

Assessment of the Lack of Lithuanian Roma Cultural representation: National Integration Plans (2000-2020)

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Submitted to

Central European University

Roma Graduate Preparatory Program (RGPP)

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of certificate of Roma Graduate

Preparatory Program

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Budapest, Hungary

2021

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Introduction

If one visited Lithuania as a tourist interested in the life of national minorities in the country, one would hardly find any comprehensive cultural display to represent the Roma community's cultural life and its heritage in Lithuania. Currently there are 2,115 Roma people living in the state, predominantly in capital Vilnius (see table 1). 96 percent of the Roma live below the at-risk-of-poverty line, and 61 percent experiencing severe material deprivation. Such circumstances often have an impact for the Roma to pursue higher education and drop the school at a young age. ¹

Counties	Percentage of the Roma population density in Lithuania
Kaunas	19%
Marijampolė	20%
Panevėžys	11%
Šiauliai	11%
Klaipėda	3%
Utena	4%
Vilnius	27%
Tauragė	2%
Telšiai	-
Alytus	-

Table no. 1, Roma population density in Lithuania*

¹ Diversity Development Group, *Romų Tautybės Asmenų Padėtis 2020*, [The Situation Of The Roma People In 2020], dr. Vita Kontvainė. Vilnius: Diversity Development Group, 2020. Website, http://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Rom%C5%B3-pad%C4%97tis-2020_TYRIMO-ATASKAITA_patikslinta-10-21.pdf (Accessed June 9, 2021).

Beside the aforementioned social difficulties of the Roma their culture undergoes constant marginality and is excluded from national canon.

*Korenizatsiya*², the Lenin's policy that promoted ethnic diversity within USSR was later exchanged for forced *Russification* by Stalin.³ Thus, from 1930 the Roma were not allowed to pursue mobilization activities rather they were seen as proletarians.⁴ Lithuania became a part of USSR in 1940 and the developed approach of Russification hindered the Roma cultural expression in the country further on. However, nowadays, unlike other apparent national minority representations through established cultural institutions in Lithuania such as Russian Drama Theatre,⁵ Lithuanian Tartar Household Museum in,⁶ Ivan Luckevičius Belarussian Museum,⁷ Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum,⁸ the Roma culture is invisible in this arena. The European Commission (EC) in the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) up to 2020 claims that among other achievements such as education, housing etc., Lithuania's progress in protecting Roma culture and history, organizing conferences and other events, and publishing books on the Roma Holocaust has noticeably improved.⁹ Yet, when reflecting upon the evaluation

² Sambati, Douglas Neander. 2020. "Western Donors, Romani Organizations, and Uses of the Concept of Nation After 1989". *Critical Romani Studies*, no. 3, vol.1. 2020. 26-45.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ "Lietuvos Rusų Dramos Teatras", 2009-2016, accessed June 9, 2021, <https://www.rusudrama.lt/>.

⁶ "Vienkiemis prie Merkinės," Subartonių Totorių Muziejus, 2020, accessed June 9, 2021, <https://vienkiemispriemerkines.lt/en/localities/subartonys/subartoniui-totoriu-muziejus/>.

⁷ "Office of the Chief Archivist of Lithuania", accessed June 9, 2021, http://www.archyvai.lt/lt/fondai/kultura_istaigos/lcva_f281_pazyma.html.

⁸ "Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History", 2017, accessed June 9, 2021, <https://muzeum.tarnow.pl/history/>.

⁹ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies – 2019*, European Commission. SWD (2019) 320 final. Brussels: European Commission, 2019. Website, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/swd2019-320-final_report_on_the_implementation_of_national_roma_integration_strategies_en.pdf (Accessed June 9, 2021).

by EC, I argue that Lithuanian state has not achieved sufficient improvement in regard to the Roma culture since it is perpetually excluded from the diverse arena of comprehensive cultural representation. Not only institutional properties that would represent the culture are absent, but due to the ineffective implementation of the first national Roma integration plan in Lithuania, there is a vicious cycle of general unawareness regarding the uniqueness of the Roma ethnicity and its heritage.¹⁰ In regard to my own positionality as a researcher, I am a member of Lithuania's Roma community and see that Roma culture is neglected, put in social margins and gradually falling into oblivion. The lack of collective representation also affects individual identities that seek the sense of belonging and self-recognition. This thesis therefore addresses the urgent need to preserve the Roma culture that might otherwise be lost forever.

Even though the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities recognizes cultural diversity as 'a source and a factor, not of division, but of enrichment for each society',¹¹ the Roma culture in Lithuania remains marginal and neglected.¹² Based on scholarly research that examines the Roma inclusion in post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe such as Sambati, Págány, Cooper, Marushiakova, Popov, and Doubek this study investigates the Roma integration plans in Lithuania from 2000 until 2020.¹³ Also, it is an innovative research because in

¹⁰ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, *Nutarimas dėl Romų Integracijos į Lietuvos Visuomenę 2000–2004 Metų Programos*, [Resolution on the Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2000–2004], by Government of the Republic of Lithuania. No. 759, Vilnius: Stated News, 5 July 2000. Website, 759 Dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2000-2004 metų programos (lrs.lt), (Accessed June 9, 2021).

¹¹ István Págány, "Minority Rights and the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe," *Human Rights Law Review* 6,1. (February 2006): 1-25 pp..

¹² Ibid

¹³ Sambati, Douglas Neander. 2020. "Western Donors, Romani Organizations, and Uses of the Concept of Nation After 1989"

Belinda Cooper, "We Have No Martin Luther King," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2001/2002), 69-78, Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, "Roma Museums," in *Roma Culture: Myths and Realities*, series ed. Editors: Hristo Kyuchukov and Ian Hancock (Munich: Lincom Academic Publisher 2016), 173-184.

established literature there is lack of analysis about Lithuanian Roma culture and its development. In this regard the aim of this research is to analyze the Roma cultural representation and its visibility within the country and in such a way to contribute to a wider context of scholarly research with Lithuanian Roma case. Also, it aims to identify the main gaps that hinder the cultural development of the Roma. Furthermore, it aims to find ways towards growing and maturing mutual sense of cultural diversity and comprehensive inclusion. Moreover, it contributes to the approach of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) that claims “there is no social inclusion without cultural inclusion,” as was introduced by dr. Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka in conference of the Cultural Diplomacy in the EU 2018.¹⁴

In order to achieve a detailed analysis in this research I have divided it into six sections. The first one briefly describes the current Roma ethnical groups prevailing in the region and analyses the first integration plan of 2000-2004 of the Lithuanian Roma. This section analyses the first attempt by the state to integrate the Roma and it shows the lack of expertise and involvement of the Roma. The second section is about the second integration plan that occurred after a four-year pause, thereby demonstrating the unimplemented obligations and deficiency of the Roma cultural exploration. The third section investigates the third plan that from that time was recalled as National Roma Integration Strategy based on the European NRIS in 2011 up to 2020 framework.¹⁵

István Págány, “Minority Rights and the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe.”

David Doubek, Marketa Levínská & Dana Bittnerová “Roma as the Others,” *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 26, No.2, (2015), 131-152.

¹⁴ Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, “Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka (Deputy Director, European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture)” August 28, 2018, educational video, 37:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyCzFKdWLSg&t=1815s>.

¹⁵ European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions an EU Framework for National Roma

However, it afresh reveals the incompetence of the state that barely contributed to the creation of the cultural representation of the Lithuanian Roma. Later I study the fourth NRIS and its accomplishments that were notable but not inclusive. The fifth section is important because it brings positive examples from other post-socialist countries. In the conclusion I define the situation of cultural representation of the Roma in country and briefly provide recommendations on potential improvements.

Theoretical and methodological framework

After having described the absence of Roma representation in Lithuania, a set of questions arise surrounding current developments in the representation of Lithuanian Roma culture and draw the line towards further improvement. Therefore, I will explore what kind of cultural representation has been created as a result of national Roma integration plans/strategies¹⁶ that were put in place to solve integration and social exclusion issues of the Roma in Lithuania. Following the first query, I pose other concern of how this cultural representation enables the community to be aware about its own culture and heritage. Finally, the identified limits of the cultural representation of the Lithuanian Roma leads to the question of how the cultural representation of Roma in Lithuania should be developed in order to enrich both minority's and majority's awareness and overcome the defined limits.

The case of the Lithuanian Roma cultural representation involves variety of actors in the field, extending from institutions of the European, government of Lithuania and NGOs to the local

Integration Strategies up to 2020. COM (2011) 173 final. Brussels: European Commission, 2011. Website, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173> (Accessed June 9, 2021).

¹⁶ Until EU NRIS in 2011 Roma integration practice was called plan.

community. Furthermore, the first national integration plan has stated that the Roma culture's distinctive language and traditions are the main obstacles that hinder the integration process.¹⁷ This claim shows the initial exclusive state's discourse and the impact it has had on further development of the Roma cultural representation must be analyzed. Therefore, to investigate the given matter, the critical discourse analysis method was chosen. Initially introduced by Fairclough¹⁸ this method probes the invisible effects of causality and determination in discursive practices, events and texts, broader cultural and social structures, relations and processes. It analyses the roots of such practices and power relations between those who shape the ideologies versus those who struggles under power.

In this regard, critical discourse analysis method is used in this research to analyze institutional power relations and their created cultural and social practices towards the Roma. It also examines the texts of the official Roma integration plans/strategies, various EU commission reports, different websites, other official documents in order to investigate the impact on the Roma cultural development. This method also is employed to study the state's discursive claims towards Roma culture and interpretation of its cultural features.

All collected data used in this research was publicly accessible on the Internet.

¹⁷ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, *Resolution on the Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2000–2004*.

¹⁸ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, (London: Routledge, 2003) 270.

The first national Roma integration plan of 2000-2004.

Currently, in Lithuania there are three different Roma ethnic groups; Lithuanian, Latvian, Kaldarera. ¹⁹ The oldest one is the Lithuanian Roma, or *Litovska* Roma. The Latvian Roma, or *Lotfitka* Roma, live near the borders of Latvia while the Kaldarera (or Roma *Kotliary*) came from Moldova and settled in Lithuania after the Second World War.²⁰ The customs, traditions, language of those groups are not the same, however, no government plan has ever distinguished among these differences. Instead, the general ethnonym the Roma was applied to all ethnic Roma groups. This phenomenon is researched by the Sambati, a researcher in the field of cultural heritage, who points out the Western's donors influence of bringing the general ethnonym that helped to unify the Roma and, in such way, to strive for their rights under the status of national minority.²¹ However, possibly such unification, which had a great contributions for emancipation of the Roma, has other side that paid less importance for emphasizing each ethnic group within the Roma. This paradigm has its impact when it comes to integration plans implementation process. For example, when Lithuanian integration plans claim to promote Roma culture, mainly it refers to the Lithuanian Roma ethnic group, however there are two other groups that have different cultural features such as language, music, clothes, etc. Therefore, some of these activities might be exclusive.

Later, during the accession process for the candidate countries into the European Union (EU) the issue of Roma integration was considerably stressed and was even one of the requirements for the

¹⁹ Aušra Simoniukštytė, "The Roma," in *The Peoples of The Grand Duchy of Lithuania*, ed. Grigorijus Potašenko (Vilnius, Adai, 2001), 90-100.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Sambati, "Western Donors, Romani Organizations, and Uses of the Concept of Nation After 1989".

successful membership.²² Lithuania was also among the countries on the waiting list to enter the EU and was obliged to create Roma integration plan that would integrate the Roma into the country's social, economic, cultural life.²³ In Lithuania prior to the first Roma integration program, the government had not taken any similar initiative.²⁴ Thus, for the main stakeholder of making the strategy, the Department of National Minorities (DNM),²⁵ it should have been a challenging task to create a sustainable plan. As the report authored by the Open Society Foundation entitled "Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection in 2002" confirms, the Roma situation was in fact poorly studied and Roma leaders were not involved in producing the strategy.²⁶

The report concluded that DNM did not create a comprehensive strategy.²⁷

However, the plan moved forward while taking certain responsibilities towards the Roma culture. Predominant items that were focused on the Roma culture were described as: to build a Roma Community Centre (RCC), to create a film about Roma history and culture, to publish a publication on Roma history and culture, to prepare a textbook of the Roma language, and to support Roma art activities.²⁸ Except for a children's textbook containing the Roma alphabet and RCC none of these tasks were realized. (Nor was the textbook officially published by DNM on the website of

²² Páány, "Minority Rights and the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe" 25.

²³ Open Society Institute, *European Union Accession Monitoring Program 2002* (Vilnius: Open Society Institute, 2002), 74-114. Website, file:///C:/Users/Romani10/Downloads/euaccesscorruptionlithuaniantrans_2002060_0.pdf (accessed June 9, 2021).

²⁴ Open Society Institute, European Union Accession Monitoring Program.

²⁵ "My Government," Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Accessed June 10, 2021, <https://tmde.lrv.lt/en/>.

²⁶ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, *Resolution on the Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2000–2004*.

²⁷ Open Society Institute, European Union Accession Monitoring Program.

²⁸ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, *Resolution on the Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2000–2004*.

the Lithuanian Roma Platform).²⁹ Even though the terms of preservation, protection and development of the national identity of the Roma were widely used as a fundamental claim, from the first integration plan the lack of basic knowledge regarding the Roma culture in Lithuania was visible. For instance, in the first national plan's characterization of the Roma, the main indicated obstacle to their integration is defined as their cultural difference, language and traditions.³⁰ Apparently, the rhetoric of the problem definition and the plan's aim to protect identity and foster the Roma culture contradicted one another.

To mention a further issue that demonstrates the Lithuanian society's attitude towards the Roma culture, the anthropologist Simoniukštytė who, independently from official institutions, published several papers about the Roma in Lithuania, points to the basic lack of knowledge about the Roma as well. She sees the aforementioned phenomenon as the deficiency of the academic engagement in this field and as the underlying cause for violence committed against Roma, an act done out of the primary need to emphasize Lithuania's national identity.³¹ According to Belinda Cooper, a professor at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights, not only economic difficulties plagued the Roma in post-socialist countries, but also anti-Roma violence, an act that became more frequent as a result of the previous socialist policy of denying ethnic distinctions. In some post-socialist countries like Hungary, this phenomenon emerged as skinhead movements.³² However, the absence of proper representation, especially for the first time after the cultural

²⁹ "Romų Platforma" Romų Platforma, Accessed June 9, 2021, <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/biblioteka/knygos/>.

³⁰ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, *Resolution on the Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2000–2004*.

³¹ Zigmas Vitkus, "Aušra Simoniukštytė: Ar geras romas yra mires romas?, [Is a good Roma a dead Rom?]. *Bernardinai.lt*, 23, 2010, <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2010-02-23-ausra-simoniukstyle-ar-geras-romas-yra-mires-romas/> (accessed June 9, 2021).

³² Belinda Cooper, "We Have No Martin Luther King."

assimilation policy of the Roma in USSR,³³ it was a vital need to create smooth intercultural dialog and to involve majority in the process of building diversity. Unfortunately, according to the Lithuanian Institute for Ethnic Studies, the percentage of people who did not want to live with Roma in the same neighborhood has been steadily increasing.³⁴ It is paradoxical that even after the state has intervened by issuing Roma integration plans, the same tendency is still present (see table).³⁵

Table 2.

Year	1990	1999	2005	2011	201
Negative perception rate	59%	62%	77%	64%	58%

The first plan could hardly be assessed as an inclusive practice that attempted to create a holistic form of cultural representation for Lithuania's Roma. It can instead be defined as a non-professional experiment conducted with a lack of responsibility and honesty that simultaneously excluded the main actors: the Roma.

The second Roma integration plan of 2008-2010.

The Roma Decade, an initiative adopted by twelve European governments, supported by the European Commission, Open Society Institute (OSI), the World Bank, Council of Europe, UNDP,

³³Sambati, "Western Donors, Romani Organizations, and Uses of the Concept of Nation After 1989".

³⁴ Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, *Romų Tautinės Mažumos Padėties ir Integracijos Vertinimo Tyrimas*, [Study on the Assessment of the Situation and Integration of the Roma National Minority], Vita Petrušauskaitė. No. VP-133. Vilnius: Ministry of Culture, 2014. Website, <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Skaityti-pla%C4%8Diau-2.pdf> (accessed June 9, 2021).

³⁵ "Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson," lygybe.lt, Accessed June 9, 2021 <https://lygybe.lt/lt/apklausa-nenoretu-buti-nei-kaimynai-nei-bendradarbiai>.

UNICEF, UNHCR and European Roma organizations, took place from 2005 until 2015. The initiative provided EU member states by framework that was aimed to improve Roma life. However, Lithuania did not participate in this initiative.³⁶ Instead, the second national integration plan of 2008-2010 only took place after a four-year gap, a factor that possibly influenced the direction and speed how the issue of Roma integration developed.³⁷ Since the impact of this second national plan has not been researched in detail, it is difficult to determine its effects. Although the RCC continued its activity during the break, its obligations to gather and systematize historical and cultural data were not implemented: even today the center has no such collections.³⁸

RCC was founded in 2001 in the Roma settlement in Kirtimai- Vilnius by following the first Roma integration plan's framework. The has four stakeholders: the Department of National Minorities, the Municipality of Vilnius, the Lithuanian Children Fund, and the NGO "Romani Fire" Operational objectives of the RCC are to implement actions aimed at integration of Roma national minority into the life of Lithuanian society; to promote the preservation of the Roma national identity, to promote the Roma culture and intercultural dialogue; to collect, systematize statistical, historical, demographic material about Lithuanian Roma.³⁹

Nevertheless, the second plan appears more innovative in terms of the cultural elaboration regarding Roma. The plan included the idea to open the Roma Household Museum, collect

³⁶"Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015," Accessed June 9, 2021

<https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/romadecade>.

³⁷ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, *Dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2008–2010 metų programos patvirtinimo* [Resolution on the Approval of the Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2008-2010], by Government of the Republic of Lithuania. No. 309, Vilnius: Stated News, 12 April 2008. [309 Dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2008–2010 metų programos patvirtinimo \(lrs.lt\)](https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/romadecade).

³⁹ "My Government," Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Accessed June 10, 2021, <https://tmde.lrv.lt/lt/tautiniu-mazumu-kulturos-centrai/romu-visuomenes-centras>.

information on the Roma victims of 1941-1945 and erect a memorial to them, prepare and include material about the Lithuanian Roma history and ethno-culture in general education school curricula and textbooks and prepare a series of press articles on Roma culture, customs and rights.⁴⁰ However, neither the museum, nor the ethnocultural and historical features on the education school curricula materialized. While the memorial was not erected, later on great attention was paid to the Roma genocide in Lithuania.⁴¹ Furthermore, one article about the Roma Holocaust victims in Paneriai was written in 2010 by Zigmas Vitkus, a historian in the Holocaust field, however not commissioned by the DNM.⁴²

When evaluating the second plan, it can again be seen that that period for exploring the Roma culture was not the most favorable for the clear representation of the Roma since unique features of the Roma culture were still unknown. Simoniukštytė points out that in this period also the lack of knowledge concerning the Roma language, music, traditions etc., proves that the Roma cultural needs were neglected.⁴³

⁴⁰ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, *Resolution on the Approval of the Program for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2008-2010*.

⁴¹ “Romų Platforma” Romų Platforma, Accessed June 9, 2021, <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/holokaustas/romu-holokaustas-lietuvoje/>.

⁴² “Aušra Simoniukštytė, Pokalbis su istoriku Zigmu Vitkumi apie Panerių memorialą: Praeitį gali vienyti, jei prisimename vieni kitų aukas (Interview with historian Zigmas Vitkus about Paneriai Memorial: The past can unite if we remember each other's victims), *Mano Teisės* December 07, 2019, <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/pokalbis-su-istoriku-zigmu-vitkumi-apie-paneriu-memoriala-praeitis-gali-vienyti-jei-prisimename-vieni-kitu-aukas/> (accessed June 9, 2021).

⁴³ Zigmas Vitkus, “*Aušra Simoniukštytė: Is a good Roma a dead Rom?*”

⁴³ Ibid

The third Roma integration strategy of 2012-2014.

The third plan of 2012-2014⁴⁴ should have brought better approach since it was based on the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (NRIS).⁴⁵ The framework mainly targeted four aspects to be solved: education, unemployment, social capabilities, and social tolerance towards the Roma. Regarding culture, it aimed to promote the Roma culture, traditions, to present Roma culture in education school curricula, collect data on Roma Holocaust victims, release an illustrated publication about the Roma history and also to collect Roma folklore, (it is meant, probably, music however there is no clarification), and to release musical record of it. These tasks were again not implemented. The illustrated book or the Roma music disk from this period, as well as the Roma history in the education curricula did not appear. However, DNM through a call for proposals, which was an element of national strategy, that would address the Roma culture started to fund various projects that were supposed to involve the local Roma communities.⁴⁶ Yet, again this plan did not meet its aims, the Roma remained the most marginalized minority group. Although there is no research regarding to what extent discrimination increased, the rates of unemployment, housing, education show a significant gap between majority and the Roma people.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, *Dėl Romų Integracijos į Lietuvos Visuomenę 2012–2014 Metų Veiklos Plano Patvirtinimo*, [Approval of the Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2012–2014], by Ministry of Culture. No. IV-196. Vilnius: Stated News, 27 March 2012. [IV-196 Dėl Romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2012–2014 metų veiklos plano patvirtinimo \(lrs.lt\)](#)

⁴⁵ European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.”

⁴⁶ Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, *Approval of the Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2012–2014*.

⁴⁷ “Romų Platforma” Romų Platforma.

The fourth Roma integration strategy of 2015-2020.

Similar to the third plan, the fourth plan of 2015-2020 was based on the National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020⁴⁸. The description regarding culture is not clear since it does not define the goals to be achieved. However, the Roma cultural life has become more visible since 2016. For example, a “Gipsy Fest” began to be performed annually by the NGO of the Lithuanian Roma Community; in 2020, the first Roma restaurant opened its doors to guests, and it is managed by the same NGO;⁴⁹ a documentary film about the Roma Holocaust, which was funded by Ministry of Culture, appeared in 2020.⁵⁰ Despite the valuable accomplishments mentioned above, Roma in Lithuania still face the same problems of undiscovered cultural identity. The Roma ethnography, history, traditions, songs, language, customs, museum are still largely absent and as a result of it - comprehensive representation. Instead, it is worth considering the fact that the Roma people by themselves collect cultural artefacts such as photography, music instruments, video recordings, traditional Roma pillows. that are not publicly available. Probably the authors of the plan could pay more attention to gathering those artefacts that would help in better understanding of inner Roma narratives and self-perceptions. After all it is one of the ways for creating inclusive and vibrant community.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, *Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society Action Plan 2015-2020*, by Ministry of Culture. No. IV-48 Vilnius: Stated News, 28 April 2015. [lithuania_national_strategy_2015-2020_en.pdf](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e3000000/1/attachment_data/data/1462222/2015_lithuania_national_strategy_2015-2020_en.pdf) (europa.eu).

⁴⁹ Rasa Baškienė, Kostas Kajėnas, *Būti Romu Lietuvoje. Romų restorano „GYPSY lounge & grill“ Vadovai: Gamindami Patiekalus Mes Dainuojame ir Netgi Šokame!* [To be Roma in Lithuania. The leaders of the Roma restaurant GYPSY lounge & grill: we sing and even dance while cooking!]. *Bernardinai.lt*, 4 8, 2021, (accessed June 9, 2021). <https://www.bernardinai.lt/buti-romu-lietuvoje-romu-restorano-gypsy-lounge-grill-vadovai-gamindami-patiekalus-mes-dainuojame-ir-netgi-sokame/>.

⁵⁰ My Government,” Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Accessed June 10, 2021, <https://tmde.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/lrt-dokumentinis-filmas-juodasis-paukstis-romu-genocido-atmintis>.

Since 2018, the Roma Community Center (RCC),⁵¹ one of the main actors in the national Roma plan making, annually submits a Civil Society Monitoring (CSM) report on implementation of the NRIS.⁵² The CSM is a pilot project aimed to contribute and strengthen the monitoring processes of the implementation of the national Roma integration strategies under systematic civil society monitoring. The initiator of the CSM is the European Parliament while the European Commission and Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG Justice) are managers of the project. Co-operating with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) and the Roma Education Fund (REF), the Central European University (CEU) is the project's coordinator. Independent status and participation with NGOs are important features of the project that helps to conduct comprehensive reports on NRIS.⁵³ However, the reports produced by Lithuanian seems a questionable act because the Roma Community Centre is not independent from governmental institutions in Lithuania. Therefore, it possibly had an influence on the 2019 report by RCC in which not all facts are substantiated by evidence. For instance, this is the case with the claim that

⁵¹ My Government,” Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Accessed June 10, 2021, <https://tmde.lrv.lt/lt/tautiniu-mazumu-kulturos-centrai/romu-visuomenes-centras>.

⁵² Roma Community Centre, *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Lithuania 2018*, Roma Community Centre. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018. Website, <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-lithuania-2017-eprint-fin.pdf> (Accessed June 9, 2021).

Roma Community Centre, *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Lithuania 2019*, Roma Community Centre. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020. <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-lithuania-2017-eprint-fin.pdf> (Accessed June 9, 2021).

⁵³ Central European University, “Center for Policy Studies”, Accessed 9 June, 2021, <https://cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor>.

informal conversations regularly conducted with the Roma by RCC helped to underscore the problem of hate speech.⁵⁴

In comparison with highly informative report of the Open Society Foundation's, published in 2002, the Roma Community Centre's report. is obviously incomplete. Therefore, it is worth reconsidering the RCC's role in generating reports about activities that are implemented by them in the majority of cases.

To assess the achievements of the integration plans from the perspective of the Roma cultural representation, nothing but one could be noticed that many goals regard the Roma culture are incomplete. Also, as the Open Society Foundation report pointed out in 2002, it is difficult to identify the line between the state institutions and the NGOs.⁵⁵ When evaluating the institutional relations, from nowadays perspective it could be said that RCC operates as an extension of the governmental body. Such a phenomenon of inter-institutional relationships is extremely relevant when it comes to the analysis of power. It could hardly be expected that state would harshly criticize itself. Therefore, there is lack of the independent voice of RCC and the explicit picture of Roma community's cultural improvement. Moreover, within all integration plans promoted claims to preserve identity and promote the Roma culture only could be seen on official documents that weekly correlate with reality., As a result, cultural situation of Roma has grown negligibly since its cultural features are scarcely explored: yet, despite this fact, various plans have been applied to this culture in the meantime.

⁵⁴ Roma Community Centre, *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Lithuania*, Roma Community Centre. 12 pp.

⁵⁵ Open Society Institute, *European Union Accession Monitoring Program*, 74-114.

Positive examples and practices abroad

As the renowned Polish Roma historian, Lech Mróz, pointed out, “Without knowing the Roma culture, it has been impossible to explain various elements of their contemporary culture. Since Gypsies have the right to education, they must also have the right and opportunity to learn about their own culture and history”⁵⁶ Reflecting on that point it finally has to be understood that in order to improve the cultural representation of the Lithuanian Roma, it is necessary to build knowledge about the distinctiveness of this culture. One of the best examples is the Roma Museum in the city of Tarnów, Poland that, since 1990, following the Fourth Congress of the International Romani Union in Warsaw, has dedicated a separate building to the history and culture of the Roma.⁵⁷ In addition, the museum actively participates in publishing the international journal *Studia Romologica*. The institution annually commemorates sites related to Roma Holocaust victims, organizes diverse events related to the Roma culture, collects ethnic Roma cultural data by organizing field trips and presents its exhibitions in different countries etc.⁵⁸ The museum has over 5,000 artefacts of Roma culture and presents their history from the 15th century onwards in tandem with that of Poland’s national history.⁵⁹ Obviously, such an institutional activity enriches the Roma culture multidimensionally: it creates the foundation for current and future generations. From the perspective of Lithuania, Poland’s example is significant due to the nations’ common history from

⁵⁶ Lech Mróz, *Roma-Gypsy Presence in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 3.

⁵⁷ Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, “Roma Museums.”

⁵⁸ Idid.

⁵⁹ Muzeum Okręgowe w Tarnowie, “muzeum.tarnow.pl,” Accessed 9 June, 2021, <https://muzeum.tarnow.pl/en/bez-kategorii-en/the-romani-history-and-culture/>

Tarnow, “inyourpocket,” Accessed 9 June, 2021, https://www.inyourpocket.com/tarnow/ethnographic-museum_21289v

1386 until 1795, the period marking the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth.⁶⁰ Also, the authors such as Narbutt, Ficowski researched Lithuanian's Roma history as well.⁶¹ However, it is regrettable that those monographs are not translated into Lithuanian language and there is not enough collaboration with Polish experts. Poland's precedent is the result of a top-down initiative, but it is not the only model to raise mutual awareness.

Another illustration is a bottom-up initiative by the Roma community itself to create a museum named The Society of Friends of the Romani Museum in the Czech Republic in the city of Brno.⁶² In 1991, the well-known Romani studies scholar, Dr. Eva Davidova, gifted the museum her personal collection, including artefacts of Roma history and ethno-culture in the former Czechoslovakia.⁶³ While beginning as an NGO, the museum from 2005 has given national status and is annually provided financial support by the Ministry of Culture. Beyond its rich collections and artefacts of the Roma history, it includes library rooms and is involved in various activities that represent Roma culture.⁶⁴

One of the most notable contemporary examples, recently established the European Roma Institute for Arts Culture (ERiac) seeks to represent the transnational cultural diversity of of the Roma.⁶⁵ The main idea of the organization is to change the perception towards the Roma culture by bringing the narratives of the Roma people into the wide occupation of social fields: politics, arts, education,

⁶⁰ Lech Mróz, *Roma-Gypsy Presence in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*. 20-49.

⁶¹ Ficowski Jerzy. *Cyganie w Polsce: Dzieje i obyczaje*, [Gypsies in Poland: History and Customs], (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1989).

Narbutt Teodor, *Rys historyczny ludu Cyganskiego*, [Historical outline of the Gypsy people], (Wilno : Drukarnia A. Marcinowskiego 1830).

⁶² Elena Marushiakova, Vesselin Popov, "Roma Museums."

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, "eriac", Accessed 9 June, 2021, <https://eriac.org/>.

human rights and culture. It seeks to involve the Roma and non-Roma cultural experts, scholars, and civil society in solving the Roma issues. The project ROMAMOMA⁶⁶ organized by the ERIAC is one of the best models of rethinking the Roma cultural identity through critical analysis raising the question how the Roma Museum should look like in order to demonstrate the great diversity of the Roma people. In addition, one of the main goals of the project is to form an alliance of European cultural institutions, to reshape museum protocols, and through these activities to pursue the fully-fledged inclusion of the Roma. The initiative is the one of the bests current exemplars of flexible intercultural dialog that might address the wider context of the Roma issues. Also, the previous examples show that museums can operate not only as static object but rather as catalysator of manyfold activities that are flexible, inclusive and creative.

Conclusion

The lack of holistic integration plan of the Roma affects not only the Roma people awareness of their culture, but it has wider impact in common social life. Excluding ethnic minorities from national cannon not only shows disobeying the minority rights convention,⁶⁷ it also shows ignorance and national unawareness towards diversity. Today, with my findings in this research the Roma community in Lithuania could figuratively be described as “*a culture without a home*”. This research showed the current cultural representation limits of Roma in Lithuania. It also raises implications that the Roma from the very beginning of integration plans were used as an instrument to fit transnational framework rather than genuine will to involve them and create inclusive cultural representation. It also raises questions such as who is responsible for careful monitoring especially

⁶⁶ ROMAMOMA, “offbiennale”, Accessed 9 June, 2021, <https://offbiennale.hu/hu/2021/projects/romamoma>.

⁶⁷ Pághány, “Minority Rights and the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe” 25.

when NGOs and governmental institutions are depended on each other. Moreover, each plan was claiming to protect the identity and develop cultural heritage of the Roma in Lithuania, however, without having research, expertise and any knowledge about the culture it does not seem possible. This research is only one minor point, that shows the limits of Lithuanian Roma culture's representation. Yet, if this research were supposed to advise proper ways towards the improvement of the current situation of the Roma, then it would suggest the authors of integration plans to realize that cultural representation is an active and flexible process that requires diligent exploration and co-curational contributions. Also, it would advise to look at cultural phenomena as in a wider paradigm which involves social, political and economic fields. Therefore it is possible to agree with the definition by ERIAC that there is no social inclusion without cultural inclusion.⁶⁸ All-embracing cultural representation raises mutual awareness, pride, confidence, self-recognition, and sense of belonging. Such representation could look as a co-curational activities that involves Roma and non-Roma people, also existing cultural institutions within the country and abroad. Finally, this kind of representational approach could become a "home" of a vibrant and inclusive community which builds a trust and responsibility towards the Roma heritage. Vice versa, without having appropriate cultural representation community reduces its chances to transmit its cultural heritage for future generations. Moreover, lack of cultural representation is one of the factors that gradually puts culture's history and identity in oblivion, weakens political voice, creates space for speculations, stereotypes and violence.

⁶⁸ Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: critical approaches*, (2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN: Routledge 2013), Preface and acknowledgments.

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