do not have a son – spiritual parent relation. The midwife is a “phuri daj” (woman/mother/grandmother/old woman) who is highly respected within the family, like any other old person, but also, because of her participation to the impure act of birth is also considered to be impure.

Marriage is a life-long alliance between the two families, the in-law relations – “xanamik” – being as strong as the blood relations and the members of the two families must support each other in any circumstances, deny nothing to each other and have complete trust in each other.

The so-called “price of the bride”, the money paid by the groom’s family to the bride’s family, represent, in fact, a sort of payment for the future children who are going to belong to the groom’s family and whom the latter has to obtain in exchange for a

symbolical value, thus reasserting his reputation and status within the community. If there is a divorce, part of this money shall be returned to the groom's family.

Young people marry at an early age (girls 12 – 13, boys 14 to 15) in the Roma traditional culture (especially the "caldarari" and the "ursari" still preserve this practice but only seldom, and the other Roma folks renounced to it long time ago), and this is nothing else but a consecration through community recognition and parent blessing of sexual instincts normal for this age. The modern cultures seem to elude the fact that puberty is one of life's periods most charged with sexual tensions and leave the solving of these crises at random, without any blessing, thus endangering the community equilibrium. While in traditional cultures the accent is placed on the well-being of the community, leaving aside the individual interest, modern cultures are focused on the individual interest based on which the situation of the community is restructured and, quite often, sacrificed for the benefit of the former. This explains the individual freedom in relation with the social system of constraints and recommendations and relatively compliant acceptance of founding a family, even at a potential level, only through sexual relations that have no community consecration and recognition.

The modern cultures undertake the risk of a community imbalance, for such a change in the status that remains unknown to the family represents more than the threat of unwanted alliances, it represents the loss of social cohesion and legal coherence of the human existence. The traditional cultures refuse to assume such a risk and promote the permanent ritual involvement in individual life.

The Roma traditional marriage has a series of ritual steps/fulfillment stages/levels in passing to a new status: the threshold ritual/elaboration that included the marriage proposal/the matchmaking – "mangimos" and the engagement; the separation ritual/community consecration, bearing reminiscences of a ravishment marriage (elopement, ravishment ritual), that represents the wedding – "abiav" – the individual aggregation ritual/oath confirmation in the wedding night – "solaxadimos" and the definitive integration ritual/acquiring of a new status/community aggregation represented by the feast for the celebrating the bride's virginity – "pakiv".

"O magnimos" has two stages: the first one involves the visit of the matchmakers – relatives of the groom or other trustworthy persons – "pakivale" – from the family to the bride's house in order to establish a first contact with her family, to test the circumstances and set the terms for a meeting with the groom's parents. If the girl's family categorically refuse any contact, the second stage, namely the visit paid by the boy's parents to the girl's parents is cancelled.

The boy's parents give the girl's parents a flask covered by a red shawl to which golden coins are attached (rr. "i ploska vuladi and-o salo lolo e sumnakune lovença") and this symbolic gift, representing and confirming the communion, is the advance payment for the bride. The exchange of gifts that follows during the engagement, during the wedding and the pakiv feast constitute a compulsory ritual gesture as a sign of mutual trust and esteem.

If the father of the bride agrees to drink, and this usually takes place after long debates meant to eliminate all possible susceptibilities, fears and doubts the two families may have, the girl is considered to be “tomnime: (bestowed)/engaged/bequeathed and her relations with the groom-to-be are marked by a series of taboos – they cannot talk without a third person being present, they cannot spend too much time together – that have not existed until now between them, as they used to have fraternal relations. In general, fraternity that is shared by community members of both genders, turns into a deep feeling of shame – “la?avo” - after the engagement, and this explains the changes occurring in their attitude and behaviour.

The deal is strengthened by an oath (rr. “solaxadimos”) and the ritual consensus through the wishings formulated by those who drink from the flask (rr. “te del lenqe o Del galbi sodi si mal bal and-o sero” = may God give them as much money as many hairs I have on my head; “te jiven jekh sela bersa, te na maj meren nici jekhh var” = may they live to be one hundred, may they never die; “t-aven sasteveste aj uze and-o godi aj and-o trupo” = may they have a healthy mind and body; “t-aven baxtale aj t-avena lenqe but chave” = may they be lucky/happy and have many children).

The wedding – “o abiaiv” – is, in general, the moment of maximum cooperation between the community members, communication and communion at all levels and responsibility sharing: the men help their wives with household work, which they usually do not do; the wedding is the only occasion on which women sit at the same table with men (normally, they eat at separate tables, sometimes even in separate rooms); the family hierarchy is restructured, as they receive new members; the wedding gathers together all the Romas (rr. “jekh abiaiv kidel sa le rromen khetanes”) without needing an invitation, because coming with your family to a wedding is a sign of respect and esteem and, if one knows that there is going to be a wedding and does not participate represents a sign of scorn and disdain and this attitude is sanctioned by the community with the same measure. The gajos are the only ones that need an invitation.

The ceremonial moment is marked by fertility rituals (the bride is sprinkled on), apotropaic rituals (the divorcees or the widows are not allowed to touch the bride in order not to contaminate her with evil magic – magic by contamination) and determinant rituals (greetings and prayers: “T-avel tuqe baxtali tri bori!” = may your daughter-in-law be lucky!; “Te trais tu sa familiaça, tre savença, tre boriança, tre nepotença!” = may you be happy together with your family, your daughter-in-laws and your grandchildren!), as well as mimicking some ravishment marriage – elopement, ravishing of the bride – and fake menaces to crush the wedding party (“kadă, haj te pharas o abiaiv” = let’s crush the wedding party”).

Although the bride has to practice the ritual crying because she leaves her family, she also has to honor all dance invitations. In exchange, the groom, even if during the “mangimos” has to be cheerful, during the wedding he has to be as discreet as possible, he is not allowed to eat or drink (in fact neither is the bride) and he has to be compelled to invite his bride to dance.

This ritual behaviours of the bride and groom have some symbolic meanings: the marriage, regarded as an individual sacrifice in favour of the community; the marriage as initiation that must be preceded by purification rituals through fasting and abstinence (looking down = abstinence of the eyes; abstinence from dancing); shame (rr. = “la?avo”) for the nuptial act that is going to be consumed.

If the bride was a virgin, the mother-in-law bestows honour on her through the conformation gift – the gold necklace – and “rachia” is being danced (a dance with the bed linen spotted with the bride’s blood and sprinkled with brandy – “rachiu”) in order to ensure the fertility of the young couple. This is an exclusively feminine ritual, men do not take part in it, but they are symbolically announced by the result when they are invited to wash their hands and sit at the wedding confirmation table to feast “pakiv”, celebrating the virginity of the bride and the performance of the nuptial act. The community is involved in this ceremony, the two families compliment their folk, they all call each other “pakivale” (of honor, trustful), show each other respect (“den pakiv”), eat and drink together, thus reflecting the communion, mutual trust and kinship (“T-avel baxtali amari skafidi” = may our feat be granted with luck). By staying virgin until the wedding night, the girl is honoring her parents and her entire folk, her parents-in-law, her husband, to all the Romas who are going to bring up her daughters following her role model. By bestowing his virgin girl into marriage, the father of the bride is honoring the father of the groom, the xanamik family and their entire folk, to all the Romas, providing a good role model. By attending this ritual, the Romas honor the bride, her parents and her parents-in-law.

Thus, the “pakiv” proves to be a celebration of honour, of the pure concept that must be preserved unaltered during the entire marriage.

## **Birth**

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The birth of a child gives the family a higher status within the community. The fertility of the woman is vital for the entire community and this is why a barren woman has a very unstable position in the eyes of her husband, she is treated with pity and contempt, and it is thought that, before the marriage, she had intimate relations with the ghouls (rr. “coxane”).

There are two types of baptism – “bolimos”: a Christian one, done at the church by a priest – “rasaj” – and Godparents – “kirovo aj kirvi” – and one called “rromano bolimo”, where there is no priest, in fact even the mentioning of his name is considered bring bad luck – “bibaxtali”. The women are in charge with the first one and the benefits are rather pragmatic than Christian, the child is cleaned from the impurity of birth and thus becomes more beautiful – “si les aver rang akana, si mai sukar” (it has a different colour, is more beautiful) – and more peaceful: the child will cry less. The Christian baptism is regarded as a magic act of purification, where the holy water (“aghiazma”) is brought from the church by women who, later on, are going to sprinkle it on their houses and relatives in order to protect them from impurity – “maxrimos”. This apotropaic gesture is

accompanied by a reparatory one: when the child gets sick, he/she is rebaptised in order to get well. This second baptism, that can be a mere ablution of the child in holy water, without the participation of a priest, also has a functional mutation, the act being considered as a purifying act that cleans the child from the attack of the impurity that causes disease and imbalance. The usual explanation is that “o jekhto bolimos ci gelas” (the first baptism did not work) or “o jekhto bolimos n-as lacho” (the first baptism was not good) and a repetition of the magic act is considered to have good results.

The Roma baptism has several symbolic features. The first one refers to purification and added value: the earth baptism – “o bolimos e phuvaqo” – when, during nomadic times, the child was placed at a crossroad – an inductive space from a magic point of view – directly on the ground and a bit of dust was sprinkled on his/her head accompanied by wishing of wellbeing and good luck, in order to attract qualities such as beauty, wealth and honor – “T-aves baxtalo, pakivalo, barvalo aj sukar” (may you be luck, honorable, wealthy and beautiful) and the fire baptism – “o bolimos e jagago” – where the child was thrice crossed over a fire from the arms of his father into the arms of his Godfather and back in order to purify him and to bring good fortune into his life, as the fire is an apotropaic element, especially for the nomad folks.

## **Death**

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In the same spirit of opposition between purity and impurity, the Roma traditional culture develop a vision on death and funerary customs.

The Roma traditional way of thinking divides the phenomenon of death into two distinct parts: the death of the body, totally rejected by the ritual community approach, as the dead body is considered soiled – “biuzo” – soiled/impure – “maxrime” – and the separation of the soul – “o gi” – from the body, together with the journey of the soul into the world of the death – “o them e mulenqo” – encouraged by a series of complex funerary customs meant to develop a collective memory related to the cult of the ancestors.

In the Roma traditional communities, death is in no way a subject easily debated. To discuss such an issue is considered as a bad omen that could summon misfortune on that house and on its inhabitants.

This vision is based on Romas’ strong belief in luck, chance or fate – “baxt” – but also in bad luck, mischance or ill fortune – “bibaxt”, which is another subject avoided by the Romas. The mere uttering of the word ‘death’ could bring death, as the word is seen as a creative element, capable of shaping the reality according to the will of the person who utters it. Avoiding to talk about issues such as death, disease or other similar issues is a way of protecting yourself and your family and community from the action of “bibaxt”.

The simple uttering of the name of a dead person can convoke that spirit – “o coxano” – that is going to take away someone from that family to “o them e mulenqo”, and this is

why the deceased is not mentioned by his name but by his hierarchical position within the family or community (“murro kako” – my uncle; “amaro sero” – our leader) or simply by a pronominal substitute – “ov” (he). The issue is not that of fear of death but of forewarning of such facts that would lead to a sudden or unusual severance from the physical life, that would also mean an exclusion from the community.

Regarded as a termination of the heart – “o agor e giesqo” -, a never-ending sleep – “biagoresqi lindri” – or as an endless road – “biagorescqo drom” – death proves to be, in the Roma traditional culture, a final separation between the physical body that becomes impure – “maxrime” – and the soul, that starts the journey towards the spiritual world.

The soiled dead body – “biuzo” – turns into a potential danger for the community and, thus, it must be given as soon as possible into custody of the priest who often is a “gajo” (non-Roma), thus belonging to the world that is outside of the community. From a ritual point of view, the burial is an act performed by individuals that do not belong to the Roma community, the priest and his assistants, and this is only natural given the Roma way of thinking according to which the impure dead body must be taken care of by the impure outsiders in order not to soil the entire community. During nomadic times, the incineration of the dead and the burning of their belongings considered to be the bearers of “bibaxt” (misfortune) and “maxrime” (impure) were common practices. Thus, the dead body was left to decay in the ground, outside the community, but not before exhausting all resuscitation possibilities.

The feminine relatives of the dead raise him several times from the coffin and sprinkle his body with alcohol or water brought from nine wells or nine rivers. A young and robust relative shakes vigorously the hand of the deceased and shouts out his name in order to insufflate him with energy and desire to live and bring him back from the death. The relatives do anything possible, sometimes even violently, to postpone, as much as possible, the sealing of the coffin and the actual interment (“kana si praxome” = when he is buried in the ground).

On the other hand, there are rituals that portray the attempt to ease the dying process, to make it less painful and to avoid the useless prolongation of agony.

All things that used to be important for the dying person are taken outside the room, so that he could no longer see them and that there is nothing that could influence him to return from his way to the world of the dead.

The beloved relatives also leave the room, for the same purpose, in order not to motivate him to try to stay alive and to let the dying decide, free of any emotional constraint, the way he wants to follow, be it towards death or life.

The ritual of mutual forgiveness is practiced, thus the dying person forgives all the wrong doings of his relatives and the relatives, in their turn, forgive all his wrong doings, in order to free his soul from any regret or remorse.

The dying person is put in direct contact with the earth, either by being directly place on the ground or by having placed in his hand a long stick, a chair, a table or another object

that is well fixed on the ground. This gesture is meant to accustom the dying person with his future status, where he is going to become one with the mother-earth, the feminine “i phuv”.

A white dog, considered a psychopomp animal, gatekeeper of the underworld – “o parno ?ukel kaj rakhel o them e mulenqo” (the white dog safeguarding the underworld) – often present in “roimata” (mournings), meant to release the soul from the body of the dying person and the ease the process of dying, is brought for the dying person to see or to be licked by it and to be led to the other world.

During the wake that last for three days and three nights, the Romas stay, drink and sing together, they talk, share their thoughts and emotions in order to drain all power from the deceased – “te cîrdas lesqi zor avri” – and to prevent him from remaining attached to life and to be tempted to come back and haunt them as a spook - “coxano”.

During the wake, there is no common feast, but everyone can eat simple Roma bread – “manro rromano peko e rromna?ar uze” (Roma bread baked by clean Roma women) – usually called “bokoli” (bun).

Even later, after the funeral, the so-called “give-away”, a commemorative ceremony, is nothing else but a borrowed custom, sign of the acculturation phenomenon, especially because of the fact that the personal belongings of the deceased, considered to be impure, were never given away to the relatives or the community members, but they used to be burnt, at least during nomadic times, in order not to become a useless burden for the caravan. Even today, these things are not often given away or inherited, except for the things with symbolic representation value, that confer a certain status in the community, such as the objects made of gold (“sumnakune”).

The mourning is preceded by the painting of the house in white and its temporarily closing, for purification, the covering up of mirrors immediately after death occurred – this ritual is also observed during birth celebrations. This practice is caused by the fact that mirrors and any other reflecting surface are considered to be gates to the other world, so they must be closed in order to let the spirit follow its course or, in case of a birth, not to tempt it to go back from where it came on Earth.

For this reason, in order not to be tempted to come back as a spook (“coxano”), the deceased must not see himself in the mirror, and this is why the mirrors are covered as soon as death occurred.

In order to define the Roma traditional culture concept on death, we must take into account two fundamental concepts: the dualism and the continuous present. The dualism divides the world in good and evil, “Del” (God) and “Beng” (the Devil), soul and body, “cacipe” (truth) and “xoxaimos” (lie), “uzo” (pure) and “maxrime” (impure), both sides being necessary for the universal harmony. According to this paradigm, the body is impure, so it is only natural that it dies, and the soul, being pure, never dies but is only converted in something else and follows its spiritual journey.

## **Roma Traditional Trades**

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The Roma craftsmen bring as a novelty a continuous specialization in various crafts fields: iron processing (blacksmithery), with the following occupations: the actual smithery, from which derived the locksmithery; horse shoeing smithery; caretery and ironworks (the artistic processing of iron); coppery (copper processing); processing of gold and silver; coating copper vessels etc.

One of the main iron processing techniques is the cold processing by “hammering” the iron (repeatedly striking the part with a hammer until it acquires the desired shape), by cutting it with the scalpel, the “scissors” or the “guillotine”, puncturing with the scalpel and piercing with the “bolt” or the “(hollow) punch”. The hot processing of the iron requires a high specialization of the craftsmen and a highly hard iron. The technique is called the “iron boiling” and it is done until the material turns red-incandescent, soft, almost liquid, in the portion that needs to be processed.

Specific for the Roma blacksmiths is the hearth placed at ground level or in a pit, equipped with simple bellows (the so-called “pit bellows”) from pleated tube, with the blowing pipe fixed in the ground. For the Roma material traditional culture, the copper processing, the “coppersmithery” or “cauldronsmithery” is as important as the iron processing.

The “caldararii” (cauldron makers) produced and repaired copper vessels but also rooftops for churches (the copper processing extended towards aluminum processing). As for the processing techniques, it includes the following important steps: meting, de-hardening, pounding, and the so-called “gypsy coppering”. The latter is an old procedure, implying high craftsmanship, passed from one generation to another as a well kept secret and, thus, little known in ethnography. Joining different parts of a copper vessel involves very complicated operations. After being manufactured and shaped to the necessary dimensions, the margins of the parts are cut in a sparrow-tail like shape, assembled with the other parts and then the joint is pounded on the “ground anvil”. When pounded on, the copper “hardens”. In order for it to be de-hardened, it is introduced several times in the embers pit equipped with bellows. These operations are successively repeated in order to make sure the joint is durable and solid.

One of the most important traditional Roma occupations is the processing of precious metals (gold and silver). The silversmiths preserved the working technique (hammering, piercing, bending, cutting, notching, embellishing by watermarking or punching etc.) as well as the old tools inventory (“beak” anvil, small manual bellows, hammer, engraver, blowing pipe/“suflai” that softens and melts the metal, the metal scissors, hand moulds, last, a sharp wooden cone pointed downwards, small pliers).



In the same category of metal processors we can also include the “spoitorii”, who, besides covering the copper vessels (pans, frying-pans, cauldrons etc.) were also dealing with their periodical maintenance.

Amongst the Roma trades, in the field of metal processing, the Romas also work with sheet-metal. As this is related to constructions, it can be classified as a house building activity. The Roma folk mainly practicing this kind of trade is the “gabori” folk (Hungarian Romas from Transylvania). The Sheet-metal workers manufacture gutters, funnels, sheet-metal rooftops.

The Roma craftsmen working with wood are the “rudari”. Initially, as pointed out by their name (sl. “ruda” = ore>rr. “rud” = metal) dealt with “gold washing”: they collected gold from river beds, (especially in Transylvania) using a technique already mentioned here and melted it into bullions. Later on, there was a professional re-orientation and the “rudari” started to work with wood. Within this trade there are various specialisations: the actual “rudari”, the “butnari” who manufacture wooden household items (plates, soffits, tubs, rams etc.); the “covatarii”/“albierii” – manufacturing kneading troughs; “lingurarii” who manufacture spoons, teaspoons, dippers, ladles; “fusarii”, who manufacture spindles; “ladarii”, who manufacture furniture (tables, chairs, stools, cupboards etc.) and especially dowry chests, “barns” and “trunks” (containing maize flour). A distinct branch is that of the “cofrari”, who manufacture willow, hazel and osier baskets.

One of the most important Roma trades, at present existing only in the memory of old craftsmen, is bone and corn processing. The “pieptanri” craftsmen used bone for combs, buttons, knife and pipe handles and various ornaments. They used the deer, cow or goat horns to make musical instruments, gunpowder horns, and, seldom, knife handles.

Another Roma occupation, long gone now, is the processing of animal skins, with a specific specialization: the “ciurari” (they made sieves and strains). The raw material for this was the animal skin, especially pig and veal skin, as it is more elastic, but also goat and sheepskin. They use to make a pinewood circle called “vesca” and cut with the knife a piece of untanned skin. The skin was cleaned and put in water to soften, then it was tightly fixed on the “vesca” using a leather belt.

As for the house building occupation, the Romas were very good at making bricks. This trade is about to disappear now. The unburned bricks (called “cirpici” in Muntenia, Oltenia, Dobrogea and Moldavia; “vaioage” in Transylvania and Banat), represented, especially in the plain and hilly areas (Transylvania), where there was no timber, the main building material. For a brick to dry out perfectly, it needed two days of continuously burning sun, and any small drop of rain could have ruined all the efforts. This is why, the brick makers developed a series of magically ritual complexes related to: stopping the rain”: a frog is sacrificed by being burnt together with the bricks in the oven; burial of an anthropomorphic doll under the house’s hearth (effigy sacrifice); the ritual sacrifice of an animal, putting its meat in a bellows filled with water (sacrifice ritual, offering for the Aquatic Deity) and placing the bellows under the hearth (ritual subordination of water to fire, thus the victory of the solar symbol over the aquatic one); “clay eggs brooding” (= bricks brooding, pretending they are eggs) by the community’s

old women (= “le phură”) that emphasizes the preeminence of the feminine generator principle (traces of matriarchy, the mother - Earth who gives birth to the Sun, the passive feminine principle that supports the active male principle) and the magic by contamination (as long as the women “brood” the bricks, the sun shines) and by similitude (the bricks-eggs are symbols of genesis, creation, the building of a house representing a foundation, an act of birth, a beginning).

The Romas also worked in animal hair processing, producing brushes (“părieri”), lime brushes (“bidinieri”) and flat brushes. The material used was pork or horsehair (the most resistant hair) and wood as support. The manufacturing technique was simple: the hairs were cut to the desired length, put in bundles; the support was then prepared, made of two thick pieces of wood; the first piece – the upper one - was perforated; the bundles of hair were put into the holes and then fastened with the other piece of wood, without holes, by attaching the bundles’ ends and gluing them with “fir-tree glue” or by “sizing” with natural resin glue.

Another trade that has disappeared is the trade of “ursari” (who used to display bears at various fairs), an activity situated between circus and curative magic. Exploiting the bear significance as a totemic ancestor, symbol of power, fertility and renewal of nature, an animal belonging to the deities of the underworld and to the Moon, with apotropaic and thaumaturgic virtues, the “ursari” transformed the bear training show into a ritual with multiple meanings and functions: apotropaic, that is protection of the house from wild animals’ attacks (“should the bear be displayed in your courtyard, your home will be safe from bear attacks all winter long”), initiatory, that is fertilization and fecundation (“călcătura ursului” – bear’s footprint – is a prenuptial ritual game for young boys and girls); thaumaturgic (“călcătura ursului” – bear’s footprint – is a cure for evil fairies, dreads, spell, witchcraft, spellbound marriages and other “diseases” induced by magic or by free supernatural forces).

One of the Roma trades that has almost disappeared was the trade in horses (“geambașia”). This was the main trade especially for the “lovarii” from Transylvania, being one of the Hungarian Roma trades in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their success resided in a very good knowledge of human psychology and a strong sense of persuasion. The relationship between the Roma traditional culture and the horse spiritual model, that has already been mentioned here in other contexts, is mythical, deriving from the very experience of the nomadic way of life and expressed through the symbolic function fulfilled by this magic animal in various initiatory ritual complexes, prenuptial ones (wedding gifts – symbol of fecundity) and settling ones (the caravan site marked by circling it with a horse, symbol of power and apotropaic sign).

If we look back, the history tells us that in 1600, music playing was considered to be a shameful trade, performed by slaves, this being the reason for banning, through strict legal regulations, the marriage with a music player: “that music player, playing the violin and the viola in various gatherings, in the mountains, at fairs, shall not marry a girl from a good, wealthy family, because such people are in God’s disgrace and human scorn”. In 1775, in Tara Românească, under the reign of Alexandru Ipsilanti, the music players

organised into their own confederacy, with an administrator and a book of duties (“catastih”). In general, studies point out various features of the music playing occupation: it is a trade passed from one generation to another; rarely practiced by individuals and more often in groups (“cu banda”, “in taraf”), recently “with the band”; it is practiced in places and on occasions such as weddings, campestal dancing, religious celebrations, feasts, fairs, markets, taverns, serenades etc.; does not imply knowing the music notes, it is learned “by ear”, at least the classical/initial form of music playing, although today, some music players have specialty studies; the instruments they play, according to the frequency of use, are: the violin (including an improvised violin, which is in fact a six string viola or a viola with a semi-circled bow), the viola, the tymbal, the accordion, the bass (the name music players use for violoncello and for double bass), the lute, the guitar, the pipe-bag, the flute made of willow or poplar wood or of reeds (similar to the Pan’s flute), tambourine (played by the “ursari”), the clarinet. This music is characterised by several essential elements: spontaneity, a lot of improvisation (this is the reason Roma music players have chosen nowadays to play jazz, the art of improvisation and variation); richness, diversity, with supple and combined rhythms – from soft to passionate, from pathetic to exuberant, from gracious to impetuous rhythms -; has a transposing nature (“writes the indigenous music”, says Béla Bartók, “in a way unknown to indigenes”, states Martin Block); with vast interpretative skills (sometimes imitating birds’ trills); using the so-called “gipsy music scale” (minor scale: la, si, do, D sharp, mi, fa, G sharp, la; sol, la flat, si, do, D flat, F sharp, sol; sol, la, si flat; C sharp, do, D flat, F sharp, thus; alternating basses and high tones with a transition tone), similar to the musical phrase “Destiny” from “Carmen” by Bizet; it uses changes of rhythm and measure, the syncope (saccadic tone and prolonged phrase), the repetition and variation techniques; it combines harmoniously the rhythm imposed by the indigenous music with oriental/Turkish “flowers” – “maneaua” and “meterhaneaua” (love songs, mainly instrumental, played slowly, in a morning tone) which started to decline by the end of the XVIII century, and the music players copy its style elements; processes Arabian rhythm elements from “canto flamenco” from Andalusia.

Magic practice is undoubtedly a trade, if the trade definition as source of income is to be considered. It is necessary to make a distinction between magic practice as a trade, in relation with non-Romas, and within the community, the latter not representing a trade, but forming magically ritual complexes, intrinsic to the traditional life. Magic practice categories belonging to the trade area are: premonitory magic (cartomancy, arithmomancy, chiromancy etc.), curative magic (“jakhalmasqo drab” – magic incantation against spellbound; “remedy” for spells, “remedy” for diseases; facilitating birth), erotic and prenuptial magic (“casting” of spells, “remedy for marriages” or love “filters”).