

**TOURISM AS A POSSIBLE WAY TO ADVANCE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ROMA INCLUSION IN
THE NORTHERN HUNGARIAN REGION**

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Abstract

The essay investigates the potentials of the emerging village tourism industry in the Northern Hungarian region in terms of job creation and development from the Roma minority point of view. Tourism as an intersectoral industry might be able to provide a possible solution for backwards regions to catch up, mitigating socioeconomic inequalities and contributing to the economic restructuring of the rural countryside. The most backwards and isolated areas with a significant Roma population are considerably affected by poverty, high rate of unemployment where natural and cultural heritage almost overshadowed by these serious socioeconomic characteristics. Few initiatives has already been launched combining village tourism and cultural heritage of the backwards regions and the present essay attempts to support the argument that however these initiatives are at the beginning it is worth to pay attention to these programs which can be regarded as one possible way out of deep poverty and segregation.

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List of Abbreviations

NHROP	North Hungary Regional Operational Plan
HNTO	Hungarian National Tourism Office
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
NHDP	New Hungary Development Plan (2007-2013)
NHRDP	New Hungary Rural Development Programme (2007-2013)
HCSO	Hungarian Central Statistic Office
ÁSZ	Állami Számvevőszék / State Audit Office
EERC	European Roma Rights Center
NHTDS	North Hungary Tourism Development Strategy (2007-2013)
NFÜ	Nemzeti Fejlesztési Ügynökség /National Development Agency
TDM	Tourism Destination Management
ROP	Regional Operational Program

Introduction

Today rural development, the inclusion of Roma minority and the reduction of unemployment are amongst the most important issues in Europe and in Hungary as well. Moreover, the Northern region of the country is considerably affected by all of these characteristics but it also has a new emerging sector which is able to connect these three issues together and serves as one possible solution for the problem. This promising sector is the village tourism which is considered being a sufficient tool for backward regions to catch up. Being a pull sector, it directly affects the life of those who are working in this field and besides of this it has an indirect and also a multiplying effect by attracting additional investments and capital to the regions.

The increasing popularity of village tourism in the rural countryside opens a new possibility for backward regions and isolated settlements to meliorate their position and create a better place of living. Financial support for rural tourism is available from the 1990's in Hungary but the real breakthrough happened in 2008 when the New Hungary Rural Development Programme was initiated. The number of applications related to village tourism reached the 1537 which clearly demonstrate the importance and the potential of this type of tourism from the applicants' point of view (Kovács, 2009).

The European Commission has already approved the Operational Program of Northern Hungary with the budget of €1.063 billion for the period of 2007-2013. The main objective is to increase the region's competitiveness and decrease socio-economic disparities by supporting the local economy, intensify the profitability of regional tourism, preventing the segregation of micro settlements and improve the regional transport system (NHROP, 2006), but in the

Northern Hungary Tourism Strategy (2007- 2013) Roma are mentioned as a problem rather a potential source of workforce or tourist attraction in spite of that they have significant and unique cultural heritage and traditions. Being the most disadvantaged and the largest ethnic minority in Northern Hungary, tourism sector might provide jobs for some of them and contribute to transform few ghetto villages into a decent place of living. However it is not a solution for everyone but the most important is the positive message which able to break down the negative stereotypes of this marginalized minority. No region can achieve development if segregation, hostility and inequality exist between its residents.

But they should not be looked as only workers, product or spectacle. It is rather a way to explore the almost forgotten traditions and create an identity which is the base of self confidence and has a positive effect on creating acceptance and understanding for the majority. As Georg Armbrüster pointed out in the opening ceremony of the European Route of Roma Culture and Heritage, “knowledge and awareness about our own history strengthens our identity and at the same time facilitates inclusion to the society.”

The present essay will explore the importance of the tourism industry as a possible tool for rural development in Europe, Hungary and the Northern region of the country from the minority point of view and try to provide evidence why should they be involved and what are the possibilities of such involvement. Due to the limitations of the present essay it is rather an awareness raising and works as a supporting evidence that the amalgam of tourism, culture, Roma inclusion and job creation can be a feasibly way out of poverty and a solution for such a complex problem.

Chapter 1: Tourism as a way towards regional development

Europe is the most visited place and world leading tourist destination with its 58% share from the world tourism industry and the Member States of the Union realize 85% therein. Due to the fact that the direct and indirect effects of the industry generates the 11 % of the EU's DGP and provides employment to more than 12 % of the working population (24 million jobs), the European Union has already recognized its potential to advance the situation of its regions especially the less favoured and developed ones (European Commission, nd. (b)). Tourism is one of the main priorities in the rural development policy of the EU and considered to be an effective instrument for job creation and income diversification. EU encourages innovation and entrepreneurship since the natural environment and associated tourism are a significant source of income and employment potential in rural areas (European Commission, 2006 (c)).

The renewed European Tourism Policy tries to provide a cohesive policy response at EU level for sustainable growth. The Treaty of Lisbon also created a new legal base for tourism, which reinforces EU as the leading tourist destination. Within the community the effective cooperation and dialogue between the involved stakeholders at lower level is the engine of further development and enhances the better use of the available European financial instruments to improve competitiveness, the development of tourism enterprises, services, facilities, job creation, mobility, and economic diversification of the regions (European Commission, 2006 (c)).

The contribution of tourism not only in the European Union but also in Hungary exceeds the world average and according to the latest available data, provided the 9,9 % of the GDP

which was around EUR 4 billion in 2008 (Sebők, 2009). Not only its significant contribution to the GDP gives importance to the industry in terms of development, but more than 7,9 percent of the working population is employed in tourism industry and around 12,6 percent is indirectly affected (HNTO, 2009).

There is no doubt that the tourism plays an important role in the country's economy. Based on the numbers of international tourist arrivals the country was the 26th most visited destination of the world in 2008 with the illustrious number of 8,8 million (UNWTO, 2009). However these numbers can be easily misleading since Hungary mainly functions as a transit spot and a bridge which connects the western and the eastern part of the continent. The future aim is to change this transit profile of Hungary and prolong the length of stay, improve the level of expenditure of tourist and take advantage from our central position. Besides the transit profile the statistics of the monthly breakdown of international and domestic guest nights spent in the country shows that the numbers during the summer season are much higher than in the rest of the year and 85% of the foreign visitors spent their time in the three most popular regions. As a consequence, not only the seasonality but the uneven territorial concentration has to be solved as well. A complex good quality service package, events, festivals and attractions open to the public every time of the year could mitigate such unevenness which requires good cooperation at regional level and a reasonably planned strategy designed to the abilities of the least visited regions (Török, 2009).

Many studies have been conducted in the field of tourism motivation to mapping out which are the critical variables in the destination decision-making process. According to the Maslow theory, today the material goods are no longer take relevant part in the decision making and other factors such as the spiritual and cultural values are the main determinants. The growing numbers of ageing and educated travelers appreciate the peaceful and natural environment of

the countryside and more prone to experience local traditions, history while spending their time in the area (Kaspar, Fekete, 2005). If the prediction of the UNWTO is reliable, village tourism and the rural countryside will gain more and more sphere in the near future.

Consumers today are increasingly seeking to escape their hectic lifestyle, want to spend some time in the nature, enjoy traditional food and get to know the local traditions, culture and the way of life of the locals. The numbers of rural accommodation is developing in Europe but rural tourism means different things to country to country. In Italy it is equivalent with the everyday life of the locals, tasting the authentic food while in France it is identified with activities such as grape harvest or cycling. In Hungary rural tourism is the synonym of “village tourism” which includes food, lodging and services combined with the traditions specific to the region such as festivals, gastronomy, cultural heritage, production and sales of handicrafts and agricultural products (Kulcsár, 2009).

Since the importance of the rural countryside is growing, Hungary should develop an attractive and unified image for its regions and for the country as a whole which fits to the recent trends and offer wide range of possibilities and programs designed to the needs of the target audience. An attractive image could improve destination competitiveness and add value to the existing products. Competitiveness is the key word since destination may be viewed as an “amalgam of individual products and experience opportunities that combine to form a total experience of the area visited” (Kulcsár, 2009). Due to the decentralization policy of the EU and the globalization no longer countries compete for tourists but regions and their image is more important than ever before.

According to the latest data, rural tourism is an important segment which has a great significance in a country where the natural landscape, thermal springs, cultural traditions can

offer an unforgettable experience for those who are looking for a land of peace and recreation combined with their childhood memories from the rural countryside. Creating an attractive package of different local activities and cultural heritage could bring investments, visitors and new job opportunities to the backward regions. In the past decade rural tourism has been identified as a niche market and Hungary has in a good position to take advantage from the emerging global trend. According to the opinion of Swarbrooke, “rural tourism is one of the main priorities of tourism development in many European countries” (Kulcsár, 2009).

Visitors usually are coming from urban areas to spend their leisure time with active relaxation in the rural environment. Due to this trend all around Europe, a new type of demand for getting acquainted with local products, cultural values and folkways is constantly emerging. (NHDP, 2007) The rural countryside slowly becomes the competitor and alternative to the “sun and sea” tourism destinations and according to the forecast the numbers of travel retailers’ sales of countryside destinations in Western Europe alone will be increased by an average of 20% from 2006 until 2011 (WTM, 2007). Rural tourism sector has an increasing potential for Hungary in terms of domestic and inbound international tourism alike, since the numbers of nights spent in the countryside in 2008 reached the 3,8 million which is a 10% increase compare to 2007. In 2008 the numbers of hosts increased by 15,6 % and the numbers of rural accommodations by 16,3 %. Despite the financial crisis rural tourism performed well in 2009 and according to the experts, further development is expected during the upcoming years (Szabadföld online, 2010)¹

¹ source of data of the article: HCSO

The importance of tourism has been recognized long time ago as an effective instrument for socioeconomic growth. A prosperous tourism industry based on long term planning could enhance the protection and development of physical environment, preserve cultural heritage and improve quality of life (UNWTO, 1989). Since it has many potential for the economy especially in rural areas where severe problems hinder the economic prosperity such as ageing population, high unemployment rate and constant migration, it is considered to be the one of the main catalysts of a wider social, cultural, economic, political and environmental changes (Hall, 2004.) Tourism can influence other industries and able to create a strong cooperation between different layers of the society, build social capital, give a strong impetus for further development, make villages a better place of living by giving opportunities for the locals and generating incomes to local municipalities alike. It could advance the development of backward regions where the natural and cultural values could serve as a base for tourism industry at a regional level. (Kovács, 2009).

The promotion of wide range of tourist attractions due to the multiplying effect and the need for tourism related services finally lead to the economic restructuring of the rural countryside. Today when agriculture alone cannot provide a secure and sufficient source of income for everyone, any alternative revenue can do a lot to make people stay, prevent or slow down the depopulation of villages. The income from tourism sector strengthens the local economy and contributing to the improvement of the quality of life and might mitigate the regional socio-economic disadvantages (NHDP,2007). The aim of the EU's regional policy is the promotion of social and economical cohesion which finally contributes to the harmonic and equal development of the regions where the most important area is the job market. However Hungary is just a medium size country, the difference of the employment rate in its regions is

significant and these differences have been remained unchanged over the past few years (Szalainé, 2009 (b)).

In Hungary the rural countryside is often associated with poverty, ageing population, income inequality, lack of job opportunity and hostility towards ethnic minorities. Sometimes the natural and cultural values are overshadowed by the local socio-economical problems but tourism might bring some hope and a chance for take a step towards development and social cohesion. One of the most promising areas is Northern Hungary from tourism point of view but unfortunately the region is also famous about the growing hostility towards Roma minority and due to the economic hardships and industrial change of the last decade, unemployment and poverty rates are above the country's average. But besides of the negative characteristics, tourism is the fastest growing sector and quite promising in creating new jobs and income for qualified and unqualified workforce alike. It is a well known fact that tourism related services such as hotel and catering industry employ high number of youths and women and also offering wide range of possibilities of part time jobs (Dávid, Kovács, Tóth, 2009).

The New Hungarian Rural Development Programme in accordance with the Northern Hungarian Tourism Development Strategy (2007-2013) also puts emphasis on the importance of the possible role of tourism industry in terms of income diversification and as a possible field of job creation. Northern Hungary where the landscape is dominated by isolated small settlements with high ratio of Roma inhabitants every possible job opportunities could improve their situation. But these people are unable to exploit employment opportunities or start up their own business for many reasons despite the fact that according the cautious estimation of the State Audit Office, the governments have spent HUF 120 billion to the Roma integration (without state grants and social allowances) between 1996 and 2006 and Northern Hungary has also received its considerable share (ÁSZ, 2008).

Chapter 2: The Northern Hungarian region

2.1. Demographical and economical characteristics

The Northern Hungarian region composed there counties, Nógrád, Borsod Abaúj-Zemplén and Heves, and located in the north-eastern part of the country alongside the Slovakian border area. It is one of the seven Hungarian statistical regions represent the second level of NUTS² creating the base of decentralization, better allocation of duties and competences and has been used as a basis for regional funding and statistics in the European Union (NHTDS, 2007).

The centre is Miskolc which is the third largest city of Hungary measured in the numbers of inhabitants and however the region have many other economic or cultural centers it is rather a net of small and micro settlements located in closed valleys or alongside the border area. The urban population is the lowest in this region and approximately 30% lives in smaller settlements under 2000 inhabitants. The ratio of Roma population is higher in small villages, which goes together increasing social problems and tendency of segregation (NHOP, 2007-20013).

According to the statistical data, in the beginning of 2009 the region has more than 1,2 million inhabitants but the demographic indicators showed 1,9% of natural decrease and the in the last decade migration has been intensified. The hope of better job opportunities and living

² Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

conditions in other part of Hungary or abroad attracted many people and in the years of 2007 and 2008 more than 19 000 residents left the region (Szalainé, 2009 (c)).

Northern Hungary also has a drawback in the field of education. However in the last few years the level of education and the attendance record has been improved, it is still under the national average. The tendency showed a 170 % increase in the field of vocational trainings but there is still a room for further development in the higher education sector since the division of the population in terms of the highest level of schooling is worse than the national average (Szalainé, 2009 (b)).

In terms of GDP per capita the region was the 6th in ranking in 2007 with its 1,6 million compare to the national average of 2, 5 million and has been on the list of the twenty most economical backward regions of the EU (Szalainé, 2009 (c)). The service sector was the dominant contributor of the regional GDP with its 55,6 percent while the industrial (35%) and the agricultural (5,3%) sectors are lagging behind. The numbers of those who employed in agriculture decreased from 9,1 to 3,9 % in the last decade and knowledge based industries such as chemical and engineering are continuously emerging (Szalainé, 2009 (a)). Small enterprises represent the 98% of partnerships which are typical in the region and around 91-92% of them belong to micro-enterprises. They mainly perform their activities in the constructing sector but retail trade and service industry are also relevant (NHOP, 2007-20013).

In the past, under the communist regime the area functioned as the center of heavy industry but after the political and economic transition factories were closed down slowly, coal mining is practically non- existent today and the production capacity of the remaining steel factories

were cut dramatically contributing to the high unemployment rate which caused damages to the economy and increased social spending (Kemény, 2005). Before the economic crisis in 2008 the level of unemployment reached the 13,4% whereas the national average was 7,8%. The number of the economically inactive people, namely those who are unemployed and did not look for a job is exasperating. Not only the unemployment rate and the numbers of inactive people put extra pressure on the region but the dependency ratio is above the national average due to the ageing population and the fact that the ratio of the economically active age cohort (between 15-64) is the lowest in Northern Hungary compare to the other regions of the country (Szalainé, 2009 (a)).

Taking into consideration the socio-economic characteristics of the region the aim is to improve economic competitiveness and simultaneously decrease socio-economic differences. To attain these goals, economic actors must cooperate at the lowest level since the highly fragmented settlement structure characterized by small villages calls for sharing of administrative, educational, economic, holidaymaking, health functions based on a better cooperation system (NHOP, 2007).

2.2 The tourism sector

In contrast to the unfavorable social and economical background and the fact that village accommodations are still characterized by relatively low service level and utilization of capacities, the popularity of village tourism is continuously increasing and the region performed well in the tourism sector in 2008, being the second most visited region from domestic tourism point of view. (Turizmus Bulletin, 2009). Although many Hungarians

decided to visit the region it is not well-known amongst foreign visitors since just 18% of them spent their time in Northern Hungary (HNTÖ, 2009). But on the other hand market researchers alleged that increase in domestic visitors is due to the financial crisis since rural regions offer a wide range of possibilities for an affordable price. To preserve this favorable trend not only foreigners shall be targeted in the advertising campaigns. According to a survey for the Hungarians the natural environment, good past experiences, relatively low cost, the built and cultural heritage were the main motivations in their destination decision making process (Turizmus Bulletin, 2009)

Due to the fact that Northern Hungary has a common border with the most developed Central Danube region, the accessibility of the rural countryside of the neighboring counties such as Nógrád or Heves can be improved by investments in infrastructure and effective road maintenance projects. The accessibility of the region was graded down to 60% since smaller villages in the mountain are isolated and the quality of the existing roads also needs further improvement. As an increasing number of foreign tourists from abroad have already been to Budapest, they have to be convinced to take a visiting in the rural countryside to explore the rich in cultural heritage and areas offering beautiful landscapes. The region has outstanding natural values and cultural traditions and the largest nature conservation area is located in this region with four national parks, five natural reserves and conservation areas which offer favorable conditions for tourism close to nature. In recent years considerable investments have been done related to medicinal and thermal baths taking advantage from the natural thermal spring supply (NHTDS, 2007).

Tourism industry has a non-negligible effect on rural development and policy makers also emphasizing its leading role in generating growth. Due to its cutting sector characteristic

involves big diversity of services and professions and links many economic and non economic sectors together including various size of companies, private persons, central and local authorities alike (Commission, 2006). According to the North Hungary Regional Operational Program the improvement of the tourism sector is the second most important priority and approximately 20.8% of the total founding will be allocated for the creation of competitive products, tourist attractions and the purpose of destination management (NHOP, 2007).

Tourism as an intersectoral industry and the fragmented settlement structure together with the region based decentralization policy of the EU led to a horizontal cooperation chain of stakeholders in the system of Tourism Destination Management (TDM) under the principle of regional concentration integrating all participants involved in tourism industry. It is a system built from below and supported from above to enhance competitiveness, cater the needs of the tourists, increase income, strengthen the image of the territory and contribute to the sustainable development (Dávid, Tőzsér, 2009). Due to several successful tenders for the 2010 period the region will receive HUF 2010 million under the ROP action planes which is the largest amount allocated for tourism development at regional level (Víg, 2010).

How can rural tourism be competitive in a long run? What are the key elements of competitiveness? It seems that Northern Hungary is on the right way to take advantage from the EU and government funds to become a successful touristic destination but one problem still has not been solved. No region can achieve long lasting and sustainable development if huge inequality gap exists between its territories and between the majority and the Roma minority. Despite of the fact that huge amount of money has been spent for integration not too much result has been achieved. Is tourism the possible solution which helps to create better conditions for Roma minority or it is a chance of the majority? Being part of a larger

European community the deeply rooted history of Roma minority and the position of the EU regarding the inclusion issue are indispensable elements for the better understanding of the current situation and the future possibilities.

Chapter 3: Inclusion of Roma minority in Europe

For more than one thousand years Roma have been an integral part of the European civilization and today they are still living in social exclusion and persistent discrimination where the risk of poverty, unemployment and negative stereotypes hinder their inclusion to the society of the host countries. Due to the fact that they are the largest ethnic minority living in all member states of the EU and their numbers reached the 12 million, the Community is committed to help their inclusion with all possible means for which they have the respective competence. The European institutions and Member States have a joint responsibility to improve the inclusion of Roma by using all the instruments and policies (European Commission, (d)). Anti-discrimination rule is also part of the article 19 of the Treaty of the European Community, and many other directives and the Structural Funds also promoting the inclusion in different ways including financial or legal support alike (European Roma Summit, 2008). This multi layered and complex issue brings together various forms of entities from governments to the representatives of grass roots movements, and numerous initiatives have been launched to meliorate the social and economical conditions of this marginalized group of people. But inclusion happens not only in the realm of economic and social issues, identity and culture are also relevant part in a community which official slogan is “United in Diversity”.

One of the most acknowledged initiatives the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” has been launched in 2005, established by eight countries of Europe. The founding members supported by the international community represented the first cooperative action to accelerate social inclusion

and improvement of economic and social status of Roma minority. As a unique political commitment, brings together governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as the Roma civil society. Today twelve member states adopted the initiative and all of these countries have significant Roma population. Each of these countries has developed a national Decade Action Plan that specifies the goals and indicators in the priority areas where culture and media also play significant role (romadecade.org).

Getting acquainted with different cultures improves the understanding and the acceptance of each other since culture works as a medium across time and space connecting people together by developing confidence and the sense of identity. Realizing this linking feature the Council of Europe became the patron of the cross border cultural cooperation activity the “European Route of Roma Culture and Heritage” (coe.int). It is a project which aimed at introducing the 600 year history of Roma in Europe and present several cultural contributions in the field of literature, fine art and music in order to break down the negative stereotypes. It is an initiative which raises awareness to the old and historically routed cultural heritage and helps participants to learn more about Roma in the framework of cultural tourism. This networking and communication project was initiated in 2009 offering a journey across time and space all around Europe. In the first stage a network of organizations is developed which work together to establish common set of activities. The next step is the tourist itineraries in different cities of Europe which provides a more comprehensive understanding of Roma culture (romadecade.org). but not only the image of people dressed in vivid colors playing cheerful melodies should be associated with Roma, the Holocaust and the constant deprivation of basic needs, poverty and hostility also part of the picture (coe.int).

“The National Gallery in Budapest has a selection of works showing the rural village life in the 18th century. What is very interesting about this, it that on these pictures Roma are very well included into the rural society and not shown as strangers” (Georg Armbrüster).³

Roma culture is part of our historical heritage and many Hungarians know little or nothing about their culture. It definitely needs more attention since Roma culture could add values to the existing tourism industry making it more colorful and also enhance the assimilation of Roma into our society (Farkas, 2009). They can be also involved not only in the demand but in the supply side of the job market since tourism can absorb qualified and unqualified workforce however several barriers exist which they cannot eliminate alone.

³ quoted from the opening speech of the European Route of Roma Culture and Heritage (2009)

Chapter 4: Roma minority in Hungary

We do not know when exactly Roma arrived in the territory of Hungary but according to the historical evidences many of them had already lived in the Carpathian basin under the reign of the Arpad dynasty. (Czibulka, 2003).

Since their persecution started very early in Europe, they had no chance to integrate into the host society and remained always on the periphery which further reinforced their feelings of exclusion. They successfully adapted to the always changing circumstances and worked as road builders, craftsmen, gunsmiths, musicians and professional entertainers. Besides the blacksmithery, gypsy music also played a non negligible source of income and many Hungarian nobles enjoyed their entertainment and offered them protection for their services (Kemény, 2005).

The era of enlightened absolutism is about the control and the regulation therefore it is not surprising that the Roma issue appeared on the agenda since they were considered to be outsiders having their own leaders, beliefs, clothing, rules and procedures. Attempts of forced integration commenced during the reign of Maria Theresa. Since the integration was unsuccessful, later Joseph II ignored the issue and declared the problem non existent. The forced assimilation continued during the socialism which went together with the destruction of cultural tradition, language and identity. However the purpose was the assimilation later it became the base of marginalization since Roma represented the lower segment of the society in terms of jobs, income and education (Kemény, 2000).

4.1. Roma minority in the Northern Hungarian region

In view of all the regions Northern Hungary has the most significant Roma minority and their numbers in the country according to cautious estimations is reached the 66 829, and it is continuously growing (NHOP, 2007-20013). No official census figures are available since ethnical origin is based on voluntary admission. Furthermore, Roma population is divided into several subgroups and does not form a homogeneous community either in their language or in custom. About two thirds of them are Romungro who are already assimilated and do not speak any of the Roma languages. In addition to that a significant portion identifies themselves as Hungarian and conceal their ethnic origin because of fear of discrimination (Farkas, 2009).

In contrast to the Hungarian society the demographic structure of Roma minority showed an increase and if we do not give them chance for a better life it could lead to severe problems in the future. Many young Roma intend to break out the poverty trap but without stabile financial background and surrounded by discrimination their situation is extremely hard. “If we do not let these people back into the labor market, there will be no one to pay my pension” said Eszter Pásztor, the program coordinator of the Fresco Village Project (Hodgson, 2009).

4.1.1. The collapse of the heavy industry and the emerging knowledge based economy

The situation of Roma people is even worst for many reasons than those Hungarians’ who also belong to the poorer segment of the society. Not only the low level of education but the

direct and indirect discrimination put barriers to their participation in the national economy which is considered being a serious concern from economic development point of view. The roots of the problems go back to the remote past where the forced integration pushed them into low paid jobs where educational background was not needed. They experienced the collapse of communist regime as a negative change in long run since most of the Roma people had been employed as semi-skilled or unskilled workers in the heavy industry and by the economic transition many Roma lost their job and their main source of income. They were the first who were dismissed from the labor intensive heavy industries and even the emerging construction sector was not able to absorb the increased labor supply. Besides the long term unemployment in the Romani working age population, restricted possibilities and low wage, the coming generation also has to work in the bottom end of the labor market (EERC, 2007).

In the beginning of the transition the emerging demand for qualified workforce in the labor market further increased the numbers of unemployed amongst Roma. In Hungary in the 1990s the unemployment rate of Romani male workers was only 4-5% higher than non-Roma workers but after the industrial changes this gap reached the 45%. Take into consideration the latest available data regarding the unemployment rate we can conclude that many Roma have never recovered from the economic restructuring and policies which targeted and aimed to resolve this problem did not fulfill the expectations (Kertesi, 2004).

The employment situation and possibilities in the market for Romani people is even worst than it was under the communist era. Now many people voluntary stay at home and apply for state benefits since due to their low qualification, they might not get more money if they would be employed (G Fekete, 2009). There has been some improvement in the field of vocational trainings and however the numbers of those who acquire university or collage degree is doubled from 1992 until 2006 in Northern Hungary, the 6% is still low (Szalainé,

2009 (c)) not to mention the fact that the ratio of highly qualified persons amongst the Roma population is even worst. And even if they are able to find a job and have a qualification they are usually receive lower terms and conditions and experienced inequality in the level of remuneration compare to their non-Romani counterparts (EERC, 2007).

It is an accepted view that education is the key to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups and regions creating knowledge based society which could enter into the job market and have better conditions of living. But on the other hand the experiences show that the traditional way of transmitting knowledge and education does not work under these circumstances. The low aspiration, the earlier failures and critics towards the education system, low level of quality and not market oriented trainings might result in failure (Dabrowski, Idziak, 2006). Enormous amount of money has been spent for vocational trainings everywhere in the country to help poor and unqualified people to find jobs but these projects had many discrepancies. However there are success stories the overall outcome is under the expectations. Many studies have been conducted to mapping out the problems and according to the findings, the motivation, non-market competitive jobs and discrimination were the main obstacles. Many Roma have OKJ decree but the trained nurses, park keepers, black smiths, basket makers could not enter into the job market or have enough income either because of the discrimination or the overstock job market (M. László, 2009). The communal work financed from EU funds seems to be an alternative but temporary solution to employ these people but according to sociologists the temporary communal work also cause harm since no reputation and future would be realized and contributes to the conservation of the current situation, namely that the most unwanted and low paid jobs are done by the poorest people, mainly the Roma minority (Kovács, 2008).

It is a generally accepted point of view that this constant and mass unemployment is regarded as the consequence of the supply side factors which means that their disadvantages come from the low or absence of required educational qualification. They are unable to enter into the job market and since the situation has been unchanged for nearly two decades they cannot escape from the poverty trap. The knowledge intensive sectors are emerging in the region and sufficient qualification is the precondition in the job market, where educational background functions as a determinant of successful hire from the unemployment (ERRC, 2007). However there are other barriers, since most of them live in isolated settlements where the limited access to job also reduce their chance to being employed for a longer period or find a job which they could perform.

Discrimination is getting more serious and the negative media coverage does not help to break down these stereotypes. According to a survey held by the ERRC in Hungary in 2005, 69% of the interviewed have encountered discrimination when seeking employment. As a woman said, “You will have a better chance to get job if someone recommend you as a hard working and reliable workforce. Otherwise it is extremely hard of being hired.” Due to the discrimination against Roma, the shadow market can offer some job opportunities which is not an ideal solution (ERRC, 2007).

4.1.2. Agriculture

After the political and economic transition and the collapse of heavy industry, agriculture supposed to be the way of development and many projects were established to promote agriculture or subsistence farming. As a result of the consolidation the fragmented system

with small land size hindered the profitability of the sector. However in some cases the agriculture seemed to be a working solution to generate income, for the Roma minority the land reform could not bring such a big change. Since they had not owned lands before the collectivization, no land was redistributed for Roma during the consolidation. They could rent it but the maintenance cost with the rent fee eliminated the profit (Kligman, 2001).

With the help of the EU several projects were launched and worked with relative success. The recent text book example is the cucumber garden in the neighboring county where the local Roma community with the help of the NHRDP established a co-operative in a tiny village, Igrici. The project provides stable job opportunity for 22 families and due to the canning factory located in Tyukod, the problem of the buyer and the access to the market has already been solved. Since the demand for cucumber is emerging the project is one of the most successful working programs in the field of Roma integration. It has to be mentioned that the land is under the ownership of the local foundation and the cooperatives has a seven years right of usage under lease (Keresztény, 2009).

But on the other hand few kilometers away in the same county, the cucumber working program is struggling. This program was initiated in the middle of the 1990's with the purpose to stop impoverishment. Since Roma families have to pay rent for the lands the profit is small and the access to market is limited. The enterprise which usually buys up the cucumbers and provides the basic capital for the production also determines the prices and keeps control over the farmers (M. László, 2009). It seems to be that cooperation and access to the buyers could bring success but families alone with small lands cannot move forward. It is not a unique case since today everyone is struggling for survival due to the unfavorable market and economic conditions.

In addition to that in Northern Hungary the hills and mountains limit the possibilities of agriculture and because of new technologies less and less people are employed in the sector. The cultivation of lands helps to reduce expenses but cannot work as a main source of income. However the lack of jobs opportunities in the economically disadvantaged Northern Hungarian area still stress the importance of subsistence farming and the social role of agriculture (NHRDP, 2007). But it has to be mentioned that today those who have some land or working in the agriculture still regard village tourism as a new source of revenue and an emerging pull sector of the local economy (NHTDS, 2007).

4.1.3. Tourism as a new pull sector

As agriculture continues to provide fewer jobs, the growing rate of unemployment in rural areas hinders economic growth and deepens the poverty in isolated settlements. Every region has its own asset and resources which can be utilized in a way to provide decent living conditions for its residents. The natural reserves, wealth of cultural and architectural heritage combined with the rising popularity of village tourism can help the economic transformation and used as a promising instrument to social inclusion.

One of the most successful and developing touristic region, Northern Hungary has the largest Roma population but no further success can be predicted if hostile environment, segregation and huge inequality gap exists in terms of level of education, living and working conditions amongst the majority and the minority. As László Sólyom, the President of the Republic of Hungary said during his visit in the most backward region of Northern Hungary, village or

ecotourism and education are the possible ways out of poverty and encouraged young Roma to continue their studies. But to exploit the natural treasures offered by the region the infrastructure shall be developed significantly and civil initiatives must get further support (Millei, 2007).

It is a well-known fact that Tourism is a key asset of the region of Northern Hungary but has not been exploited up to now. Poorly utilized favorable tourism industry conditions all over the country must be developed therefore The Regional Development Operational Program distributes 36.4% of the total budget available to the regions to support tourism priorities such as tourist attractions, accommodations and services compare to the 5.9% share allocated for human resources. The number one priority is the development of infrastructure with the 57.7 % share from the budget (ÉMOP, 2007). The European Union finances activities that encourage job creation by sustaining preservation and further enhancement of minority cultural heritage. It could also help improve the provision of cultural services, upgrade local traditional products, or stimulate tourism through rational exploitation of minority cultural resources (European Commission, 2006 (a)).

“The minority problem is the problem of the majority as well and the relationship between Hungarians and Roma people can only be advanced if the Roma customs, feeling and desires are explored which hopefully able to break the existing deadlock of mistrust and suspicion” (Gugliemo, 1993). Negative stereotypes, high rate of unemployment, segregation, discrimination and hostility form a complex system where these components reinforce each other and lead to multi layered problem package which hard to be solved. In order to design a policy which addresses the problem and able to generate positive changes we have to understand the complexity of the phenomenon, its causes and extent as well.

Since it has many economic and social aspects, and tourism is an intersectoral industry connecting many industries, trade and services, regional development, culture, health care, education, sport, environmental protection, forest and water management, agriculture, employment, and last but not least the activities of self-governing authorities (TDSSR, 2005), it can serve as a good common starting point to find a solution for the Roma issue. Tourism can build up not only vertical but horizontal connections within these sectors and a most of the aspects of such a complex problem might be addressed through the cooperation at the intersectoral level.

But how can they enter into the tourism industry if hostility, prejudice and lack of capital form serious barriers? According to a survey conducted in 2009, foreign visitors have no negative stereotypes about Roma minority and most of them are willing to take part in a traditional Roma program with pleasure. Roma wedding, gypsy dance and a party with traditional foods and music were the most preferred programs but museums, theater, cooking competition and pig sticking are also amongst the most attractive list of events. The respondents also pointed out that the government is the main factor which can affect the popularity of gypsy culture (Farkas, 2009). The role of the government in the promotion of positive image is more significant than ever before to reverse the negative attitude towards Roma minority, and communicate a more positive picture and mitigate social tensions between Roma and non-Roma population.

After visiting the most prominent website of the village tourism, the Northern Hungarian tourism industry, the Hungarian Tourism Office and a thematic website which offers

programs in every regions of the country⁴, the final conclusion is that no well-promoted Roma program is offered in the Northern Hungarian region. The situation has to be improved but programs offered should not be pictured as a competitor of other programs in the region since it might cause further tension. Roma culture has to be promoted outside of the capital city as well and integrated into the existing structure of local attractions especially in a region where most of the Roma are living.

Attractions can be integrated into a complete package under the newly introduced TDM system based on the cooperation between even small and powerless settlements. The lack of unity of small actors in the realm of business cannot result in success not even a sustainable and long term development. Isolated villages without capital are not able to attract many visitors or offer a complete package of services and attractions that meets the tourist's demand. TDM is a bottom up initiative which further strengthens the personal attachment and involvement at grassroots level (Lengyel, 2008). Motivation is essential for backward communities to feel the project as their own and actively take part in the realization. The idea has to be approved and supported by the community involved (Dabrowski, Idziak, 2006).

But on the other hand the organization of such programs requires capital and connections not to mention the marketing or the performance part. Culture and discrimination are the two issues where money can be directly targeted ethnic minorities in the EU. The culture was one of the main priorities between the period of 1998 and 2002 supported by hundreds of millions of Hungarian forints. In 2003 the Medgyesi cabinet set up a Roma Cultural Fund with a HUF 165 million but the support started to decrease and in 2005 reached only the HUF 80 million.

⁴ <http://www.programturizmus.hu>
<http://itthon.hu/>
<http://falusiturizmus.lap.hu/>
<http://www.nordtour.hu/>

A year later the direct support of Roma culture at the Cultural Department ceased to exist. The support was not more than HUF 50 million in 2007 (ÁSZ, 2008). The Cultural Roma Center after fierce debates opened in the beginning of this year in Budapest but further support is needed especially in the rural countryside to help those who are living in desperate conditions to make them be able to do something at local level.

The main types of products which can be used as an additional source of income are souvenirs, art products made by craftsman, or traditional gypsy music. To find market for such products is extremely hard since it has to have a certain quality, and attract or reach an adequate number of buyers to generate at least a solid profit. The most common problem with music performance is that however Gypsy music definitely a niche product after the privatization no privately owned restaurants can afford to employ musicians or if they do so the income is not enough to make ends meet (Ménés, 2009). Festivals can offer another solution but Roma culture is not only about constant merry making, it has other side as well and providing quality and at the same time realistic picture is more important (Papp, 2008).

At the first sight tourism can offer possibilities but it must not forget that it is not working in every village and it is not the only nor the ultimate solution. It is just an option which might help some Roma to have better life but which is more important is the positive message and the example that able to restore the good reputation and break down those walls which hinder the inclusion and acceptance.

The next chapter will describe the experiences from the past and the current situation and tries to address the problem of legal barriers, EU funds and government supports which is supposed to spend on Roma integration.

Chapter 5: Funds and Development policies

5.1. General conditions and problems of EU funds

So many efforts have been made and more than HUF 670 billion was spent on remedial programs under the Hungarian National Development Program between the period of 2004 and 2007, but the unemployment rate and the living conditions of Roma minority has not been changed significantly. Theoretically backward groups could get enormous money after the EU accession compare to the previous periods and in addition to that, the Hungarian government also allocated extra money as a result of the heavy critique received from the EU due to the poor results and performance. However it seems that there was no barrier to get the funds, in reality Roma minority could not benefit as much as it was intended (ÁSZ, 2008).

The insufficient target utilization of the national and co-financed EU programs goes back to the definition of the target group. The government could not agree whether Roma issue is a social and employment or rather an ethnical-minority problem based on human right issues. Since Hungarian data protection law prohibits the gathering of data on ethnic basis, concrete statistics on the numbers of Roma were unavailable which made the target utilization more problematic although in some cases it would have been advantageous for the ethnic minority. The supporters of the unified policy prevailed and no “special Roma programs” were initiated. They argued that a positive discrimination is more harmful than advantageous and due to the fact that Roma minority is not a homogenous group either, this kind of target programs might create further tensions and misunderstandings (ÁSZ, 2008). But in

accordance with the EU rules the founding of culture and discrimination related issues are still funded on ethnic bases.

Since there was no exactly specified “target group” the efficient monitoring, accountability and transparency issues have not been solved. Furthermore the always changing departmental structure at ministerial level and the lack of communication and coordination of projects between the executive hindered the effective utilization and the equal distribution of funds which supposed to target disadvantageous groups, mainly the Roma minority. As a complex issue, it requires multi level and coordinated action of the stakeholders and governmental institutions (ÁSZ, 2008).

Today several programs are directly target Roma minority besides the field of discrimination and culture. The program for Roma micro and small enterprises gives financial support for further development and acquire equipments needed (palyazatiportal.hu). Many other programs were set up in the field of education and to facilitate the employment of Roma people.

Not only the legislative and coordination level caused problems but the conditions of the tender procedure and strict requirements also put extra pressure on the applicants. Civil organizations which were prepared and dedicated their activity to the Roma integration also struggled with the bureaucratic rules and regulations. The precondition to receive the funds was an initial contribution which was an infeasible requirement since most of the applicants were in lack of capital. The growing bureaucracy also caused headaches since those who won the tender had to submit enormous amount of paper for being entitled to recall the installments. If the papers were not sufficient, the money was not paid or caused serious

delays in the money transfer (Ász, 2008). The programs are stopped and in the hope of the future money they usually applied for bridging credits. As the representative of one of the Roma foundations said, the dept made the maintenance of their projects unfeasible and if they had not got support from the UNDP they would have been in trouble. The government tried to address the problem and established a found to ease the liquidation problems and gave money to cover the expenses generated by the interest of the bridging credits. However in 2006 the fund ceased to exist (M. László, 2009).

There are several smaller obstacles such as the VAT, which is non-deductable in the EU causing extra financial burden on the applicants and the winners of the tenders. However the Hungarian government tried to mitigate the consequences of the increased national VAT and gave compensation to the projects, it is still not deductible (nfu, 2009 (a)).

5.2. Rural development and Tourism policy

In Hungary tourism has a strong connection to the rural development policy and not only the state but local governments, civil organizations and private persons can do a lot in order to exploit the opportunities provided by the different EU financial instruments and government supports. From the very beginning when the SAPARD program initiated, the application for such instruments required practical experience, infrastructure and some initial capital since most of the funds were partially subsidized. The bureaucracy and the strict regulations regarding the accountancy and documentation rules sometimes make the application procedure impossible for small and underdeveloped regions and for more develop settlements, it was difficult to justify their application for such support (Kovács, Szeles, Bacsí, 2002).

Even though cooperation seemed advantageous for all parties, it had a dark side as well. As the cooperation of the two tourism based Keszthely-Hévíz and Tátika-Rezi sub-regions pointed out differences of opinions might occur especially if huge contrast exist in terms of level of development and financial background. The program which was prepared by the stronger partner paid less regard to the interests of the weaker partner (Kovács, Szeles, Bacsí, 2002).

Backward regions alone could not apply and if they apply together with their more developed counterparts sometimes are used as a right base of justification to get more funds with better conditions. The situation is even worst when settlements with high ratio of Roma inhabitants are involved in such common applications. Since no program or funds can be directly allocated for the development of Roma settlements, educational purposes or other programs with the exception of culture and issues related to discrimination according to the EU rules, after the successful tender the stronger and developed regions took the money away without consequences or simply did not let the Roma representative to take part in the decision making and implementation process. Sometimes the agreements existed on papers only and due to the weak monitoring system no wonder that huge amount of money has been spent on development of backward regions and no results have been achieved regarding the conditions of Roma minority (G. Fekete, 2009). However many counter examples are also well known.

Not only application for EU funds causes problems, national law and the disadvantageous characteristics of the region also can make the situation more difficult. In tourism sector the lack of substantial accommodation capacity of higher standards of services hardly to meet the consumer demand. Further expansion of the accommodation possibilities is inevitable if

substantive job creation and revenue boosting effects are expected to achieve. Since most of the territories in Northern Hungary are classified as the most disadvantaged areas in socio-economic sense, no private investments can be expected unless the tender conditions are improved by government grants, or other supports or incentives.

It is valid for the northern region as well, that those who are involved in village tourism are usually pensioners or families with the lack of capital and valuable assets. The average yearly income from the village tourism is around of HUF 500,000 from which the cost of maintenance has to be deducted so at the end the pure profit is not enough to upkeep a family, but it is rather a non-negligible contribution for their standards of living. In the backward regions where no other opportunities exist, renting out apartment or one attraction or event can generate more jobs. It is not purely a business but a tool for improve the overall conditions of the area which provides market for local producers, helps to keep traditions, slows down the depopulation and functions as a secondary source of income (Thurzó, 2009).

There is no doubt that Roma minority are not in position to let out rooms for tourist, but they can be involved in local programs and in the service sector alike. Today village tourism is far more than providing accommodation, and as the tendency shows in the recent years the rising number of accommodation and catering facilities went together with the diversification of programs offered to visitors. More and more hosts join to the local touristic organizations and programs offering a complete touristic package to their visitors (Németh, 2010).

But the government decided to levy tax on the non-hotel accommodations which is in force from 2010 in contrast to the fact that according to the preliminary estimations no significant amount of money will be collected. The growing administrative burdens and strict accounting

rules discourage many people to enter into the accommodation business since the cost generated by the rules and regulations overreaches the gain received. The representative bodies in tourism related industries worry about the falling numbers of accommodation service providers and claiming that the new regulation pushes them into the shadow market to avoid taxes and administrative costs. It not only means tax avoidance but they probably break off their relations with the representative bodies and agencies as well (Kiss, 2010).

Not only accommodations but entrepreneurs can determine and contribute to the development through tourism in the given region. “The most important needs of rural territories are the development micro enterprises and encouragement of diversification in order to create jobs, the improvement of skills and education and providing a wider access to basic services and the improvement of the villages, the protection of heritage and the development of local communities” (NHRDP, 2007). The numbers of small and micro enterprises in rural areas have a role in manufacturing handicraft products, using the traditional production modes. The increasing tourism industry with cultural and traditional events, fairs and thematic tours are also helping rural entrepreneurs to catch up and enlarged their business strength popular and ethnic values and generating alternative sources of income (NHRDP, 2007).

The Found for Roma Micro and Small Enterprises is an example for a positive discrimination and the aim of the program is to meliorate the competitiveness of such enterprises in the market (palyazatiportal.hu). Even this found is available for Roma micro or small enterprises, there are no designated target areas in the filed of tourism or related activities.

Chapter 6: Initiatives in the tourism sector

Not only the government but private actors also discovered the potential of tourism in terms of village renewal and job creation. The following two examples are amongst the first and hopefully successful initiatives which try to combine tourism, culture and rural development in the most disadvantageous regions.

6.1. Promoting pro-poor tourism in the Least Developed Micro Regions

“Preservation and programmed development of the natural and cultural heritage provides basis both for the improvement of the quality of life and the diversification of economy. It improves the appearance of the settlements, gives room for self organization and strengthens the identity of local residents. “Since many archeological treasures, castles and historic manor houses are located in rural areas, the smaller settlements of the peripheral locations can take advantage of a strong cooperation using their competitive and comparative advantages (NHRDP, 2007).

The government realized the deficiencies of the previous programs and allocated HUF 96,9 billion within the budget of the New Hungary Development Plan for the period of 2007-2013 in order to support the so called Least Developed Micro Regions. One initiative within the program is the promotion of Pro-poor tourism that hopefully results in increased net benefits for poor people. The aim is to enhance the linkages between tourism business and the

residents of the area and as the result the contribution of the industry to poverty reduction is increased and poor people are able to participate more effectively in product or service development (nfu.hu (b)).

The idea of pro-poor tourism is a well-known and successful approach to advance the development and the catch up of backward regions which have outstanding abilities in natural or built heritage. “It is not a specific product or sector of tourism, but rather an approach where the strategic aim is to unlock opportunities for the poor – whether for economic gain, other livelihood benefits, or participation in decision-making.” The establishment of different forms of village tourism which connect isolated settlements is a viable and sustainable component for capacity building, product development, improve credit access, facilitate the process of education and create new jobs and market for the benefit of host communities. The strategy also involves packaging of tourism related products and linking them with events such as cultural festivals making the destination more attractive to a specific market segment (Ashley, Roe, Goodwin, 2001).

The official website of the National Development Agency offers wide range of possibilities for schools to organize excursions in these regions and seven micro regions from Northern Hungary are also presented. The website not only gives a short description of the sights located in these regions but also connect different attractions creating a two or three day thematic tour in the promoted area where even a small income can make difference. The purpose besides the income generation is awareness raising. From the summer a new thematic package will be introduced tailored directly to the needs of families and help them to discover the hidden beauty and treasures of these regions (nfu.hu (b)).

6.2. Tourism based creative idea for village renewal

How can an isolated settlement without any significant touristic attraction and hope of investments enter into the tourism business and break out the poverty trap with an idea designed to the existing circumstances? Are tourism and culture the two key components for some of the backwards regions to escape from their miserable conditions? The following two examples give a short insight how marginalized villages can turn into touristic sights, describe the complexity of tourism which make positive change in every field of the life of the residents.

“Creating community spaces suitable for the modern historical and cultural values has a general significance with regard to the development of communities “ (NHRDP, 2007)

Theme village is not a new born idea for village renewal. The successful European textbook example is Sierakowo, a small marginalized village without any historical traditions or heritage of its own. It was established after the World War II. and the residents either have Polish or Ukrainians origin. The settlement is far away from major roads and depopulation, high level of unemployment, low level of education, lack of human and social capital were its main characteristics (Településfejlesztési Füzetek, 2008).

The creation of a Theme Village helped Sierakowo to break out of poverty, restructured the social networks, brought motivation and change to the life of the people and last but not least through out the tourism, the project created jobs and income for the locals. The idea is a based on the Lord of the Ring trilogy, therefore a Hobbit village was created by the residents with the help of volunteers. The program is based on activities, such as treasure hunting in the surrounding forests and meadows, theater plays and festivals. After the while the residence

could finance the activities independently and learned customer service skills to upkeep the system and attract visitors to the region. The project has received distinction in the European Village Renewal Award in 2004 and got a huge media attention (Dabrowky, Idziak, nd).

“Knowledge and awareness about their own history will facilitate inclusion through fostering their own identity” (Armbrüster, 2009).

The Hungarian example of village renewal is Bódvalenke, a small and isolated village in Borsod-Abaúj Zemplén county where approximately 85% of the population is Roma. The average monthly income per capita was not more than HUF 16. 000 and only two people had permanent job before the project started. They lived from state allowance and permanent jobs offered by the shadow market and found allocated for the village is required for municipality’s own public work program and no money has been allocated for development (MTV, 2010).

The aim is to demonstrate that with small external help the deprived ghetto village is able to stand on its own feet and break out of poverty with its own effort. The idea based on the combination of culture and tourism which might generate not only job but confidence and good reputation for the community as a whole. The frescos painted on wall are representing Roma cultures, beliefs, legends and the most important stages of their history including joy, and sadness alike. The reinvented culture is the base of the largest open air exhibition of Roma art in Europe and which brings the small community together fighting for the same goal, recall the almost disappeared traditions and involve the younger generation to the renewal works. The paintings are under the sole ownership of the house owners, they take active part in the creation and later in the maintenance (bodvalenke.eu).

The younger generation of Roma has almost lost their cultural roots and do not acquire the skills of their ancestors. The old traditions are fading away which goes together with the neither here nor there feeling of belonging (Kemény, 2005). But with the project they can get motivation and a strong sense of identity. The hostility towards Roma can be mitigated and not only scandals but good examples, initiatives and their values also have to be put into the spotlight and reach the public (Hodgson, 2009). They have strong artistic history and today the contemporary Roma art is more than neglected. Traditions not only in their old form but contemporary art, music or design can play a significant role as a new form of reinvented culture (Papp, 2008).

“Supply competency is the ability to pack touristic products and create an image attractive to visitors” (Kulcsár, 2009). In the least developed part of Northern Hungary these products are fragmented due to the high number of micro and small settlements. The fresco village fits to the History Valley program of the region connecting many small settlements together in the neighborhood of the famous Aggtelek cave, which is part of the World Heritage. Every village has its own historical memory or service facilities and this horizontal cooperation for the development of Hungary’s most deprived region can bring success for the residents.

Concluding Remarks

While tourism has proven to be a feasible solution it should be emphasized that many difficulties exist and it should not be considered as the only solution. The purpose of this essay was to draw attention to a field which has not been discovered in depth yet, but the few initiatives implemented can support the argument that it might contribute with its small share to the economic restructuring, development and a peaceful inclusion of Roma minorities.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that education is the number one priority to enhance the economic integration of Roma minority but provision of employment has to be given to the older generation. However tourism industry cannot give employment opportunities to every Roma, in this case the positive outcome is more important.⁵ It also has cultural and identity aspects which might reverse the negative tendencies of hostility and discrimination which currently happens on everyday basis.

Prejudice has to be replaced and the main objective is to transform the hostility into a more positive picture contributing to the acceptance and further development of the most backwards regions of Northern Hungary where strong cooperation between all stakeholders at every level an indispensable element for further success.

⁵ opinion of the author of this essay

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