

Vocational training for Roma adults to tackle social exclusion: Romane Buca in Sundbybergs Folkhögskola - Sweden

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**Case Study N°24
March 2016**

Acknowledgements

The research for this Case Study has benefited from financial support by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2012-2016) under grant agreement n° 290613 (ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation; <http://improve-research.eu>). The authors are solely responsible for any remaining shortcomings and errors.

The case study has been carried out in 2014.

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Bibliographic Information

Saruis Tatiana, Civino Chiara, Colombo Fabio, Kazepov Yuri (2016), *Vocational training for Roma adults to tackle social exclusion: Romane Buca in Sundbybergs Folkhögskola – Sweden*, ImPRovE Case Study N°24. Antwerp: Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy – University of Antwerp.

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1 The initiative and its organizers

Romane Buca is a national project aimed to increase social inclusion of Roma people and improve their access to the labour market. The initiative provides vocational and educational activities for Roma adults (professional courses, paid internships).

The *Romane Buca* project is run by the NGO *Sensus Stockholm* in collaboration with the Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen* - hereafter *AF*) and involves three local public institutions and a private organisation: *Eskilstuna* and *Uppsala* counties, Stockholm *Skarpnäcks* district administration, *Sundbyberg Folk High School*. In fact, the national project includes local subprojects realised in four Swedish localities: *Eskilstuna* and *Uppsala* counties, *Skarpnäcks* district and *Sundbyberg*.

The innovative experience analysed here concerns the subproject realised in *Sundbyberg Folk High School*, in Stockholm.

Great efforts have been made in this project on influencing and establishing multilevel cooperative relations among the national and local organisations involved and in order to jointly improve the education and work opportunities for the target group.

The main actors involved in this experience are the following:

- *Sensus Study Association* (*Sensus studieförbund¹*) is the main actor and responsible for the management of the project. It is Sweden's fourth largest association for adult education, comprising 450 employees, a national office and local units spread in eight regions.
- *AF* is the national governmental Employment Service and the largest job placement service in Sweden. Its general aim is matching job demand and supply and contributing to increasing employment in the long term. It is involved in *Romane Buca* both at the national/strategic and at operative/local levels. It also contributes with its own resources to the realisation of the project and the activities.
- *Sundbyberg Folk High School* (*folkhögskola*) is located in *Rissne*, a suburb of *Sundbyberg*, a municipality in Stockholm County in east central Sweden, just about 20 minutes north of the Swedish capital. Within the *Romane Buca* project, it has realised two vocational training courses for Roma adults to become care assistants for elderly people and treatment/therapy assistants.

Swedish Folk High Schools are independent for-profit organisations for adult education. There are 150 folk high schools in the country, 25 are in Stockholm, mostly in the suburbs. Their main goal is to provide higher education for people who failed to complete their studies in compulsory schools and want to try again to complete their basic schooling. Though most of these institutions are private, they are mainly funded through public resources². Like the municipal schools, they provide the core courses of the national curricula, but they are autonomous in defining their educational offer, apply different approaches and adapt their organisation and teaching methods to their pupils' specificities. They usually provide interactive and dynamic classes, individualised programmes, and courses of Swedish as second language for immigrants. They are multicultural and multi-social contexts.

Concerning the financial aspects, the *Romane Buca* national project's budget is about six million Euros. The Swedish ESF Council co-finances the project, providing 3,48 million Euros, namely 58% of the total budget. The contribution from the ESF covers the costs of the classes (the educational staff involved,

¹ See <http://www.sensus.se/Om-Sensus/>

² About 75% of the Folk High Schools in Sweden are expression of various social movements and non-profit associations. About 40 Folk High Schools are operated by county councils and regions. The 80% of the Folk High School budget is public (assigned as contributions for every registered student), so that the cost to be covered by the students is low, covering only schools material and educational facilities.

the administration, the classrooms, the books and school furniture and so on). The co-funding runs from November 2011 to June 2014. The remaining 42% of the project budget (2,52 million Euros) comes from AF. These funds includes the benefits provided to the recipients during the vocational course, the wages of professionals involved in the project's organisation and realisation, and extra technological equipment for Roma students with particular needs or dysfunctions.

2 Basic information on the (local) context and the emerging problems

Approximately 50,000 Roma people live in Sweden, about 0.3 % of the whole population (*Council of Europe, 2013*³). Swedish Roma population is composed of five sub-groups, which arrived in the Country in different periods, with a different history and linguistic and social specificities⁴: the Swedish-Finnish *Kaale* Roma arrived in Sweden in the 1500s; the Swedish Roma came at the end of the 1800s; non-Nordic Roma came from Poland and other Eastern Europe Countries in the 1960s and early 1970s; a further Roma group includes recent Roma immigrants arrived from former Yugoslavia due to the wars and political instability of the 1990s; finally, there are also Roma travellers, living an itinerant life.

The total number of Roma in Sweden and in Stockholm is unknown. There is limited knowledge and no overall picture of Roma educational attainment, employment levels, health, customs and living conditions (Swedish Government, 2011), due to the fact that no statistics based on ethnicity are allowed (Council of Europe, 2002). However, reports from national studies, local researches and Roma organisations give clear indications about high levels of unemployment and drop out in compulsory school are recorded among Roma. Many of them lack any kind of school-leaving certificate, and sometimes they are even illiterate. The highest concentration of Roma citizens is located outside Stockholm city-centre, in suburbs like *Skarholmen*, *Skarpnäck*, *Morby Centrum* and *Tensta*, where the cost of living is lower and housing rents are more affordable. Roma communities are often isolated and live in very poor socio-economic conditions and suffer from social exclusion.

In December 1999, Roma (together with Jews, Roma, *Sami*, Sweden Finns and *Tornedalers*) were officially recognised as a Swedish national minority. This implied the official recognition and the protection of the Roma language as a national minority language, and a minority policy⁵ for them was introduced as a new policy area within the State budget.

Despite Roma communities living in Sweden for 500 years, they have a history of facing persecution and abuse. In 2013, the Government published a *White Paper*⁶ to analyse the Roma situation in the Swedish society in the last century. The report highlights abuses and rights violations of Roma until the 1900s: maps of their communities prepared by the main government agencies, sterilisation and taking custody of their children, entry ban through immigration rules and so on. The document concludes that stereotypes and prejudices about Roma people have not decreased in the last decades. They are transmitted over generations and, until very recently, even influenced national policies (from 1900 to

³See http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_country_factsheets_2013/sweden_en.pdf.

⁴ The different subgroups are identified primarily according to the kind of traditional works done. Each subgroup is followed by a further division by nationality (*nátsija*), then by inheritance (*Vítsa*) taking the name of the founder, and for the family, until arriving to the individual. The various historical paths undertaken during the diaspora of the Roma from India to Europe, during the previous centuries, have led to a high degree of heterogeneity between macro-groups, mainly between the Roma and Sinti, and within the Roma community, among subgroups, that has developed in linguistic (some subgroups have lost the use of the Roma language), cultural and socio-organizational differences.

Source: RomBase, *Ethnology and Groups Family & Social Structure: Traditional socio-organization* (<http://rombase.uni-graz.at/cgi-bin/art.cgi?src=data/ethn/social/trad.en.xml>)

⁵ Govt. Bill 2008/09:158, Report. 2008/09:KU23, Riksdag Communication 2008/09:272.

⁶ See: <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/18375/a/237061>.

2000). A series of central and local government measures have been carried out since the 1960s to rectify these injustices and to improve the situation of Roma people in Sweden. These initiatives have improved the situation in some ways, but discrimination and exclusion remain for many Roma.

In 2006, the Ministry of Integration commissioned a *Delegation for Roma Issues*. Its aim was to play a proactive role, based on Sweden's international undertakings to safeguard and promote human rights, through measures to improve the situation of Roma community in the Country. The *Delegation* carried out the document *Roma rights — a strategy for Roma in Sweden*, submitted it to the Government in July 2010. Its contents are linked to the Europe 2020 strategy and its overall targets related to work access, social inclusion and education. It has been widely distributed to municipalities and other organisations interested and engaged in Roma issues.

In its programme, the *Delegation for Roma Issues* highlights Sweden as being weak in safeguarding Roma rights and states that Roma human rights, including those arising from their minority status, are still not assured, and their living conditions are often very compromised and much worse than the population as a whole (Swedish Government, 2011). They experience very low employment rates, especially among women. As in other European countries, Swedish Roma have difficult access to the labour market and they are more discriminated against than any other minority group.

Generally, employers and employees are not aware about Roma culture and tradition and treat Roma workers with suspicion. They are not selected in recruitment processes due to their origin: they have nearly 24% less chance of being called for a job interview and this leads to weak self-confidence and motivation (*ibidem*).

The *Delegation* argues that pure discrimination is not the only reason for their disadvantage in the labour market. A low education level is another major factor. Moreover, there is no longer any demand for traditional services and professional skills provided by the Roma.

Furthermore, they lack effective personal contact networks that jobseekers belonging to the mainstream society usually have, which is often a gateway to various workplaces. Roma have good networks, but often they are developed within their own community. This situation weakens the effectiveness of policies and measures aimed at social inclusion and increases Roma poverty and their exclusion.

As highlighted in the reports on the Swedish housing market carried out by the *Discrimination Ombudsman* in 2004, 2008 and 2011, (*ibidem*), many Roma find that they are prevented from buying or renting homes because of their ethnic background and many are subjected to abuse and harassment by neighbours. Moreover, the requirements placed on tenants by landlords, e.g. with regard to annual income, mean that discrimination, reliance on municipal social services and other difficulties experienced by some Roma in the labour market also affect their chances in the housing market. According to the *Delegation for Roma Issues*, Roma living conditions are also adversely affected by low housing standards, temporary solutions, evictions and even homelessness.

Concerning health, customs and living conditions, interviews realised by the *Swedish National Institute of Public Health* in 2010, highlight a high risk of illness in the Roma population, due to a general sense of exclusion (also linked to unemployment), powerlessness and discrimination (*ibidem*). Roma women in particular experience a stressful condition, which they attribute to heavy workload at home. The study also underlines a lack of knowledge of the rights, culture and situation of national minorities, and shortcomings in the way they are treated in the health and medical care system.

Through its contacts with municipalities, the *Delegation* has also learned that many Roma people experience confusion in dealings with the social services when they apply for assistance and financial support. Many of them report discrimination and prejudice in their contacts with the welfare system

(*ibidem*). The *Discrimination Ombudsman* has revealed even within these services organisation assets that may contribute to the restricted access to Roma and maybe to the weakest part of the whole population. The *Stockholm County Administrative Board* confirms this view on the obstacles that Roma people face within the social services, due to different culture and values, in particular Roma's the scarce knowledge of the public services' rules, practices and values. Conversely, they identified also a widespread ignorance of the Roma's culture, customs and practices in the administration employees.

In February 2012, the Government adopted a *Coordinated long-term strategy for Roma inclusion 2012–2032*, as part of a general policy strategy on minorities' inclusion adopted in 2009 (Govt. Bill 2008/09:158), aimed to enable Roma men and women to participate in all areas of Swedish society on equal terms. This strategy broadly follows the indications of the *Delegation for Roma Issues* and is strongly inspired by international agreements on human rights to education, employment, housing, health, social care and security, language, culture and freedom of association.

Sweden has committed itself to improving Roma living conditions, promote effective equality, guarantee the respect of their human rights, and increase their inclusion within economic, social, political and cultural life.

The overall goal of the strategy should be reach in 2032: to secure the same opportunities in life for a 20 year old Roma person as a non-Roma. The strategy should succeed in closing the work and welfare gap between Roma and other groups, eliminating Roma powerlessness, and repairing Roma faith in mainstream society, closing the gap in trust.

The strategy is based on shared responsibilities between national public authorities and municipalities, on reinforcing Roma participation and social engagement promoting institutional consultations, on the valorisation of Roma culture and languages, on employment of Roma people in government bodies to improve the access to services for this part of the population.

Within this programme, five municipalities have been involved in a pilot project to trial interventions. It runs for four years and they receive a special assignment and financial aid to activate local initiatives to improve Roma inclusion in the areas of education, employment, healthcare and social security. The "Pilot Municipalities" are *Gothenburg, Helsingborg, Linköping, Luleå* and *Malmö*. The County Administrative Board of Stockholm was given the responsibility to coordinate and follow up the whole pilot operation.

3 Genesis of the initiative

The *Romane Buca* national project has been designed autonomously by the NGO *Sensus*, but it has been conceived starting from the analysis conducted by the *Delegation* and on the government's strategy for Roma inclusion, in particular about the possibility for Roma people to have access to effective education pathways and job opportunities. In fact, as already mentioned, the project is aimed to develop models and strategies for Roma inclusion in the society and labour market, through educational and vocational activities. These are carried out by four sub-projects realised in different locations (*Eskilstuna, Uppsala, Stockholm Skarpnäcks District, Sundbyberg*) and involve 160 beneficiaries. Unlike the other local projects, the one realised in *Sundbybergs* is strongly based on education and has a special genesis process.

Sundbybergs Folk High School has a long tradition in dealing with multiculturalism and a 15 year long experience in providing education pathways to Roma students in Stockholm.

In 2011, 29 of the 35 Roma students attending the school previously experienced failure at school and dropped out and 13 of them did not finish primary school. The opportunities to get a job without primary and/or secondary education are very small and even more so for Roma people. This is one of the reasons why 15 of the 35 Roma students received income support and/or other social welfare

benefits. Furthermore, often they are in debt with the CSN⁷, a national organisation that provides financial aid and loans for studies. This further discourages continuing their studies and hinders the achievement of individual autonomy as well as the confidence in government institutions.

The 90% of Roma people are in debt with the government for the students' allowance. The loan is assigned without an accurate budget planning and that debt is one of the problems in general with Roma adults. They don't have a study tradition and some of them take the loans, then they don't succeed in education and cannot start a new education or training pathway, because they used the loans... (AF officer, Romane Buca project)

Having a long experience in the field and knowing the specificities of Roma students' learning, in 2011, *Sundbyberg Folk High School* tried to realise a project to address these problems. It was called *New training with and for Roma (Nya utbildningsinsatser med och för romer)* and involved the "sister-schools" of *Skarpnäcks* and *Southern Stockholm Folk High School* in order to start up formal vocational education courses aimed at Roma people. They obtained co-funding from *ESF* and worked intensively to involve public institutions by contacting a large number of municipalities in Stockholm County and City districts. Several of them claimed that they were not interested in the project as there were no Roma people living in their areas. The schools tried to work both on the mobilization and recruitment of potential beneficiaries in order to demonstrate the need of intervention and on increasing awareness in the public administration in all the County of Stockholm about the problems encountered by Roma people. Unfortunately, this strategy had aimed to find a public partner for the project but did not lead to a positive outcome. In the opinion of some interviewed, this was due to public institutions' general disengagement towards Roma issues.

The schools also asked the Municipality of Stockholm whether the students involved in the project could receive income support during the two years of vocational courses. The *Labour Administration* answered that it was not possible because, following their guidelines, economic welfare benefits for training should extend to a maximum of 3-4 months.

This rule implies a precise idea of education by the Municipality of Stockholm: that it should be equal for each and every one, so if Roma want education they have to go to the regular adult education. But we know that this is not the way to handle this problem, because we have the experience and the knowledge showing that it does not work for adult Roma people: to get in the same classroom and support each other, and have teachers that know about the culture and how to work within different Roma groups. (Administrative coordinator of Romane Buca Sundbyberg sub-project, Sundbyberg Folk High School)

In November 2011, the *Sundbybergs Folk High School* decided to spread a press release describing the project and the difficulties they met in to realising it. Articles on this issue were published in *Dagens Nyheter*, the biggest newspaper in Sweden, and in the local press. This is how the national level, specifically *AF* and *Sensus*, came to know about the project. They contacted the school to better understand the project's potential and proposed a collaboration. After this initial contact and a meeting with the *ESF Council*, in February 2012, *Sensus*, the school and *AF* agreed on the option to add the school's initiative as a sub-project within the national project *Romane Buca* run by *Sensus*. In March 2012, this proposal was approved by the steering committee for the *ESF* project. *AF* officially became a partner of the national project and could support the sub-project, providing the needed economic benefits to the students.

Regarding the other schools involved in the original project, *Skarpnäck School* became an operative actor under *Skarpnäcks District's* sub-project, while *Southern Stockholm Folk High School* could not be

⁷See: <http://www.csn.se/om-csn>.

included, since the total budget of *Romane Buca* was insufficient for supporting additional activities. The ESF funding for the first attempt of the project, *New training with and for Roma (Nya utbildningsinsatser med och för romer)* was given back to ESF.

On the one hand, the intervention of both *Sensus* and *AF* was crucial for the project at *Sundbyberg Folk High School* to be realised. On the other hand, this turned out to be useful also for the national project *Romane Buca* and *Sensus*, which obtained the collaboration of the General Director of *AF*.

After the approval of the sub-project as part of *Romane Buca*, an intensive work phase was required during the month of April 2012 (the implementation was supposed to start in May), in order to rearrange the *Romane Buca* administrative budget and adequately integrate the school's activities into the national project. In fact, *Romane Buca* was specifically conceived to improve the job opportunities and integration in the labour market for Roma, while the original idea of the school was based exclusively on providing education. The project had to be readapted in line with the general aims.

The students started on the second of May... so it was very quick... because the project had already started... What normally would be a process, requiring a certain amount of time, at least 10 days for AF, and following the strict regulations of AF and ESF, has been done through a hard work in a very short time... it was a lot of paper work to do, blank form to complete for each student, to get this allowance... (AF officer)

This initial phase of hard work reinforced the reciprocal trust among the organisations involved and created a good basis for the ensuing collaboration.

4 The activities and organisation

Two vocational courses have been organised within *Romane Buca* by *Sundbyberg School*.

The first course, lasting 2 years, began on May 2012 and was completed in December 2013. It aimed to form "treatment assistants", assistants for persons with physical or social or abuse problems (e.g.: alcohol or drug dependency). 21 participants were admitted to attend the classes. On completion of the course, applicants attended a traineeship lasting 6 months.

At the end of the first course, 17 of 21 students obtained their certificate. The school granted a diploma attesting a post-secondary school vocational qualification (less than a University degree) related to the successful attendance of the vocational course and internship. It is recognised by *AF* and has national validity. 9 of the 17 students (more than 50%) found a job rapidly after diploma. It is considered a good result, especially considering the national project's goals: *Romane Buca* set a target that at least 25% of participants had to find a job or start higher level studies by the end of the project.

A new course to train "personal assistants" (*behandling assistant*) to take care of people in need of personal care (elderly and disabled people) started in January 2014. There were 19 participants, selected with the same criteria used for the first course. It ended in June 2014. Its duration was only six months and it did not provide the practical training, due to the timing of the project and the *ESF* co-funding. The short duration of the course made for a condensed programme making it more difficult for both teachers and students.

We wanted to make a course of one year, but we could not, because the project is completed. This is very short education ... We have to give them a lot of knowledge in a very short time, so it's very difficult, but I think we would manage it. Often, Roma people need a long time to come into the study, because they are not used to study, they have stopped in grundskola ... (Administrative coordinator of Romane Buca, Sundbybergs Folk High School)

In the opinion of some interviewed administrators, the long duration of the programmes can be considered both an advantage and a detriment for the project's results: it gives prestige to the course and the qualification; at the same time, people who cannot commit for such a long period are excluded from this opportunity. The courses were also intensive: the classes ran for 40 hours a week, 8 hours a day as a normal full-time job. At least the 80% of presence during the whole programme was required.

At the end of each programme, the students obtained a professional qualification allowing them to get a better and more regular job. The qualification for both courses is post-gymnasium, not equivalent to a university degree, but officially recognised in Sweden. It is equivalent to other certificates obtained through similar courses provided by AF. The integration between the original proposal of *Sundbyberg Folk High School* and the national project *Romane Buca* gave the students the possibility to integrate their educational trajectories with job apprenticeship, support in the job search (as in writing a CV, coaching) and access to training on the functioning of the labour market. In addition to the normal training plan, beneficiaries spent two months of practice in real companies, during the summer. They had access to the AF database to search for jobs and practice finding opportunities with the help of the project manager and AF officer.

The operational team of *Sundbyberg school* sub-project is composed by: a project manager, already employed at the school; a teacher that is also responsible for the organisation of the courses; two teachers and an assistant teacher, the former already work at the school, while the latter belongs to the association *Roma Nation* and she is also member of the sub-project steering group; a *brobyggare* (literally: "bridge builder"), a special social and cultural mediator; an administrative and financial coordinator, also from the school; an economist and administrator, external, employed part time at the sub-project; a counsellor and advisor (10% part-time, internal to the school); and an officer from AF, employed at the local office of *Solna*, representing the higher level of AF.

The project leader of the national project *Romane Buca*, affiliated to *Sensus*, the project manager of the sub-project, the *brobyggare* and the teaching assistants are Roma. Their employment in strategic professional roles within the sub-project underlines the will to include the target population both as beneficiaries and as part of the team, in a real perspective of integration.

During the first course, the project manager and the officer of AF, who were responsible for finding the companies for the practical trainings, had a very short time to accomplish this task, as the project had started in May and the trainings were planned to take place during the summer. The time was scarce and this meant that all the students had training but not exactly in the area of interest for their studies. In their second year, all participants were trained in a better selected and appropriate place. As already stated, it was not possible to organise the practical training in the second course.

The teacher assistants and AF officer took charge of a large variety of problems and needs of the beneficiaries. The AF officer had the task to provide psychological and administrative support to the group as well as individual coaching. He was at the school two days a week:

I was part of the staff at the school, so they could always come to me, and they came to me all the time (...). They had problems all the time with everything: about the housing, with the municipality, at the social services, with their family ... they had all kinds of illnesses in the family. We could help them to talk with the social service inspector or the other officers at the municipal or governmental services. (...) Every month they have to fill in some forms to get their money and that is a big problem for them (...): there are two different forms to fill in, one on a paper and one on the computer, they have to fill in their activities ... And it is complex because, I don't know, they're not so used to work with computers, all of them, because they have been

outside the society for such a long time, so they are not accustomed to fill in forms and they don't know the things that we usually know. (AF officer)

The teacher assistant is a Roma person and she played a very flexible role within the project, carrying out various activities. In fact, she provided special help to participants with specific needs, such as support in individual study. She participated in the classes, called the students when they did not attend and helped on daily problems:

... Because if you are occupied with this and that and your house and your pay and ... you can't focus on the studies. (Project leader Romane Buca, Sensus Stockholm)

Some students had serious problems concerning learning processes, like dyslexia or dyscalculia, ADHD, physical or mental dysfunctions. For these cases, AF provided extra resources and both economic and technological support. For example, three people received a personal computer.

The last key-figure involved in the project, as part of the operative team, with a strategic role was the so-called *brobyggare*, literally “bridge-builder”. He is a Roma person and acted as a cultural and social mediator. His task was to build trust relationships with the students and to facilitate the contacts between the beneficiaries and the institutions (school, social services, employment office and so on). He also had the task to mediate the dialogue and address potential and real conflicts in the workplace during the practical training:

About the workplace, it is particularly important that we offer support for any problem with the beneficiary. The employer can call me or my colleague and so on, even though in most of the cases nothing happens. The fact that there is a mediator that you already know and you can contact is a guarantee both for the beneficiary to accept the job and the employers to take the beneficiaries with them and make them work ... it is a greater guarantee that leads them to accept. They would not accept otherwise. (Project leader of Romane Buca, NGO Sensus Stockholm)

During the practical training, an employee of the company where the training was organised was chosen as a mentor, responsible for the applicant's activities. Once a week, there was a meeting between them, to talk about what had been achieved. At the end of the placement, the head of the company wrote a letter of reference for the applicant. This is a very important tool to facilitate the access to the labour market.

A key figure was the teacher who organised the courses and the individual plans. He was responsible for defining and planning the programmes and had to take in account many considerations in these choices, such as the requests of the labour market, the offer of courses provided by AF to avoid overlapping, the interests expressed by Roma people.

Many Roma people are interested in taking care of cars, for example, but we cannot teach it. I think about which teachers we have. (...) AF has a course similar to ours, but in a city in the north of Sweden. So this course is good for Roma people, because they are the only one in Stockholm that got a certificate that they are personal assistant (behandlingassistent), so they can go before other people who do not have this education. (Teacher and responsible of Romane Buca courses, Sundbybergs Folk High School)

The teacher also had the task of selecting the students among the applicants, by conducting interviews with them. The most relevant criteria applied in the selection are the motivation to study and the capacity to attend the classes. Through the process of selection, the participants had not just to be

evaluated as candidates (motivation and skills) but also informed about the programme and become aware of the meaning of a two year long engagement:

Before they begin attending the courses, I'm interviewing them and giving them tests in Swedish and mathematics, sometimes in English. It depends on the courses. I interview them about why they want to go to school, what goal they get, how it has been in their life and what they want their life to be and so on... to see if they really want to go to school... I try to see it... and then I ask for school background, as they go on when did they leave ordinary school and so on, what have they done before they come here, if they worked. (...) 50 persons wanted to go to the courses and I chose 34. So they said - No no no, about 20-25, because of the motivation, what they said, the test in Swedish and so on. - So not everyone could come to the courses. You should write, you have to understand a text and you have to spell, because instead I should begin from courses for illiterates, that's not my job... (Teacher and responsible of Romane Buca courses, Sundbybergs Folk High School)

The candidates' educational background and knowledge of Swedish were evaluated but, in order to let more motivated people participate, in some cases, they were given the possibility to attend during the courses also the subjects to complete a previous interrupted school education or additional language classes. In general, these supplementary learning activities were organised by the same school; but if there was not this possibility, other resources could be activated:

There was a case in which a participant had a very low knowledge of the language. He was assured that the diploma with the license, etc., will be given when he completed his studies in the Swedish language, and now he is finishing his studies in language through SFI⁸, that is external to the school. This is because the level of language was so low that he needed another type of teachers who could give him the basic level, and we did not have it in the school so we chose to use other activities. (Teacher and responsible of Romane Buca courses, Sundbybergs Folk High School)

The selected beneficiaries were (almost all) aged up to 22-23 years old. This group is a privileged target group both for the municipality and AF as they have better economic support which improves their chances of completing the courses. Many 22-23 year old Roma people are married and have children, thus they need financial stability and this increases their motivation to attend the courses. In contrast, younger groups (16-20 years old) are not considered as aware enough about their precarious and weak situation, often because they have small jobs in the "black" labour market. In their perception, they can live well without education.

The project was open to all Roma people living permanently in Stockholm. Although there were no age limits for participation in the course, most of the applicants were about 25 years old, mixed women and men. The activities took place in *Sundbyberg School*, but the beneficiaries came from Stockholm city and other municipalities. Among the cohort of the second course, most of them were living in the West of the city (suburbs of *Rinkeby* and *Tensta*).

All the applicants attending the courses had to be registered by AF. Once they passed the selection, they had a first contact with the AF officer, who helped them to apply for *Activitadstad*, i.e. the allowances provided by AF. Differently from the income support provided by the municipality (that can be extended to a maximum of 3-4 months when integrated to a training opportunity), AF's benefit could be provided during the entire education course (lasting up to two years). The amount depended

⁸ Swedish for immigrants (Sfi) is a governmental educational institution, with the aim of providing adult immigrants with basic knowledge of the Swedish language, and giving those who cannot read or write the opportunity to acquire these skills.

on the age and previous work experiences and could vary strongly. It was usually not enough to cover all living expenses of the applicant's family, so many of them had to rely on other financial resources as well (social income support, parents). However, it was an important first step, which in the majority of the cases has enabled people to have a positive first contact with the public services and overcome the distrust in institutions spread within the Roma community (see par. 2). In addition, the registration to *AF* gave the possibility to obtain support for specific physical or psychological problems directly related to learning processes (for example related to the use of computers or other media) or to have access to other types of financial assistance provided by *AF*.

The interviewees judge the integration within the team as excellent. Professionals with different backgrounds, organisational culture and skills, belonging to different organisations, started a good and effective cooperation and coordination to reach common goals. A characteristic of the project is that all professionals involved played their role in a very flexible way, facilitating relationships and activating any useful resources to reach the aims. The result is a multidimensional intervention, based on education and job activation, but taking in account all the potential constraints hindering their progress. A further characteristic is a personalised approach, mainly based on good knowledge of Roma culture and difficulties, but also on individual specificities and professionals' flexibility.

Among its activities, the national project has also developed an ongoing evaluation, in order to analyse perspective the different methods implemented in the four sub-projects in a comparative and to see which is the most effective. Four external researchers were hired and followed the activities with the beneficiaries and monitored the whole development of the project, carrying out evaluation reports. The embedded connection between education and work has proved to be a very effective strategy to bring young Roma adults into similar trajectories and can be considered an effective effort to fight the drop-out phenomenon:

We have seen that giving only education does not work, if it is not completed with other phases. For example, if you look at Sundbyberg, there we have an example that we can focus (...) because they had education courses similar to those [that are now realised within the project], but they did not give the same results you have now. And this is also because the participants had a great support during the courses, but once graduated, it ended there, and they found themselves lost in a world that they did not know. So for us not only the education is important but also giving them these tools ... instruments to be able to continue both a working career or studies, and be able to live a certain level. (Project leader of Romane Buca Sensus, NGO Sensus Stockholm)

Romane Buca finished at the end of June 2014. At the time of the field work (February 2014), the team was waiting for the start of the new *ESF* programme in order to elaborate a new project. The new proposal was supposed to be more focused on educational issues and based on the conclusions of the evaluation carried out from *Romane Buca*.

5 The innovative dimension of the initiative

As suggested by the literature about social innovation, *Sundbyberg School's* sub-project has been analysed through three basic components (Gerometta, Häußermann and Longo 2005; Moulaert *et al.* 2005a, 2005b): a) the satisfaction of basic social needs (content dimension); b) the transformation of social relations (process dimension); c) and the empowerment dimension.

a) Content dimension

The innovative content of this initiative relates to the awareness and satisfaction of specific needs concerning a traditionally excluded minority.

Education and inclusion in the labour market and society are general policy aims concerning the whole population, but in this case, the method to reach the same goals had to take into account the special characteristics of the target group. As already explained, national researchers demonstrated that past policies aimed at inclusion did not take in account or did not succeed with Roma people, thus new proposals and methods had to be elaborated. That is why the *Romane Buca* national project has experimented a new intervention to improve the access to the labour market and promote job stability.

The *Sundbyberg* sub-project is focalised on proposing Roma people specific education and training pathways. It was based on the long experience of the High School with Roma students, and a deep knowledge of this cultural minority with special needs and difficulties. The involvement of professionals coming from the Roma community helped the adaptation of the education pathways and all related support to the students' problems. Furthermore, the integration of education courses with social measures and services for employment increases the possibility to support the complete process toward the access to a job.

The participants were supported in filling the gaps in previous education and setting up a professional profile through an approach that takes into account their cultural, social and individual issues. During the period spent both at school and in companies for practical training, the target group was encouraged to experience themselves in different contexts (school and companies). Here they could have contacts with other people and to overcome the isolation, build and reinforce relationships and networks outside their community, create trust and capacity of dealing with institutions, improve self-confidence, personal and professional competences and autonomy.

Sundbyberg School's long tradition of multiculturalism and successful experience (about 15 years) in the field of education of Roma people has increased the interest and expertise in Roma culture and social communities among the staff; to learn and use specific cultural approaches, also taking in account sub-groups. The school managed to be perceived as "neutral" and placed in a good and safe neighbourhood, where Roma students are outside of their traditional territorial and cultural context, so that no conflicts among different families can rise:

It's a bit like the mafia families (...), in the sense that there are some suburbs where some Roma families rule and have a lot of power. I'm not joking when I say like mafia families, because if it's a suburb with a lot of Roma people and there are some Roma families ruling and other Roma families come from other suburbs, there can be conflicts. Here there are no Roma families, in this neighbourhood. (Study counsellor of Romane Buca Sundbyberg, Sundbyberg Folk High School)

A careful and specific teaching strategy took in account Roma oral tradition in the transmission of knowledge. The training programme was mainly based on oral communication and integrated to the traditional method of the school, called "study circle", founded on education through life observation and open discussion among the participants.

Summing up, the project has experimented on an "old" issue (social exclusion of Roma) and consolidated policies (education and access to labour market) within a new approach integrating attention for cultural aspects, educational and vocational pathways, economic provisions, social and health measures and support to job inclusion. The method is mainly based on individual coaching and

mediation. The governance of the project is characterised by a strict coordination among organisations and flexibility of institutions, services and professionals.

b) Process dimension

As already explained, the *Sundbyberg* sub-project was born in a bottom-up logic: it was created on the basis of the experience of three high schools, which facing difficulties concerning Roma education for many years, had accumulated knowledge and expertise in this field, and also built relationships of trust with the Roma community:

They speak good about the school, the education and the teachers (...). They tell other people around them, in the family, that it's ok to go to school, so the younger people can go to school. You know, Roma girls are going to help their family and maybe they can't go to school because they are needed at home, so when they talk about Sundbyberg Folk High School, the Roma people say that it's ok, that's ok to go to study in that school ... also for the women... (Project manager Romane Buca Sundbyberg, Sundbyberg Folk High School)

The three schools elaborated the first training project for this specific target group. As already explained, this first attempt could not be realised, but it created the possibility to be noticed and individuated by the national level and was subsequently integrated in the *Romane Buca* national project and supported by economic benefits from *AF*. The sub-project network had to overcome immediate issues concerning the timing and bureaucratic aspects of the project. This initial common effort had the effect of strengthening the group creating more opportunities to:

- realise a multidimensional intervention, supporting education pathways and access to the labour market with specific social measures and paying special attention to cultural aspects. This is one of the main strengths of the project;
- influence the national strategy, obtaining the attention of the government and other authorities working with Roma in the field of education and promoting effective methods to succeed in school pathways and access to labour market. There is a cooperative relationship aimed at mutual learning among the five pilot-project municipalities;
- create dialogue with the European Institutions and be part of a wider context, thanks to the focus on transnational cooperation started by *Romane Buca* with other European countries⁹.

The school's good reputation among the Roma and the solid trust relationship built over the years has become a sort of "guarantee" for the Roma community, especially for students' parents and partners. It represents a very important achievement in social relations, which has allowed a softening of the strong social control exercised over the individuals by the community, which generally prevents children, especially girls, from attending ordinary gender-mixed schools once they reach adolescence (this is one of the drop-out reasons). In fact, *Sundbyberg Folk High School* has been the first school to succeed in creating mixed women and men classes. The presence of cultural and social mediators was crucial in reaching this aim.

This is another important aspect emphasising the bottom-up logic of the four sub-projects: Roma professionals are involved at all the levels, as mediators, project managers, and the project leader.

c) Empowerment dimension

The organisers are very aware of an individual empowerment perspective they define as "human capital accumulation"; to be supported by vocational education and facilitating the access to the labour

⁹ Projects *Networking Europe and Inclusive Europe* owned by *Sensus* aims to increase transnational cooperation in ESF projects. *Sensus* has established contacts with potential transnational partners, as Spain and Finland.

market and promotion of social inclusion. The activation process is initiated on a voluntary basis with the individuals' consent. The professional qualification recognised by AF offers an opportunity of getting access to the regular labour market. The practical training and the letter of reference written by the employer certifies a level of professional skills and competences. These steps also aim to decrease demoralisation and improve self-confidence:

... because many of our beneficiaries have some type of work experience, but since it was work in the 'black market', they cannot write it on their CV, because it is illegal. (Project manager Romane Buca Sundbyberg, Sundbyberg Folk High School)

The personal contacts that the participants can create at the work place during their traineeship are supposed to increase their social network for the job search and contribute to break their isolation. The social measures provided during the courses give the students economic stability, helping them to concentrate on the courses. The employment services are also crucial for motivation: giving information and tools to facilitate access to the labour market. Finally the trust relationships that the beneficiaries can build with public institutions, e.g. services like AF, promotes empowerment and the access to services and opportunities within the project and for future needs.

To have a regular and stable work position and an awareness of increasing opportunities in the labour market are indeed important factors for individual motivation, but it also opens up a different perspective within Roma communities. It becomes more and more important for Roma parents to provide better education and offer their children strategies and models for better integration in the society.

Thanks to the long-time and solid relationship between the school and the local Roma communities, this has started to become a possibility. It is a long-term perspective aimed at changing customs and social and cultural transformation of the relationships between the Roma community and the rest of Swedish society. In fact, parents employed in better jobs and more socially included are a positive role-model for their children, and this can help to break the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion and to promote the social mobility of Roma people in a long-period perspective.

You know, we have been working with this type of education for 20 years, and everyone in Sweden, knows where we are and that we work well. We wish that many of the people who come to the courses will get a job, and that's why we work. And children can look up to people who work and become aware that they can too. If God wants, in 10 years these courses will be no longer needed. (Project manager of Romane Buca Sundbyberg, Sundbyberg Folk High School)

The project (and the sub-project) also explicitly aims to increase awareness about Roma inclusion among employers, native employees and the entire Swedish society. Prejudices are fought by sending motivated and well-prepared Roma employees to companies, so that people have the possibility to change their view and overcome prejudice. Building good individual relationships in daily life and work can contribute to the removal of cultural labels and stereotypes. Pursuing a change of mentality and open society towards the Roma, fighting prejudice and segregation, is a long-term goal too.

Finally, the sub-project adopts a strong gender perspective and explicitly aims to stimulate and meet women's demand of education and specific needs in gaining consent for their participation in courses. *Sundbyberg Folk High School* is the first school to create mixed women and men classes, also including people of different ages in the same courses and rooms. This has been possible thanks to a long process of mediation conducted by the project manager, trusted by parents and husbands as a guarantor, and thanks to the good reputation of the school among the Roma. The topics of gender differences have

been discussed during the courses from a sociological and a legal point of view, as an important issue in the project.

6 Institutional mapping and governance relations

As for the other *Romane Buca's* sub-projects, *Sundbyberg Folk High School* is involved in a multilevel partnership network, with each level taking on specific functions. Some actors and stakeholders are involved in activities at more than one level, thus covering complex and multiple tasks:

1 - The local level is composed by:

a) The operative team engaged in the sub-project activities directly involving the beneficiaries. It includes the teachers and the teacher assistant, the *AF* officer, the project manager (see par. 4). All the staff works part time for the project and the wages come from the *ESF* funds. Only the project manager and the *AF* officer work full time (*AF* officer's salary is paid both by *AF* and *ESF* fund).

b) The local steering group is composed by the project manager (belonging to the school), the *AF* officer, the administrative coordinator of the project, the principal of the school and sub-project main manager, the teacher and responsible person for the courses, three representatives from two Roma Associations, *Unga Romer*¹⁰ and *Roma Nation* (one of them is the teachers' assistant), involved in order to go on acquiring knowledge and experience about the Roma language, community and culture.

2 - The national level includes:

a) The National Steering Group involves *Sensus*, the project's executing organisation (*projektägarrepresentant*)¹¹, the four sub-projects leaders; the *AF* officer who is the representative of the General Director; and two representatives of the non-profit Roma organization *É Romani Glinda*¹². Additional members are two *Romane Buca Sensus'* project leaders; a *Sensus* project economist and the four sub-project managers.

There were regular meetings between the project managers and the lead partners from all the sub-projects, in order to share information about the advances of subprojects and the progress made. Once every two months there were also meetings of Roma professionals only involved in all the sub-projects, in order to give mutual support in their work, exchange information and discuss issues and topics, and to build an open network of collaboration among the sub-projects.

b) An important panel activated by *Romane Buca* project is the stakeholders' forum. It is composed by the organisations, authorities and municipalities who are interested in Roma issues and can both receive and provide a contribution in sharing reflections, analysis, evaluations, discussions, contributions about the project's organisation, method, implementation, results. The participants to

¹⁰ *Young Roma* is a non-profit organization at the national level who works against young Roma discrimination in society and promotes various educational activities.

¹¹ Definition of project "ownership:" the owner should be someone who is a) a key stakeholder (i.e., is dependent on the system to deliver bottom-line results for which he/she has direct responsibility); and b) "owns" the system requirements for the long haul -- that is, is involved in the ongoing decision making about what does and doesn't go into the system, and then is there in the same capacity when the system is modified/upgraded over time.

Source: <http://www.projectmanagement.com/>

¹² See <http://www.romaniglinda.se/index.php/om-e-romani-glinda>.

the forum include the following representatives: the *Equality Ombudsman* (governmental)¹³, the *National Agency for Social Insurance* (Swedish: *Försäkringskassan* - governmental), the *EU Roma*¹⁴, the municipalities involved in the Government pilot project (*Malmö, Helsingborg, Gothenburg, Linköping and Luleå*), *Södertörn University*, *Hugo Wallentin center in Uppsala* and the *County Administrative Board of Stockholm*.

Sharing information and knowledge within the forum is functional to the general objectives of *Romane Buca*, and to the development of Roma associations and individual spokespersons of the communities; raising awareness among authorities and local authorities on Roma living conditions, education and the need for adequate interventions; and to increase the public partners' knowledge and cultural competence of Roma communities.

3 - The transnational level, based on the cooperation between *EU* states members, aims at:

- putting the Roma issue in a larger context of the Roma as a transnational group;
- gaining more influence towards the society through the tools available within the EU;
- allowing potential students to come from other EU countries;
- spreading, exchanging and comparing successful work methods, strategies and experiences about social inclusion of Roma people with other EU Countries;
- meeting the requirements of the Swedish ESF Council.

Romane Buca involves a group of European Countries including Finland and Spain, which are perceived by the interviewed coordinators of *Sensus* to be the most strategic in dealing with Roma issues and for the successful examples of social inclusion they are realising and sharing with the group. The Czech Republic and Hungary are also considered as interesting examples for their policies in this field. The exchange of information and knowledge mainly occurs through study visits of delegations in/from the countries involved in the project and discussion with the different public and private institutions and organisations responsible for provision of the target group. The main referents for *Romane Buca* are: In Finland, the Delegation for Roma Affairs in the Government Offices, which acts as a mediator between the Roma community and the government, and the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, which creates various and successful initiatives to improve the situation of Roma in Finland; in Spain, a Roma foundation called *Fundación Secretariado Gitano*, which is very active on projects involving Roma, including a ESF-funded project called *ACCEDER*, whose structure is quite similar to *Romane Buca* as focused on education and work integration, for the involvement of Roma mediators and so on.

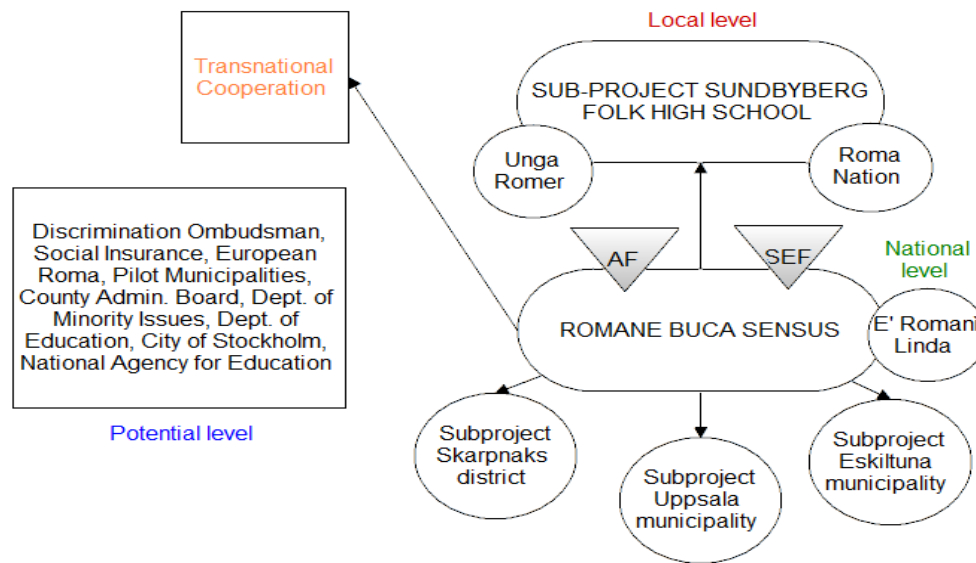
During the project, various methodological activities within the transnational network were performed or are planned:

1. Field trips relating own participants and the relevant partners, for the visit of interesting and strategic projects;
2. Two "working meetings" with the transnational partners, in order to share methods and discuss the transferability of good practices (mediators-bridge-builder, training methods and so on);
3. A transnational conference involving the transnational partners, local partners and other relevant stakeholders to increase the circulation of information and reinforce cooperation;
4. Participation to transnational activities organised by other organisations working on the same topics in Sweden and elsewhere in the EU.

¹³ The *Equality Ombudsman (DO)* is a government agency that seeks to combat discrimination on grounds of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age, and to promote equal rights and opportunities for everyone.

¹⁴ *EU Roma* is an International network involving 12 Countries. See: <http://www.euromanet.eu/>.

Fig. 1 The Sundbyberg sub-project within Romane Buca governance



Source: our elaboration from desk analysis, interviews and focus group.

7 Governance challenges

The following section analyses the governance challenges to social innovation in the experience of *Sundbybergs Folk High School*. They are described as they emerged from the documents and the field research, using the ImPRovE definition.

7.1 Mainstreaming social innovation

The *Romane Buca* sub-project of *Sundbyberg Folk High School* has achieved out good results until now, in fact almost half of the participants of the first course found a job on course completion. Some solutions experimented within the project, like the “bridge-builder”, have been already introduced in other contexts. Nevertheless, mainstreaming, upscaling, spreading or, at least, giving continuity to the initiative is the main open challenge that the partnership involved in the *Sundbyberg* sub-project has to face, given the end of the co-funding from *ESF* in the end of June 2014. As already explained, the timing of the *ESF* funds has prevented the full realisation of the second vocational course.

In order to apply for new *ESF* funds, the school must always refer to a public counterpart. It has worked intensively to involve municipalities in Stockholm County or City districts. A crucial point is to demonstrate and communicate the success of vocational education to promote Roma inclusion to obtain attention and funds. The first attempt of realising the project failed because a scarce awareness of the problem and the difficulty of finding a public partner interested to collaborate in this field. Moreover, some participants to the focus group argued that the project is not yet visible enough in Stockholm and has to still be adequately communicated to the local institutions and the politicians; for others, the school has already a good and spread reputation throughout Sweden, considering the many expressions of interest coming from various municipalities.

According to the interviewees, there is very little chance that the project will be implemented as part of municipal or national public policies. The main problem is the restricted rule of the *Labour*

Administration of Stockholm not permitting the provision of economic welfare benefits for more than 4 months, considering this period is not enough to cover the complete duration of the vocational courses.

During the focus group, an occurrence in particular emerged as a “missed opportunity” for mainstreaming: in 2012, during the implementation phase, *AF* proposed that the school provide them paid vocational courses similar to those carried out within the sub-project. After two years of debate on the proposal, nothing has been realised. According to some interviews, this was only partially due to the replacement of the *AF* Director who had previously supported the *AF* partnership in the initiative. The main argument was a difference in the targeting between *Sundbybergs’* sub-project and *AF*: the school provided only vocational courses for Roma people, while *AF* works with different target groups (refugees, newcomers, long term unemployed), and ethnicity as a targeting criteria for selecting recipients is not permitted by regulatory guidelines.

The interruption of funds prevents the leading organisations from properly designing a realistic vision for the mainstreaming of the educational programme. At the time the case study has been carried out, the team was waiting for possible resources from a new *ESF* programme for 2015. It will likely continue to be a sub-project under a national proposal presented by *Sensus* if new funds are obtained. The successful results obtained by the *Sundbyberg’s* sub-project are leading to a reinforcement of the role of education in the design of a new national project to support Roma labour market inclusion.

After such a successful experience, a stand-by period could cause the team to be split up: the key-actors will be dispersed in other projects and jobs, with the loss of unique competences. Strong efforts and new professionals will be required to start a new project, with an expenditure of energies and resources to share aims and practices and re-build relationships within the new team.

Furthermore, in projects concerning the Roma, building trust and good relationships with the community are fundamental. The discontinuity risks compromising and wasting these resources.

A lot of experience, in so many years I have known a lot of Roma families: fathers, sons and daughters. It is an important aspect, also for the success of their studies. (...) About 10 persons (the participants) want to keep on studying in courses for handling assistant (treatment assistant). (...) They don't want to stop the study, they want to continue, and they are begging and begging me to make a course, but it's not easy when you don't have the money. (Teacher and responsible of the organisation of the courses for Romane Buca Sundbyberg, Sundbyberg Folk High School)

The interviews highlighted another problem: for projects not coming from the public sector, the possibility of obtaining funds and collaborations with institutions depends very much on the willingness and awareness of social issues by key persons having decision-making power in the government, in municipalities or other public agencies. In 2011, the Ministry of Integration visited the initiative in *Sundbyberg School* and made important promises, but no positive effects have been seen. In this logic, the national elections in September 2014, as well as the recent rise of the feminist party to the *EU Parliament*, represented by a Roma Swedish woman, is perceived by the team as an opportunity to gain more attention. This logic creates discontinuity in policies on Roma and maybe in other sectors, both at national and local level.

7.2 Governing welfare mix: avoiding fragmentation

The initiative presents a multilevel integration considered as positive by all the professionals involved. The main positive points on this issue are the following:

- 1) Representatives from Roma Associations, as well as Roma professionals, are included both in the local operative team and in the National Steering group, who bring their contribution in terms of language and cultural skills, and are actively involved in the operational and decisional process (see 7.3).
- 2) The stakeholders' forum constitutes an effective platform to reinforce the contact and collaboration with all the institutions interested on Roma issues and those taking part to the implementation of the National Strategy.
- 3) The transnational cooperation consenting contacts with other institutions working on Roma inclusion in other *EU* States is considered as precious in reflecting, learning and reinforcing knowledge.

Despite the growing awareness of the governmental institutions on Roma social exclusion, the interviewed referents highlighted that there are still obstacles to cooperation with public services. The strict regulation of welfare measures hinders a flexible intervention needed in this field as a specificity of the target group. The failed attempt to reach an agreement with the Labour Administration of Stockholm Municipality for the first proposal of the project was due to the incompatibility with the municipal regulation on the duration of benefits related to vocational courses, limiting the connection with the school's project education pathways. *AF* is also subjected to similar strict guidelines that have hindered the possibility of mainstreaming (see 7.1). The collaboration within the project is based on an exception due to a director (recently replaced) who decided to bypass the regulations and choose flexibility in order to experiment with a different strategy.

The project has shown that the link among Roma students' specificities, problems and resources is key in succeeding in a similar experience. A special balance between universalism and attention for specificities is probably needed for interventions in this field. Measures to promote labour market inclusion, social benefits and education should be coordinated and integrated to be effective. Otherwise, the risk is to provide the same intervention to different needs, to promote an incoherent strategy and to waste resources without a real attention to the goals.

In the opinion of the interviewed, this closed and rigid attitude of the public sector reflects the feeling of discrimination and suspicion of the mainstream society towards Roma people. They argue that as long as this attitude does not change, it will be extremely difficult to get an open and sincere cooperation between the public services and civil society organisations interested on these issues. The participants of the focus group are aware that a similar change implies a very long-term process. They hope that government institutions take greater attention on this issue and assume a different attitude to promote a better programmatic coherence with respect to Sweden's strategy for Roma Inclusion 2012-2032.

7.3 Governing welfare mix: developing a participatory governance style

Governance processes at the different scale levels within *Romane Buca* are described as participatory and welfare mix oriented. As explained above (see par. 7.2), both within the national and the local steering groups there are representatives from Roma organisations and professionals belonging to the target group that are involved at the operative level and in the decisional process on an equal basis. Thus, there is an effort to take in account their specificities and culture in the intervention.

The good relationships between the partners, especially the school and the Roma people in Stockholm are also considered as relevant for the success of the project. As already explained, as Roma people often do not trust institutions, the long-time relationships with the school was crucial for encouraging their participation to the courses and also young women could take part in the classes. This is supposed to empower Roma women and to influence positively their role in their community and Swedish society.

Furthermore, the long lasting experience of relations with the Roma communities in Stockholm has enabled the School to provide an adequate pathway for Roma students and to design an intervention integrating education, social measures and services to encourage the access to labour market. The multi-professional network and the flexibility of all the organisations involved made it possible to realise this proposal and to obtain good results.

Sensus and the school have been working closely, since the mobilisation phase, to involve a broad network of organisations, authorities and municipalities interested on Roma issues at local and national level. The project has actually stimulated the start of a dialogue between *Romane Buca* partners and the *Stockholm County Administrative Board*. This is supposed to lead to the realisation of a new integrated national project. This would be highly coherent with the goals and the arrangements proposed by the National Strategy for Roma 2012-2032 and would contribute to cohesion and inclusion aims throughout the Country.

7.4 Equality and diversity

All the interviewees confirm the conclusions reported by the Delegation for Roma and the Discrimination Ombudsman (see par. 2), complaining of the general attitude of discrimination, suspicion and prejudice within the mainstream society and the social services towards Roma. They also underline that a scarce knowledge about Roma history, culture and condition among the public officers contributes to restricting the access to welfare for this part of the population. Despite to the growing awareness within governmental institutions on the situation of social exclusion of the Roma, the interviewees have highlighted that there are still many obstacles that prevent Roma people from accessing and sourcing effective fruition of public services.

As already mentioned, the strict regulation of welfare measures hinders a flexible intervention needed for this specific target group. The Municipality of Stockholm refused to readapt the length of income support to the duration of the vocational programme, as the municipal instructions exclude the provision of benefits for more than 4 months. Following a principle of equality, regular adult education is provided with the same conditions to everybody, supposing an idea of homogeneous society in which every citizen has the same skills, bargaining power, cultural level and social status. According to the interviews, Roma adult people would require more specific and dedicated education services to support them in reducing linguistic gaps and in improving skills, working with experienced teachers and cultural native mediators with a deep knowledge about their customs, traditions, and the social and cultural differences within different Roma groups. The vocational internship is considered as a fundamental step for the Roma target group to break the segregation and to fight the barriers of access in the labour market. The support of a mediator is considered useful for both employers and trainees to better understand each other and prevent and solve potential conflicts. It facilitates removing suspicions and stereotypes.

The activities of *AF* are also subjected to strict guidelines and, as already mentioned, its participation to the project was possible thanks to the director's decision to bypass them to take in account the beneficiaries' specific situation. It is important to underline that *AF* has adapted *Activitadstad*, the welfare benefits support, to the educational and economic needs and cultural specificities of Roma participants and to the courses' duration, extending the allowed period for the provision. On the contrary, Stockholm Municipality has decided not to treat the Roma people differently from other citizens, refusing to adjust the duration of the subsidy to fit the length of the course.

The public institutions applied two different perspectives about balancing equality and diversity in the access to welfare services for a special disadvantaged social group. In a universalistic welfare system,

based on equal social rights for all the population, it could be difficult to take in account Roma specificities, as other people special needs, and to introduce enough flexibility to adapt the intervention to minorities and to individuals. The experience analysed here has been effective because it was based on flexibility of organisations, professionals and rules. This opened the possibility to meet complex needs with a multidimensional and integrated intervention dealing with education, activation, culture and social aspects at the same time.

7.5 Uneven access

The project had to take into account multiple aspects of diversity to be inclusive (as explained above) and facilitate the access to the courses: the cultural and subcultural specificities, the gender differences, the linguistic, professional and learning skills, the social and economic disadvantage. Other aspects taken into account were the motivation, the capacity and the real possibility to participate adequately in the courses, evaluated during the selection of applicants.

The motivation, study habits, educational background and competence in Swedish language were considered as necessary criteria to conduct the selection, as admitting people with too different levels of education could introduce too much complexity in the programme and an excessive demand for attention of some students compared to others.

Another aspect to consider was the capacity to deal with the course in terms of time availability, family responsibilities and distance from the School. Despite the project being open to the whole Roma community in Stockholm, the location in *Sunbyberg* inevitably allows some Roma living in the closest suburbs to easily attend the courses. It is more difficult for other potential applicants who live far and do not have the economic means or the time to reach it every day. This limited territorial mobility could be an implicit selection factor. On the other hand, as already explained, the location is considered as adequate, because the neighbourhood is perceived as “neutral” and safe from the wars among families (see par.5).

The length of the education programs had a double effect on the access to the courses: on the one hand, it gives prestige to the diplomas and better quality to the students’ knowledge and competences; on the other hand, it is possible that people with less resources in terms of available time or study skills could not commit for such a long period and had to renounce this opportunity. Nevertheless, for the first course, about 50 people applied and almost the half of them were admitted. Applicants not admitted to the courses had the possibility to join the other *Romane Buca* subprojects, for example the one located in *Skarpnack* Municipality, only 15 minutes from *Sundbyberg*.

7.6 Avoiding responsibility

From the beginning of 2000, due to the pressure applied by the *European Commission*, the attention and awareness of institutions on Roma peoples’ living conditions and exclusion has increased in Sweden.

As already described, in 2006 the *Ministry of Integration* commissioned a *Delegation for Roma Issues* that in July 2010 published a report on Roma living conditions in Sweden. It was widely distributed among municipalities and other organisations potentially interested in Roma issues through meetings and statements. In 2012, the Government presented a long-term strategy to improve the living conditions of the Roma and guarantee their human rights in Sweden, and carried out a pilot project involving five municipalities, owned by the *County Administrative Board* and running for four years, in order to experiment and establish permanent local solutions. AF implemented an autonomous project, consisting of an online platform, to spread awareness about Roma involvement in the labour market,

with the collaboration of Stockholm City. In 2013, the Government published a *White Paper*, admitting the inadequacy of national policies to reach social and labour market integration of Roma people and underlining the abuses and hindered human rights of this part of the population. This rising awareness and assumption of responsibility has been important in launching a new strategy in a long-term perspective.

The *Romane Buca* project, financed by European funds, and the *Sundbyberg* sub-project are perfectly in line with this new deal on Roma social and labour market inclusion. However, despite the aims and need for these kind of initiatives, the municipal institutions reacted markedly differently towards the project: some of them refused to be involved, considering its attention for Roma specificities as incompatible with their own universalistic regulations and policies. This is a tricky issue related to the asset of the Swedish welfare state, based on equal treatment of all citizens, where to differentiate the welfare intervention on ethnic basis is forbidden by the law.

The project could be realised thanks to AF's flexibility on rules and social measures, consenting their extension for all the duration of the education pathways, to adapt the intervention to Roma needs and the purposes of the experimentation. Additionally, the municipality is likely concerned that a different treatment in favour of the Roma population could be unpopular among public opinion, also considering the public expenditure retrenchment affecting in general the access to welfare measures and its generosity.

This means that a deep reflection about the balance between equality and diversity would be crucial to realise effective interventions for including Roma (and maybe other people in difficulty) taking into account their individual instead of their cultural specificities.

7.7 Managing intra-organisational tensions

Before the project began, many years of experience in offering education pathways to Roma students gave *Sundbyberg Folk High School* professionals and teachers the possibility to build solid relationships with the local Roma communities and develop competences and adequate organisation to realise the courses. The integration with other actors within the *Romane Buca* project and subproject was indicated as a strength of this innovative experience. As already stated, good integration and collaboration were highlighted both in the strategic and operative teams. Thus, no intra-organisational tensions were reported during the interviews and the focus group. On the contrary there is good level of satisfaction for those aspects and regret for the risk of dispersing the team because of the interruption of the project for the lack of funds' continuity.

Some tensions were reported about the first attempt of *Sundbybergs Folk High School* and other schools in providing education courses for Roma people (see par.3). Receiving a negative response by the local public institutions motivated by the absence of Roma issues in their territories and/or by impossibility of readapting some social measures to support the project, the schools decided to spread a press release explaining their project and the difficulties met to realise it. Despite this, they could not obtain any positive dialogue with the local institutions in that phase and even the UE funds obtained to finance the project had to be given back. It was the government and AF to accept that challenge within *Romane Buca*.

7.8 Enabling legal framework

As mentioned above, the realisation of the project was made possible by a flexible interpretation of the rules for the assignment of social benefits introduced by AF (see par. 7.4) and refused by the municipalities (see par. 3 and 7.6).

Activitadstad, one of the social benefits assigned by AF for the participation to labour market programmes, is usually provided for a maximum of 6 months. In the *Romane Buca* initiative, its duration has been adapted to the length of the educational courses – up to 2 years. As already explained, the balance between equality and diversity can be a tricky issue in the universalistic Swedish welfare model, when considering the goal to reach effective intervention in favour of Roma people and their specificities (see par. 7.4 and 7.6).

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Appendix

The field research aims, through a complex transdisciplinary and integrated methodology, to analyse the conditions influencing the rise of innovative experiences on poverty problems and their potential of mainstreaming in different welfare models. Following the established protocols for the fieldwork, the actions conducted for the case study by the University of *Urbino* team, between January and February 2014, are:

- Analysis of documents, data and publications (e.g. documents related to the project *Romane Buca* furnished by *Sensus*) concerning the innovative experience and aimed to individuate useful information about its working and development. Analysis of institutional documents, data and researches to describe the national policies and Roma community conditions in the framework where the project is realized (e.g. Government reports on problems analysis, implementation programs and evaluation reports).

- 5 qualitative interviews involving: a) administrative coordinator of the sub-project; b) the *AF* officer involved in the subproject and representing also the Head level of *AF* at the national *Romane Buca* steering group; c) the national project leader of *Romane Buca Sensus*; d) the project manager of the sub-project at *Sundbyberg folk high school*; e) the training organizer and teacher at the courses; f) the study counsellor at *Sundbyberg folk high school*, involved 10% part time in the sub-project. The interviews aimed at describing in depth the project, its genesis and potential, its organization and network, the characteristics of the local Roma community, their living conditions and relationships with the context, the national policies concerning this topic.

The participants to the interviews were involved in the focus group. The Headmaster of the Folk High School and sub-project referent attended this meeting too. The focus group aimed at go in deep on the analysis of the project, better describing its innovative characteristics in the relation with the context where it is realised.

ImPRovE: Poverty Reduction in Europe. Social Policy and Innovation

Poverty Reduction in Europe: Social Policy and Innovation (ImPRovE) is an international research project that brings together ten outstanding research institutes and a broad network of researchers in a concerted effort to study poverty, social policy and social innovation in Europe. The ImPRovE project aims to improve the basis for evidence-based policy making in Europe, both in the short and in the long term. In the short term, this is done by carrying out research that is directly relevant for policymakers. At the same time however, ImPRovE invests in improving the long-term capacity for evidence-based policy making by upgrading the available research infrastructure, by combining both applied and fundamental research, and by optimising the information flow of research results to relevant policy makers and the civil society at large.

The two central questions driving the ImPRovE project are:

How can social cohesion be achieved in Europe?

How can social innovation complement, reinforce and modify macro-level policies and vice versa?

The project runs from March 2012 till February 2016 and receives EU research support to the amount of Euro 2.7 million under the 7th Framework Programme. The output of ImPRovE will include over 55 research papers, about 16 policy briefs and at least 3 scientific books. The ImPRovE Consortium will organise two international conferences (Spring 2014 and Winter 2015). In addition, ImPRovE will develop a new database of local projects of social innovation in Europe, cross-national comparable reference budgets for 6 countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Spain) and will strongly expand the available policy scenarios in the European microsimulation model EUROMOD.

More detailed information is available on the website <http://improve-research.eu>.

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