

THE BULGARIAN ROMA IN HELSINKI

**The diverse sub-groups amongst Bulgarian Roma and their reasons
for being in Helsinki**

A Documentary Film

Borislav Borisov
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Diaconia University of Applied Sciences,
Degree Programme in Social Services
Bachelor of Social Services

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to provide an accurate picture or describe the idea, the process and the outcome of a documentary project titled "The Bulgarian Roma in Helsinki". The idea behind it is to create awareness about the Roma minority groups of Bulgarian origin in Helsinki and the unique process that was involved in creating a zero-budget documentary.

The documentary, which has influenced its creator a great deal in his perception of Roma, and its outcome described in this report, is visible and positive. Major political and social organizations identify with the idea and have expressed support and willingness to promote and present this film for the benefit of people and organizations.

The process, long but productive, was educational in a multitude of ways to its creator and all the ones involved from start to finish including the participants in the film itself.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this documentary project is to identify the diversity between the Roma from Bulgaria and the reasons for which they come to Helsinki in particular. We have seen or heard some things about them in the recent past largely due to the popular “The Decade of Roma Inclusion” initiative. Moreover, the existence of diverse sub-groups amongst the Roma and the Roma minority is well known and perhaps due to my Bulgarian origin it's also quite visible to me. Having grown up with them around and having worked with them for approximately two years now in my capacity as a social worker has contributed to that skill as well.

The idea is with this 26-minute documentary to show you the sub-groups of Roma that I know and also the ones I have discovered during my work on this project so that all of you watching can learn more about the Roma minorities and their reasons for being in Helsinki – the latter becoming the main focus as I went along with the process. My goal is to raise awareness about these Roma sub-groups and the reasons they migrate, thus hoping that as result the integration process can be made easier for them and the new culture that they are being integrated into would be more flexible towards them. Such awareness is indeed the main goal of this film.

In this project I have filmed a group of people of Roma origin from Bulgaria who are here in Finland. In order to keep the material short, I used four separate cases/stories. I aimed at provoking the viewer's thinking towards the Bulgarian Roma in Helsinki by creating awareness. Despite the amount of documentaries out there related to the Roma, few can show about their cultural diversity within or gave an actual inside look into their life especially here in Helsinki.

2 BACKGROUND

In this part of the project I will explain why I made this short documentary film. To begin with, I have to say that Roma are being marginalized since 13-th century until today, and to the general population they all seem the same. I've tried to present the Roma minority groups from Bulgaria in their realistic environment in Finland with the intent of providing an education tool useful to the local community, social workers and students of the Roma diverse sub-groups and culture.

I'm convinced that this project will offer a unique insider's look of the Roma culture never been seen before in Finland in their present way. I also believe that by doing this short film I will be able to put some prejudices to rest on Finnish part and help the difficult integration into Finnish society for Bulgarian Roma minority groups.

I know that this film will contribute in a positive aspect to the degree programme of bachelor of social services I currently study, and educate others for the future if they need to know more about the traditions and customs of unique groups of people that have been marginalized which was from the time they set foot in Europe with a few exceptions, of course, like the Roma in Spain where flamenco was born as part of the Roma culture.

To recap, the main idea of this short film is to raise awareness among people and introduce the Roma culture and the reasons for them being in Helsinki in order for them to be more capable of helping them. I did this project because of my personal and professional interest in this matter, based on my personal experience growing up and now in my recent and extensive working endeavors with the Roma at the HIRUNDO Day Center.

When asking myself why I did this documentary film, I have a simple answer. Every time when talking about Roma and the issues involved when dealing with

them, people keep asking me, what could be done to improve their situation? Well, the answer is never simple, however, looking at the source is always a good thing and knowing the people is vital in order to apply potentially appropriate solutions.

So, knowing the people is a key factor in my case. This is the reason why I did this film – to show who they are in order for the social workers as well as ordinary people to be able to apply working methods less influenced by prejudice. The simple "aha!" result is what I was looking for as well as being informed and being able already to raise that awareness related to the Roma lifestyle and their reasons for being here in Helsinki.

Talking about the social workers and the social services workers, this film could be used as a tool to educate or at least inform the social services bodies in Helsinki and Finland. In my line of work at the Hirundo Day Center we have always been in contact with the emergency social services care for a variety of reasons. Therefore I think this film can be used by many officials in social and other institutions as a powerful educational tool.

HIRUNDO Day Center is placed in the Sörnäinen residential area in Helsinki, not far from the center itself, and HIRUNDO Day Center is part of the great and widely developed organization called "Helsinki Deaconess Institute". Although small, the facility manages clients in the hundreds every day during the summer season. The facility consists of one large living room of sorts with a kitchen attached to it. Further on, we have a small laundry room with two washing machines and two tumble dryers. We also have a medical doctor's office which consists of one office and one examination room. Last but not least, we have one office room with two working desks where most of the intellectual work is done (the so-called paper work).

The other group of people that this film could be useful is the students who are the future social workers and others working or will be working with Roma minority groups. In the case of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences and its programme in Social Services and Community Development, this film product could be used for the first year students when in the vicinity of Kallio and Sörnäinen as well as Helsinki as a city, and the exposure group tasks. Roma are now a part of the Helsinki city life and landscape. They can also be seen in Sörnäinen on a daily basis.

This is why I am sure that this documentary can be a vital tool in education in general; at least for the next five or more years. Most of the participants in the film have been coming to Helsinki for many years now. This is why the film will be relevant for the future as well. The exact Roma people coming to Helsinki might change but the reasons they do it will remain more or less the same

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the article described in the following paragraph, I have got myself familiar with the Roma culture in general as well as in small details that I had seen but never really knew why or what for. The name of the article (“Education and training opportunities for all”) speaks for itself and the idea is that I will try to represent it in a video format. (EU, Lifelong Learning Programme)

The report I mentioned above can be found online on the romaninet.com site in English, Romanian and Bulgarian. This report and the internet page are all part of a EU project called The Lifelong Learning Programme: Education and training opportunities for all, a project that started in 2007 and will run until 2013 with the budget of nearly seven billion Euros. It also aimed at a variety of programmes such as exchanges, study visits and networking for both students and teachers as such including anyone involved in education. (EU, Lifelong Learning Programme)

On the point of awareness about the Roma culture, I will give a basic idea of the importance of that culture in the daily work and life (Peterson & Brooks, 2004). The authors have described the idea in a very unique and interesting perspective that we can all relate to. Picture yourself in an antique store where some people find it to be filled with “junk” as the authors say or others find themselves in a store filled with “treasures”. If you know something about the antiques in our case, i.e. the Roma culture and their history, then you will find yourself surrounded by treasures. Some see this cultural history as frustration and others as fascination. (Peterson & Brooks, 2004)

In my project, such cultural history and the raising awareness for it can generate versatile results and in my opinion positive ones. We can observe different types of risk taking attitudes, preferences in terms of planning, different types of

communication, deferring ways of dealing with issues. (Peterson & Brooks, 2004)

What I will be describing here is that by raising this awareness, showing to the viewer that the Roma culture and their community has a lot to give to modern society. My goal with this film will be to make viewers have a look themselves in that antique store full of “treasures” and not “junk”. (Peterson & Brooks, 2004)

As cited in (Roma in an Expanding Europe by Ringold, 2004, Dena Orenstein), the sheer diversity of the Roma culture makes it almost impossible or at least very difficult to research Roma. Information on their living conditions or their poverty status is almost nowhere to be found. And if there is some, it is fragmented or insufficient, and therefore difficult to fully grasp or draw valid conclusions of any kind.

What could be said of the Roma culture here that is not already known by now? In my film, I try to picture this very thing: knowing more about the Roma. I believe that I have managed to capture that fact that the Roma social organization and their own values clearly affect their relations with non-Roma up to a certain point. And, yes, this relationship between the Roma and the non-Roma, also known as *Gadje*, is believed to be important. Clearly, Roma define themselves as different from non-Roma, and that explains to great extent how they made it so far without changing their own basic values and principles despite the repeated pressures by governmental integration policies back then and now.

As Ringold, Dena Orenstein explains, and I will also agree, that Roma are divided into two separate groups. One is the traditional nomadic lifestyle Roma, and the other represents the ones that are willing to integrate and educate themselves. This separation between these two major groups has infused even more this mistrust between Roma and *Gadje*. (Ringold, Dena Orenstein, 2004)

In this part here I will focus on the main reason for this film: the awareness. Being able to find a book that describes this phenomenon for me was vital as I learned how and what to do in order to keep awareness alive. I will agree with the author, Vipin Kumar, that we the humans are social animals. What society does and what we do has a constant influence on our thoughts. What we know and what we feel is being influenced by our surroundings, or in other words, the people around us, the culture and the social class. Obtaining awareness is not only achieved by observing carefully, but taking part in situations and happenings that prompts you to be aware.

Not being or having awareness could cause problems when adapting to any culture or a social structure set-up. In this case social awareness could be described as the author did: "the knowledge about various components of society and social process". Knowledge about your culture, class, social relationships, and how many factors influence awareness such as family, school and education, health or customs and traditions is making us more aware and how well these factors work together.

Taking these factors like education and culture into account (and many more) we can always choose our most influential one. Here I will describe the ones that are generally vital in a broad terminology in accordance with the (Kumar 2010 book Social Awareness, Self Awareness, Personality Development and Current Affairs).

Firstly, the agencies of socialization and to give examples of those that help us build awareness about society and its processes are school, family, peers and mass media.

School and college is probably the most influential to me while I was growing up. Learning basic values in school is what it is all about. At school we are all exposed to a variety of social subjects and issues that inevitably have their impact on us.

Family, is the place where we learn from our parents moral values and the surrounding culture or even the social class one`s family belongs to. Many of us gain our own philosophy of life based on our family and the social values and education we receive at home.

Mass media is probably the most influential factor for awareness in modern day society. Media had made us aware of issues that do not have direct effect on us but have significant social relevance or developing empathy towards someone or something. Mass media and TV in particular have the most significant and most effective impact on us in the shortest time possible. Here is one of the most important reasons why I have chosen to make a documentary film about Roma and their reasons for migration as well as their own differences. Trough this crucial method of using media I will attempt to create the awareness I am aiming for. The awareness, that describes the true Roma and their reasons for being in Helsinki.

Interpersonal interactions – this is the oldest and most effective way to create awareness. Also in my case I have always interacted with individuals of different cultures or social status ever since I was a child. From my experience, I have realized that interacting with individuals is the best way also to reduce prejudice and improve one's social skills as a future professional.

Political parties, as we know, have also an impact on the people by raising awareness to all kinds of socio-economic issues. However, based on this we are aware of major political views and standings.

Non-governmental organizations have probably one of the most important roles in creating awareness. As in my case and in my job, I am being educated by an NGO, and reducing prejudice and creating awareness as we speak. Being part of such an organization I am also creating awareness on a daily basis and now with this film project. (Kumar, 2010)

To recap and to identify some of the benefits of social awareness and to agree with the author I shall name some of those in the following words. Based on social awareness we increase our knowledge and understanding about any social issue that we are faced with. It helps us to reach our goals and shape ourselves as who we are. Developing important social skills is also an inevitable part of social awareness that will assist us in adopting certain environment better and easier. Social awareness will make us appreciate different cultures and different groups of people that we work with, and most of all, for me social awareness helps me avoid interpersonal and intergroup problems that I face in my line of work with Roma minority groups every day. (V. Kumar, 2010)

4 DESCRIPTION OF THE VIDEO PROJECT

The method I used in this documentary project is filming certain individuals that agree to be filmed; this includes their whole family if permitted as now got eight however I used only four in the film and the rest were reluctant. I have filmed them in their own environment such as at home or travel trucks that they live in. Then I captured parts of their daily lives in public. The source of my idea comes from films I have seen and thus I used certain concepts that I have developed myself after being influenced by such films. My personal experience in the past also played a role. As an example I will mention two such films which were very informative and inspiring to me: “The Rageh Omaar Report – The Right to Roam” and “The Roma: The Road to Inclusion” both available on YouTube.

How did I find my movie participants? As a project worker in Hirundo Day Center, I had the opportunity to get to know many of them and gain some trust and confidence. Later on, when I asked the participants to take part in the film they agreed with a smile on their face being glad to help me out; they felt important in their own way.

The project is both verbal and visual. As I was trying to find out the sub-groups amongst these Roma minority groups here in Helsinki, I discovered interesting things by letting the individuals explain such things as personal opinions of tradition and habits. To be more exact, I focused mainly on adults and men in particular because they have such colorful and diverse roles in their own minority sub-group or the bigger groups that are very well known as Kalderashi, Gitanos, Manush, Rominchal and Erlides. Unfortunately, the women were reluctant to participate, or their husbands did not allow them to say everything as they kept saying that they don't know anything. As the Roma men say, it's culture; this is who we are; this is how we have lived and will live.

There have been no interview questions. However, I was able to explain the idea to them, namely, that the film is to present their sub-group amongst groups and/or countries if you will. Interestingly, the outcome was different. The participants in the movie showed their sub-group but most importantly, the reasons why they come in Helsinki. At one point I was willing to film two workers in the HIRUNDO Day Center, so that they can express their point of view regarding those differences in a few short sentences. Unfortunately, during the process I was not able to film inside the day center due to formalities and certain deadlines related to the decision-making ethical board in Helsinki Deaconess Institute.

I will write about the risks that arose throughout the whole process. So far, the biggest risk was if one side does not agree to be filmed and sometimes asking for money in order to be filmed such as some Romanian Roma. Therefore, I had to focus only on Bulgarian Roma and their life and culture in Helsinki.

Believing that the idea of raising awareness is still very much alive, it will be very interesting for the viewers to see the unique insider's look into the Roma community here in Helsinki even though from one perspective.

The Bulgarian Roma who were filmed were very helpful and the few risks I faced during filming were the police for example. I was afraid they might not permit me to follow the Roma and film them on their daily routines if there were such. But, at the end, I had no problems with that. The other risk factor I was concerned about was the equipment that I had. Low-end camera and poor light sensitivity restricted me while filming in dark conditions.

Finally, having gathered all the information and edited it in a way that will represent the original idea I had, I included some original music. There were some non-verbal moments which later on I decided not to include because I was not satisfied with the results. With the help of software for video editing and my skills so far, I believe I was able to accomplish the goal from an amateur point of

view which was the desired effect, or as professionals call it the POV (point of view) style.

“A point of view shot (also known as POV shot or a subjective camera) is a short film that shows what a character (the subject) is looking at (represented through the [camera](#)). It is usually established by being positioned between a [shot](#) of a character looking at something, and a shot showing the character's reaction (see shot). The technique of POV is one of the foundations of [film editing](#)” (Princeton University online page)

Naturally, the plan changed slightly as I was going on with my project. After having the raw footage, I had to start editing. This was a challenge beyond my wildest imagination. Fortunately, in my case I had an overall idea even before even starting filming about the overall look of the film. This was to my advantage I believe I did it well. The sheer amount of hours spent in editing was overwhelming for me.

From start to finish with filming and editing I estimated that I spent approximately two months of hard work at least four hours a day or about 240 hours. I have invested in editing alone approximately 100 hours of work. Then come the subtitles. There I spent three weeks of sleepless nights trying to translate alone accurately and paraphrasing accordingly due to the small space for long sentences. That alone was a challenge for me as I had never done it. However, judging by the reactions of some viewers I did a good job despite the grammatical mistakes that are still to be found and corrected. The overall time consumed in this project from start to finish is approximately two years up until this moment.

The people involved in this film making are I and the participants in the actual film. I have had some help from my friends when it came to subtitles and translating Bulgarian to English. I received help and feedback from two popular documentary film makers and journalists. The first film maker has been a crucial inspiration for my project. Her comments were:

"The movie is beautiful! Very good, deep, simple and powerful. Tells the story from their perspective honestly and without any extra dramatization. Great job Bobie! I am very proud of you and happy for you. You have put some parts of the interview inside of the film that can show the contradictions in an interesting light. Thank you for showing!"

Here are the comments of the second film maker that had the opportunity to see the film and provide valuable feedback:

"Nice work with the film! You have given everyone time to explain and show how they live and work. It felt that it was very honest and informational film about their conditions in Bulgaria and in Finland. This would help people to really understand their situation. Why don't you contact Helsingin sanomat and ask them to make an article about your project and interview some Bulgarian Roma? I think it would be so important for people to know all this."

Subsequently, I had enlisted the help of few friends to assist me in terms of feedback of the film as one whole and the help of Margarita Vlaeva when editing subtitles. I have had also viewers from different backgrounds, both cultural and professional, such as Jared who is Australian. A restaurant Chef, Sattu, also had the opportunity to view the film as a Finn and provide her view on the film. Ralitsa Dimitrova and Anca Enache, my colleagues at work at the HIRUNDO Day Center, have also seen the film and provided positive feedback. There are also doctors and nurses who are the volunteers in Global Clinic which is a group of health care workers that provide acute health assistance to our clients at the HIRUNDO Day Center. They also had the opportunity to see the film independently and liked it.

On October 4th 2013, my colleague Ralitsa Dimitrova and I along with another colleague who actually participates in the film attended a meeting at the Bulgarian embassy with the Bulgarian Consul and two other employees. The reason was a project idea according to which the Bulgarian embassy will provide me with assistance in raising awareness and the possibility to officially present my

film project to the Finnish public. The idea is now in motion. There will also also a photo exhibition which I have been planning for some time now and almost done with. The Bulgarian embassy will organize and invite the press and other country representatives on an official level. Now Helsinki Deaconess Institute is also willing to participate in this project presentation alongside the Bulgarian embassy. They are interested in making this prima facie a co-operation project and further more interested in using the film for their own future purposes. This is the best possible scenario for creating awareness with this film project.

5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPEMENT

Being in development as an individual first is most important to me. Having finished this documentary film and looking back on the single idea that I had, I have to admit that I feel I've come a long way as an individual, as a member of society and as a professional working with Roma minority groups.

Believing that I have managed to produce yet another tool for improving social development as done by film makers, I have developed myself as a tool for addressing the problems of poverty and inclusion. I now firmly believe that the way of reaching out to the general public with an important issue such as the Roma inclusion besides the social work would be the creation of more media projects such as documentary films or photo exhibitions. I have personally found one of my strong sides that contributes to my professional work and this alone has assured me that I am now more objective and not strictly theoretical to my approaches when dealing with Roma or any minority groups.

My definition of poverty is now clearer ever so slightly as I have yet to discover more and more. By knowing the Roma in my film more, I am now able to determine what different levels of minimum poverty and absolute minimum poverty are for me (Hall & Midgley, 2004). These poverty lines are a valuable tool for a young social service worker in terms of being able to focus on the requirements that could be applicable in such poverty measurement situations. However, these poverty and absolute poverty lines do not give the full picture such as health or housing accommodation or even education which describe the situations of Bulgarian Roma in Helsinki.

By developing and materializing such a film which I call a tool for defining poverty and inform professionals and communities, I try to create awareness for myself and for everybody else who will see the film. I know I am not the only

one who has created such project, but in the context of Finland and in particular Helsinki, I have so far managed to educate a fraction of the people and the organizations I am aiming at. I have managed to impress professional film makers by dealing with the unknown when making a documentary film, which made me better in terms of taking professionally calculated risks which I would otherwise not take. I know how to apply certain amount of trust which is necessary for me to be more successful in applying professional care for people of Bulgarian Roma origin.

Filming the individuals featured in this documentary has also improved not only myself but also them – one of the participants is currently employed in HIRUNDO Day Center where I work. This is that trust I wrote about above. I believe I have improved not only myself but the ones directly involved in this video project.

6 CONCLUSION

To draw a conclusion to this report is not difficult. As I mentioned above regarding the Bulgarian embassy and their willingness to support me in publicizing this film, I have already reached a level of success by diminishing the prejudices of such important figures such as the Bulgarian political representatives in Finland. Their readiness to make it public and thus give voice the Roma including the fact that they are not bad people is overwhelming to me. Even if the project does not materialize due to a variety of factors that could change the course of the outcome, I have succeeded on a small scale if not on a political level which would always be the optimal outcome.

Social activists and workers have understood for some time that media plays a significant role when it comes to generating social awareness through publicity and sympathy for a variety of causes. (Hoover & Emerich, 2010).

In this sense, I had the unique opportunity to represent both social services and documentary film makers to achieve and, in near future, publish this film which has most certainly proven to be a powerful social tool. A tool that can influence ordinary individuals and social services professionals as well as social services classrooms for the future.

The simple fact that there is insufficient information on Roma and conclusions about them are being drawn in general is difficult. Therefore, I am convinced that this documentary is one step forward in the right direction towards Roma inclusion and knowing Roma from a deeply cultural point of view.

There is a significant communication gap between the way the media presents Roma and what Roma actually describe themselves as. These misunderstandings and the scarce information on Roma needs to be adjusted. Therefore, the media information needs to be accurate in order to be objective (Anstead, 2010). Based on this interesting information by the author and founder of charity

organization EQUALITY I find my project to fill in well these gaps and misunderstandings which impact the Roma and the rest of the communities of the adoptive country. Therefore, this film could be used on an international level because it can be applied to any country which has Roma minority groups.

Another finding which could be seen in this report by (Anstead, 2010), is the visual method that he has described and put in a very unique way. I will quote here by posting this image. What this image shows is the result of research by the author focused on the effect of the media to the general population when asked how the media portray Roma.

The 'Wordle' tool graphically shows the key descriptive word response to the question: 'How does the news media portray Romany people?'. The larger the font size, the more often the word was used.



The next image that I will post here is the result based on what Roma actually describe themselves as, which directly and visually represents what I have done and why I made the film.

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