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The Roma in Austria – a historical perspective

Thomas Leoni •

Introduction

Recently an Austrian MEP has called for the institution of an EU commissioner "entrusted with the task to integrate the European minorities, especially the Roma and Sinti"[1]. This demand does not represent a random appeal, but is part of a debate that is heating up. The issue of the Roma and Sinti has assumed a new dimension for the EU with the enlargement process of the Union. An estimated number of at least 3.8 million Central and Eastern European (CEE) Roma[2] (but this figure may be as high as 4.7 million) are set to become EU citizens between 2004 and 2007. These people represent strongly marginalised and discriminated groups that have scarce access to education and labour markets, and have to rely heavily on social security transfers for their subsistence. These facts are a cause for concern not only among European policy-makers. They have found an echo in the perceptions and fears of society and the media, and contributed to poison the debate around the free movement of people within the enlarged EU[3]. For the CEE countries, integration of the Roma is not an option, but rather an absolute necessity. A report that has been recently issued by the United Nations Development Program has reached the following conclusion:

"They (the five acceding CEE countries) will become successful members of the EU if the Roma (as well as other vulnerable groups) become integrated productively into their home

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[1] *Der Standard*, 04.02.2004, http://derstandard.at/?id=1557027: "Der SPÖ-Delegationsleiter in Brüssel, Hannes Swoboda, fordert einen eigenen EU-Kommissar, der mit der Integration von Minderheiten besonders der Roma beauftragt werden soll. »Europa muss nicht nur eine Politik für Sinti und Roma betreiben, sondern diese vor allem mit ihnen gemeinsam entwickeln und umsetzen«, erläutert Swoboda am Montag laut Parteiaussendung."

[2] Hungary, the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic have Roma minorities of at least 550,000, 480,000 and 250,000 people respectively. Romania, which is set to join the EU in 2007, has arguably the largest Roma population of the world, estimated between 1.8 and 2.5 million people. Another 700,000 Roma are living in Bulgaria.

[3] In Britain a campaign with strongly xenophobic undertones was initiated by the yellow press. This campaign, which had ample resonance in January of the current year, suggested that after completion of EU enlargement, large numbers of Roma would migrate to the UK in order to take advantage of the social security system. "Britain, here we are!" was one of the headlines of a cover story in *The Daily Express*, displaying the picture of an unshaved young man with a broken tooth and a child on his back.

societies, via employment, education and political participation. Without proper integration, and without an overall development framework to guide the process, the opportunity provided by EU accession may quickly disappear. The risk is that, if postponed, the cost of finding solutions for marginalized groups will be immeasurably higher and will have few chances of success. The human security costs of exclusion will spiral, potentially resulting in political extremism and setbacks for the democratic process."[4]

However, the issue of the Roma and Sinti is not one that is confined to the CEE countries, nor is it worrisome only because of possible migratory movements in the wake of EU enlargement. The situation in Eastern Europe has highlighted once more the condition of the Roma who live in Western Europe. In most countries integration of the Roma has failed completely, and the Roma live at the margins of otherwise affluent societies. "The Roma (Gypsies) remain to date the most deprived ethnic group of Europe. Almost everywhere, their fundamental rights are threatened"[5]. In Austria the total number of Roma and Sinti is estimated between 25,000 and 40,000. A fraction of them (not more than 5,000) is recognized as an autochthonous minority. The fact that the legal status as ethnic group (*Volksgruppe*) was accorded to them only very recently, in 1993[6], is a clear indication of the neglect that surrounded the Roma in Austria. The institutional and political authorities of the Second Republic, and to a certain extent the scientific community too, have ignored the Roma for over four decades. This neglect at systemic level has been the counter-part of social attitudes permeated by ignorance and prejudice.

Over the past fifteen years – and partly as a consequence of a critical re-evaluation of the Roma-persecutions during the Nazi period – there has been an awakening of political consciousness among the Roma themselves[7], and rising awareness among the majority population. The need for greater visibility and for a political voice has led the Roma to create first one, then several associations. The recognition as ethnic group has made it possible for the Roma to benefit from public financing, and several initiatives have helped to improve their educational situation as well as to strengthen their cultural identity[8]. This notwithstanding, social and economic integration is still a distant goal, especially in light of the fact that the Roma who have been recognized as an autochthonous Austrian minority represent only a fraction of all the Roma who live in Austria. Arguably only those Roma who have completely denied their roots and cultural heritage have been able to climb the social mobility ladder. Assimilation of the few, not integration of the whole ethnic group has been achieved.

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[4] UNDP (2002), p. 5.

[5] European Roma Rights Center, http://www.errc.org/.

[6] The decision was taken by the National Assembly on December 16th 1993, and became effective on December 24th of the same year (Bundesgesetzblatt Nr. 895/1993 ST0323).

[7] A major landmark in this sense has been represented by the autobiography published by *Ceija Stojka* (1988), which brought to the fore the persecutions and discriminations of the Roma (in this specific case Lovara) in Austria.

[8] More detailed information in this respect can be found in Sections 7.1 and 7.2.

Moreover, the structural changes of the economic system and the labour market that have been taking place in Austria and Europe exert additional pressure on disadvantaged groups like the Roma. Integration gets increasingly difficult in an environment where educational qualifications represent a highly exclusive access to the labour market, while high unemployment rates and a ‚reserve army' of low-skilled labour make competition for low-skilled jobs fierce. In the face of these problems, it is plausible to think that – without counter-acting measures – the problems of the Roma will persist and likely increase in the future. This paper analyses the issue of the Roma from a historical perspective. In a second paper the current situation will be highlighted. There the focus of analysis is the access of the Roma to the labour market. That analysis will build on a case-study of the Roma population in Oberwart, a Burgenland-district that hosts the largest Roma settlement in Austria. This case-study, which will rely on data collected through a survey, as well as on an in-depth analysis of the labour market in Oberwart and in the Burgenland as a whole, will constitute the core of the second paper. For a full assessment of the present-day condition of the Roma, and in order to establish a link between the Burgenland-Roma and the other groups of Roma that live in Austria, it is however necessary to embed the case-study in a more general framework. The present paper will therefore provide a broad historical and theoretical analysis, as well as a detailed description of the situation of the Roma in Austria in the post-war period, based on various research undertaken in Austria. Particularly in the 1990s, research on aspects of Roma history has surfaced, partly as a result of renewed interest in the Holocaust, forced labour and xenophobia in the war and post-war period.

On a terminological note, it is important to stress that in this paper the definition "Roma" is used as an encompassing term to define all individuals of Roma/Sinti origin, regardless of specific sub-groups (which are often very distinct from each other). The term "Roma", or in some cases "Roma and Sinti", has been accepted by the vast majority of these sub-groups. While the definition "Roma" still carries the risk of an over-simplification, it is a great improvement with respect to previous names used to address these ethnic groups. In fact, terms such as "gypsy", "*Zigeuner*", "*gitano*", "*zingaro*", etc., have all been coined by the majority populations, and bear a negative connotation. The word "Rom", on the contrary, is rooted in Sanskrit, from which the Romanés language family stems, and means "human being". From a linguistic point of view, here "Roma" is used both as adjective and plural noun, with "Romni" as feminine singular and "Rom" as masculine singular noun. The term "gypsy" is used only under quotation marks, to indicate the terminology used by others.

1. The Roma in Austria in long-term historical perspective

1.1 The Roma come to Europe

A comprehensive treatment of Roma history would go far beyond the scope of this paper. It is however possible to select significant events of the past to shed light on more recent developments. Groups of Roma made their appearance on German speaking territories as early as the 14th century. According to documentary evidence, they had been encountered in present-day Burgenland already in the year 1389[9], and it was in this region that they established their first dwelling places on Austrian soil. The Roma had fled the North-western parts of India in subsequent waves of migration starting in the 9th century. Groups of Roma reached almost every corner of the European continent and the Mediterranean basin, from the Maghreb to Scandinavia[10]. The geographic and temporal magnitude of this development highlights the heterogeneity and historical complexity of this migratory movement. While all Roma who reached Europe shared common geographic and linguistic roots, each tribe was characterized by a unique history and a distinctive set of cultural and social attributes. Equally, the European societies that were confronted with the appearance of these people were in a condition of perpetual flux and change, and by no means homogenous.

It is therefore not surprising that the interaction between the wandering Roma and the autochthonous populations assumed very different forms, depending on time and place. It is however safe to say that discrimination represents the overriding trait of the history of the Roma. From the very beginning, the locals viewed these people of dark skin, who came on horseback and spoke a strange language, with distrust, fear and enmity. The appearance of the Roma resulted invariably in the creation of fantastic anecdotes, long-living prejudices and lies. So, throughout the centuries they have been characterized as liars, spies, thieves, warlocks etc., and the wildest assumptions have been made about their habits[11]. These attitudes of the local populations were matched by the way in which institutions and authorities approached the issue of the Roma. During the times of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation rulers and feudal lords targeted the "gypsies" with hundreds of edicts and pieces of legislation. In edicts of the Reichstag in Lindau from the years 1496/7, for instance, they were declared outlaws (*vogelfrei*), and therefore it was no crime to persecute, imprison, torture or even kill them. In 1498, the Reichstag of Augsburg ruled that "[...] he, who damages

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[9] *Baumgartner* (1995), p. 111.

[10] For instance, Sweden has had a Roma population since the 16th century. In present-day Sweden, the Roma are estimated to be between 40,000 and 50,000, and they have been granted minority status in 1999. For further information, see *Ministry of Justice* (2003).

[11] For instance, it was believed that the Roma had a very permissive sexuality; that they were allied with the forces of evil; that they kidnapped children; and even that they were practising cannibalism.

gypsies, does not commit a sin"[12]. Similar measures – accusing the Roma of being spies, wizards or thieves - were taken in 1500, 1530, 1544, 1548 and 1551[13]. The motivations that were behind these sanctions varied – but the common goal of these laws was to put the "gypsies" at the mercy of arbitrariness. In the period after the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), the intensity of persecution increased, and from 1651 to 1700 no less than thirty edicts dealt with the Roma. In the period from 1701 to 1750 the persecution became even fiercer, with 68 edicts that reached new peaks of cruelty. For instance, in 1726 Emperor Charles VI gave order to "execute all male gypsies, and cut off an ear of women and children under the age of 18"[14].

This list is by no means exhaustive, and could be extended *ad libitum*. However, a description of the discriminations and persecutions to which the Roma were subjected tells only one side of their history. Despite the highly adverse environment confronting them, the Roma were able to survive and maintain to a certain extent their cultural diversity over centuries. This is certainly due to the fact that – thanks to their high mobility and adaptability – they were able to react swiftly to repressive measures. The political and institutional fragmentation made it possible for the Roma to move to counties and feuds where the legislation against them was less harsh, or simply less enforced. In other instances, they had just to flee from the more urban and densely populated areas, and hide in mountains or woods, in order to escape persecution. However, another major factor that explains the survival of the Roma was their ability to interact flexibly with their host communities. In the initial period for instance, many Roma were accepted by the local populations because they feigned to be repenting Christians that came from Egypt[15] to expiate their sins. As members of the *civitas peregrina* they had a role in medieval society, and their life-style was sanctioned by it.

1.2 The modern state and its policies – a new approach to the Roma

This state of affairs changed as Europe entered a new age, and also the Roma had to find new ways to interact with majority society. They had brought with them a wide array of skills and handcrafts, and used them to find socio-economic niches that allowed their material subsistence. "As wandering blacksmiths, sharpeners of scissors, tinkers, pig-slaughters, horse-dealers and musicians etc., they fulfilled necessary functions and were more or less tolerated"[16]. In many instances, they were able to establish a symbiotic relation with the autochthonous communities – mostly peasants in rural areas. This explains why, at regular intervals, feudal lords and local authorities changed the existing legislation, or decided to ignore it, in order to secure the presence of Roma groups on their territory. So, e.g., in the year

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[12] See *Karoly* (1998), p. 34.

[13] See *Kaiser* (1993), p. 25.

[14] See *Karoly* (1998), p. 34.

[15] In fact, the definition "gypsy" has its etymological root in the word "Egypt".

[16] *Moritsch* (1990), p. 27.

1616 the Hungarian lord Count Thurzo granted a nomad tribe from Vojvodina the right to settle on his lands, to pursue the profession of blacksmiths and to live according to their inherited customs. Only four years earlier, that same ruler had accused the Roma of theft and robbery, and pleaded before his king to have them banished from his territories.

Thus, in many cases the fate of the Roma hinged on the circumstances that made their presence valuable or, quite conversely, dispensable. The European wars, famines, pandemics, economic and demographic up- and downturns, all affected the lives of the Roma in direct or indirect ways. For instance, the Thirty Years' War gave them the opportunity to follow the marching armies on their campaigns, to offer their services to the battling parties, and therefore to live undisturbed. On the contrary, the demographic boom that ensued during the second half of the 17th century led to heightened tensions between Roma and non-Roma communities, and resulted in massive persecution during the first decades of the 18th century. This fluctuating pattern started to stabilize in the second half of the 18th century. With the emergence of a strong bureaucracy and of the institutions of a modern state, also the attitude towards the Roma assumed a new dimension. In particular, the policies implemented during the heyday of the absolutist monarchy, and those developed during the second half of the 19th century, deserve attention.

Empress Maria Theresia and her son, Emperor Joseph II, initiated a new paradigm in dealing with the "gypsies"[17]. Under the influence of humanitarian ideals, as well as of the *raison d'état* that demanded economic efficiency and social control, they attempted to 'reform', i.e. assimilate, the Roma. The most prominent pieces of legislation in this sense were promulgated in 1758, 1773 and 1783. These decrees interdicted Roma from possessing horses and carriages, and outlawed their traditional occupations as musicians, horse-traders, blacksmiths and beggars. As compensation, and under the condition that they renounce their original names and assume new, Germanic names (such as Neuburger, Neusiedler, Neubauer or Neuungar), they were offered pieces of land and initiated to agricultural activity. The Roma had to wear the local dresses, and the use of Romanés language was punished with physical penalties. Roma children had to be sent to school, and their young men were liable to conscription. The clear aim of these measures was to deprive the Roma of their nomadic culture, and to force them to settle and to adopt the life style and values of the majority population. In fact, the laws affecting the Roma did not shy at very drastic measures to achieve this goal. In order to encourage mixed marriages, Roma men were not allowed to marry Romni any more. The cruellest regulation, however, provided for the children of Roma families to be taken away from their parents, and be given to non-Roma families for the

[17] For the regulations enacted during this period, see for example *Kaiser* (1993), pp. 30-50, *Samer* (2001), pp. 11-13, and *Karoly* (1998), p. 35.

purpose of education. This type of social engineering can be found in other societies and at other points in time[18]. In light of the paramount importance of children for Roma culture[19], it is no surprise that the victims perceived this measure as particularly oppressive, and that they tried in all ways to resist the efforts made by the absolutist regime.

The policies implemented during this period did not achieve the desired result. The financial means to enforce the regulations were not sufficient, the collaboration of the local communities too scant, and the resistance of the Roma too high. The assimilation initiative was quite effective in Western Hungary, where 3,000 Roma settled down (among them the core of the modern 'Burgenland-Roma'). Overall however, total assimilation occurred only in single cases. While the regulations enacted by Maria Theresia and Joseph II failed to deliver on their expectations, they set an important precedent. The use of the state machinery, of educational and military institutions, and the drive towards homogeneity were exemplary of the approach chosen by modern states in dealing with "disturbing factors". The age of absolutism brought also the first census of the Roma population. According to this census, carried out in 1783, there were 9,000 Roma who were pursuing an occupation (the vast majority of them were blacksmiths and day-labourers, with others enlisted as musicians, beggars and horse-traders). Between 450 and 500 of them were living in present-day Burgenland.

From the middle of the 19th century, a new set of Roma policies began to be developed. While the role of bureaucracy and state machinery became even more prominent (e.g., passport controls), the orientation of these policies changed with respect to the past. In the 18th century, the monarchy had tried to make the Roma sedentary, and to prevent them from moving and emigrating. Now it was trying to deport them and to avert new immigration. This was partly due to the fact that new waves of migration had taken place, bringing mainly groups of Lovara, who settled around the Neusiedler Lake, to the Austrian lands. At the same time, there were economic and political motivations that underpinned the change in attitude towards the Roma: "In the era of political nationalism and economic liberalism it became an important goal of the state to govern migratory movements"[20]. The new legislation implemented by the authorities had the aim to regulate the flow of Roma. In practice however, the combination between regulations about residence (*Heimatrecht*), vagrancy (*Vagabundengesetz*) and deportation (*Schubwesen*) created a vicious circle that gave the Roma no chance to acquire full citizenship and civil rights. Starting in 1848, every citizen had the right to be "resident" (*heimatberechtigt*) in one municipality. In theory the

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[18] For instance, in Australia great numbers of aboriginal children were removed from their families to advance the cause of assimilation. This practice, which was part of a government program, lasted until the late 1960s. See *HREQC* (1997).

[19] A popular saying of the Roma expresses this well: "*Nane chave, nane bacht*", i.e. , "No children, no happiness".

[20] *Bauböck* (1996), quoted in *Karoly* (1998), p. 37, footnote 51.

"gypsies" were no exception, and hence were assigned to municipalities (*Heimatrecht*), and required to have a residence permit, a passport and licences for their trades.

However, the ultimate authority in accepting outsiders rested with the municipality itself. The latter could easily avoid granting the residence right by refusing to issue the appropriate papers, or by delaying the whole process. The Roma represented a cost factor for the local communities: most of them were below the poverty line, and according to the law the municipality had to pay for their social safety transfers. Thus, it is not surprising that the Roma found it very difficult to be granted permanent residency. It was easy for the municipalities to find pretexts for rejecting them: a minor breach of the law by a relative was a motivation good enough to expel the whole family. In addition, most Roma were illiterate and had no familiarity with bureaucratic procedures. Once a municipality refused the residence right, it could invoke the deportation law, and expel them from the municipality. Without the proper documents, and a proof of their means of subsistence, the Roma were thus forced to wander and had never a chance to enjoy the rights that were emerging together with the constitutional state. Most of the Roma did not possess the Austrian citizenship, and very few had a chance to acquire it. As stateless within a society that was organizing itself more and more along the lines of nationality and citizenship, they were condemned to an increasingly marginalized existence. Moreover, as wandering individuals who lived outside of the sphere of legality, they were also hit by the vagrancy regulation (*Vagabundengesetz*) and frequently imprisoned.

2. The emergence of the Burgenland-Roma

2.1 Roma-population concentrated in Burgenland

The historical facts and events are to help put the developments of the 20th century into perspective. In fact, the situation at the beginning of the last century resulted directly from the failures of the past. The absolutist monarchy had not been able to assimilate the Roma, and the emerging constitutional state had *de facto* excluded them from citizenship and legality. As a consequence, there was a lack of institutional, political and cultural tools to integrate the Roma, and their presence was basically understood in terms of a problem. A by-product of the regulations enacted in Austria during the 19th century was that most of its Roma ended up in Western Hungary: the Austrian government had closed its borders, and pushed its Roma (e.g., from Styria) to Hungary; at the same time Hungary prohibited the emigration of its Roma communities, and assigned them to local districts effectively preventing them from moving[21].The local municipalities had to provide for the newly arrived

[21] *Baumgartner* (1995), p. 116: "1870 hatte Ungarn ein Ausreiseverbot für "Zigeuner" eingeführt. Die Abschiebung sogenannter "deutscher Zigeuner" aus dem österreichischen Raum nach Ungarn bedingte einen Zuzug im westungarischen Raum (dem heutigen Burgenland)."

Roma, which helps to explain their resistance to the arrival of new groups. When they failed to reject the Roma, they settled them on low-quality communal land in the outskirts of towns and villages[22]. This is how the notorious "gypsy settlements" came into existence, and the history of urban segregation of the Roma in this part of Europe began[23]. A part of Western Hungary (the Burgenland) was integrated in the Austrian Republic in the aftermath of World War I. Through the territorial arrangement reached at Trianon in 1920 a sizeable number of Roma returned to Austria, and became what are nowadays called the Burgenland-Roma.

During the interwar-period the Burgenland-Roma represented the bulk of the Roma in Austria. According to a census from the year 1927, there were slightly more than 6,000 Roma in the Burgenland (out of a population that according to the 1923 census was of 285,569), and only 1,600 of them in remaining parts of the Austrian territory[24]. Clearly, these figures have to be taken with some caution. In particular the number of Roma who were spread over the whole country, and were pursuing a nomadic (or partially nomadic) life-style, was difficult to ascertain. Most of the Burgenland-Roma had however settled down permanently, and lived concentrated in much smaller areas. This does not mean that there are no minor incongruities with respect to their number. The police (*Gendarmerie*) for instance, claimed that already in 1921 7,000 Roma were living in Burgenland, while figures from the official census of 1925 speak of 5,480 people[25]. The census of 1934 reported 6,507 people belonging to Roma linguistic groups in Burgenland, a number that increased to 7,612 in 1936. Overall, it seems safe to assume that between 5,000 and 6,000 Roma came to Austria as a consequence of the Treaty of Trianon, and that this figure increased gradually over the years. Estimates speak of 7-8,000 Burgenland-Roma in 1939[26], with a total number for Austria set between 11,000[27] and 12,000[28]. The district with the largest presence of Roma – both in absolute and relative terms - was Oberwart. After the war around 3.000 Roma were living there, and their number increased to almost 4.000 towards the end of the 1930s. They represented a share of approximately 6 percent of the local population.

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[22] There the Roma were allowed to erect houses and huts as *Superädifikate*, i.e. as private property on public soil. For a discussion of Roma property see Section 5.3.

[23] *Samer* (2001), pp. 13-14.

[24] *Gesellmann* (1989), p. 193.

[25] *Benkö* (1979), p. 160.

[26] *Baumgartner* (1995), p. 119 and *Benkö* (1979), p. 64.

[27] *Benkö* (1979), p. 64.

[28] *Rieger* (1997), p. 34.

Table 1: Burgenland-Roma population in the inter-war period

District	Census 1925/26	Official file 1927	Gendarmerie 1933	Official file 1933	Census 1934
Neusiedl a.S.	293	315	398	400	254
Eisenstadt/Mattersdorf	197	276	327	348	285
Mattersburg	316	390	444	468	415
Oberpullendorf	570	634	759	715	570
Oberwart	2,545	2,955	3,555	3,674	3,304
Güssing	536	597	693	701	798
Jennersdorf	742	736	977	974	881
Total	5,199	5,900	7,153	7,280	6,507

Source: *Baumgartner – Freund* (2003).

The demographic trend of the Roma was highly exaggerated, giving reason to think that their "incredible proliferation" (*unheimliche Vermehrung*) would soon lead them to absolute majority in many municipalities. In reality the Roma represented at most 3 percent of the total Burgenland population. The authorities tried to prevent the settlement of new Roma in many ways, and kept a vigilant eye over the existing communities. During the period between the wars, the Roma were repeatedly counted and data on their living habits, demographic characteristics and employment positions were collected. "Through counting of persons, the creation of a photographic archive and the numbering of gypsy houses a complete registration was achieved [...] In 1925 fingerprints of all gypsies over the age of 14 that were living in the Burgenland were taken [...] In 1926 pictures of all gypsies had already been taken"[29].

2.2 The Roma rely on socio-economic niches

These data, together with testimonials and documentary evidence, provide rather accurate insight into the life of the Burgenland-Roma between the two world wars[30]. It has already been noted that, for the most part, these Roma had long abandoned the nomadic life style. Some of them were wandering around during the warm seasons of the year, but even those had a stable dwelling place to which they returned in winter[31]. To give a few examples, according to a survey of the year 1933, only 314 of the 3,555 Roma of Oberwart were not sedentary (*unstet*). In the district of Güssing, it was only 34 out of 693, and in Jennersdorf no more than 25 out of 977. The only area where this relation did not hold was the district of the Neusiedler Lake: the Lovara population that had settled there at the end of the 19th century

[29] *Mayerhofer* (1988), p. 37-38: "Durch Personenzählungen, das Anlegen einer Fotokartei und das Numerieren von den Häusern von Zigeunern erreichte man eine lückenlose Registrierung [...] 1925 wurden alle im Burgenland wohnhaften, über 14 jahre alten Zigeuner daktyloskopiert. [...] Bereits 1926 wurden alle Zigeuner fotografiert."

[30] The following section relies mainly on *Benkö* (1979), *Mayerhofer* (1988) and *Gesellmann* (1989), but several other studies have also dealt with the situation of the Burgenland-Roma between the wars.

[31] See *Gesellmann* (1989), p. 195.

had still maintained more traditional roots, and accordingly in 1933 only 156 people were described as sedentary, while 242 were considered nomadic. The Lovara were called "German gypsies" by the majority population because, unlike the other Burgenland-Roma (who were considered "Hungarian gypsies") they spoke German fluently. They lived mainly as horse-traders, and visited the market places of the whole region, including Hungarian towns like Sopron, Bábolna and Csorna[32].

Box 1 shows the employment situation of the Burgenland-Roma in 1925. According to official statistics, only 354 of the 5,480 Burgenland-Roma had a steady job. It is apparent that those Roma who had a regular employment were pursuing their traditional occupations. What about the rest of the Roma population? As in the past, the Roma had to use all their ingenuity to adapt to the local conditions, and to try to find ways to fit in the local socio-economic pattern.

Box 1: Occupation of the Burgenland-Roma (1925)

105	musicians without a licence	11	horse-traders
62	blacksmiths	9	potters
30	musicians with a licence	9	shepherds
27	grinders	8	umbrella makers
22	wire binders	15	tin smith
11	peddlers	5	basket makers

Smaller numbers of them were miners, road- and railroad-workers, retail traders, marketers, saw filers, broom makers etc.

Source: *Gesellmann* (1989)

It is important to bear in mind the economic framework conditions in Burgenland during the interwar period. Burgenland was the youngest and poorest of the Austrian *Bundesländer*. It was characterized by under-developed infrastructure, little industry and a prevalently agrarian economy. From the very beginning, it was considered the "stepson" of the Republic – and despite some efforts and partial successes, it was not able to improve its situation significantly in the interwar period. The agricultural sector was in dire need of land reform. Not more than a dozen of mostly aristocratic families owned large estates that represented 23.5 percent of the total Burgenland territory. The vast majority of peasants, however, were managing small estates that could provide them with no more than bare subsistence. Of 55,000 farms, 47,300 belonged to the smallest category, a fact that forced many peasants to abandon their activities and to leave the countryside. The industrial sector was still at very early stages of development, and heavily constrained by the lack of infrastructure and financial capital. Despite a tenuous take-off during the 1920s, by 1927 Burgenland had only 37 enterprises with more than 20 workers, employing a total of 4,654 people[33]. "In spite of signs

[32] *Mayerhofer* (1988), pp. 119-124, gives a detailed description of the Lovara community in Burgenland.

[33] The total population of Burgenland, according to a 1923 census, was 285,569.

for a sectoral upswing, the Burgenland economy was not able to consolidate, a fact that is highlighted by the increasing number of unemployed: 4,157 in 1926, 4,593 in 1929."[34] Burgenland, with its relatively small population, was the Austrian *Land* with the highest absolute number of emigrants. This situation worsened with the onset of the world economic crisis, which was felt even in this rural part of Austria.

In light of this socio-economic framework, the only way for the Roma to survive was to find ways to cooperate with the peasant population. This happened mostly in a very informal framework. The Roma represented a cheap labour force that could be employed in times of necessity without contracting any obligations. Thus, Roma worked as casual labourers, they helped during the harvest and the hunting season, and ran errands for the locals. "This went so far that each peasant family had its own »domestic gypsies«"[35]. Moreover, many Roma made a living as gatherers: the woods and the fields had always been important for them – both as a hiding place, and as a source of food. There they went to collect fruits, mushrooms, medicinal herbs and even flowers. These goods were used for self-consumption, or, especially in the case of herbs and flowers, sold on local markets. Since all these activities were not sufficient to guarantee a living, especially during the cold parts of the year, some Roma had to rely also on socially less accepted forms of subsistence, like begging and soothsaying. When everything else failed, the Roma had to resort to petty theft. The actual material damage which resulted from these crimes was always of minor entity. In most cases the Roma stole food, and occasionally timber, for immediate consumption. Nevertheless much "social" damage resulted from these activities, as it enforced the prejudices of the majority population.

2.3 Progressive exclusion during the inter-war period

The fact that a number of Roma had to resort to beggary and criminality in order to survive is a clear indication of the difficulties this minority was facing in the interwar period. On the one hand, the difficult economic situation, coupled with the discriminations practised by the employers, gave the Roma little hope of finding regular employment. At the same time, there were no effective social policies to counterbalance, let alone to counteract, this general trend. In a tradition that went back to the 1950s and 1960s of the 19th century, the local municipalities were required to pay out of their own pockets for social assistance to the poor

[34] *Gesellmann* (1989), p. 15: "Obwohl sich sektorale Aufschwungtendenzen bemerkbar machten, konnte sich die burgenländische Wirtschaft nicht konsolidieren, was man anhand der steigenden Arbeitslosenzahl beobachten kann: 4.157 in 1926, 4.593 in 1929".

[35] *Gesellmann* (1989), p. 74: "Es ging sogar soweit, daß jede einzelne Bauernfamilie ihre "eigenen Hauszigeuner" hatte".

and sick. In other words, the federal government had no policies targeting the Roma[36], and simply delegated the issue to the local authorities. This perverse legislation placed a heavy burden on the already limited financial possibilities of the municipalities, and had multiple negative consequences. It pitted the interests of the locals against those of the Roma, and was a source of conflict and resentment. The worse the general economic situation, the more pronounced this conflict and resentment. This led to an attitude of rejection on the side of the municipality. In order to receive social assistance, the applicant had to have a residential permit (*Heimatzuständigkeit*), and later in the 1930s an "assistance card" (*Unterstützungs-ausweis*). Not surprisingly, like in the 19th century, the local authorities refused to issue these documents, thus closing the vicious circle between social exclusion, poverty and illegality.

Another example of the half-hearted attempts at improving the condition of the Roma is represented by the educational policies of the *Land*. On one side, and especially during the early 1920s, the authorities voiced the desire to provide for schooling of the Roma children. At regular intervals, concrete measures in this sense, like a "regional education fund for gypsies" (*Landeszigeunerschulfonds*) in 1924, or a "public relief institution for gypsies" (*Zigeunerfürsorge-anstalt*) in 1929, were proposed by the regional government. However, these proposals were never implemented for lack of financial means or political will. The Roma children were formally required to attend the local schools – but the necessary support in this direction was wanting. While in certain instances, and particularly during the 1920s, the school participation of Roma children increased, this trend never consolidated. The children were facing huge obstacles on their path to regular school attendance. They lacked basic accessories (like clothing for the cold season and stationery), and the local schools – confronted with lack of space – were not inclined to find place for them. At the local level, the communities were sometimes willing to help the Roma, but there was no concerted effort and financing on a regional scale. There were some episodic successes, like a Roma school that was established in the district of Stegersbach. Positive developments were however marred by disconcerting factors: in Stegersbach the special curriculum introduced for the children included the topic "The gypsies as land-plague"[37]. More generally, Roma children were heavily discriminated at school: "all the other (children] were deliberately avoiding the gypsy children"[38].

In light of these facts it does not come as a surprise that the economic crisis that followed the "Black Friday" of 1929 led the situation to precipitate. In Burgenland the slump did not have the devastating effects it had elsewhere – but it was sufficient to stall the fragile economic take-off, and to sharpen the unemployment problem. Overall, the 1930s had a negative impact on the relation between Roma and non-Roma population, and this change for the

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[36] This was the case until the end of the 1920s. Once the issue of the Roma assumed a wider public dimension, and more dramatic connotations, the federal government started to intervene. However, the measures adopted were almost exclusively of repressive type. See following sections.

[37] *Gesellmann* (1989), p. 175, *Benkö* (1979), p. 191.

[38] *Gesellmann* (1989), p. 167.

worse affected many aspects of daily life. The provision of social insurance and health care services (*soziale Fürsorge*) is a case in point. During the 1920s, those Roma who were granted access to social security benefits had not been discriminated with respect to the local population. In 1933 however, the social transfers received by the Roma came under scrutiny, and significant cuts in poverty benefits (*Armenfürsorge*) and sickness insurance (*Krankenversicherung*) were proposed. In 1938 the authorities went so far as to grant them access to medical treatment only "in cases of absolute necessity"[39]. This type of development makes it clear that there was a diminishing will to tackle the issue of the Roma in a constructive way, and to look for solutions.

Since the middle of the 19th century the Roma had been perceived more and more as a problem, and frequently the media, but even the institutions, addressed the issue speaking of the gypsy as a "plague"[40]. This trend worsened steadily, and during the 1920s and 1930s the "gypsy plague" attracted increasingly the attention of the authorities. In 1929 a reform made the "*Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens*" – the "Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance" – a concern of the federal authorities. In this period the government started to react to outcries and reports that were describing the situation as worsening and unsustainable. There was even an effort at international level, with a series of conferences that arrived at the conclusion that an International Office for the Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance (*Internationale Zentralstelle zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens*) had to be created. While this project was never carried out, in 1936 a national *Zentralstelle zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens* was established in Vienna. With the economic crisis, the already narrow niches that warranted the existence of the Roma ceased to exist. In addition, the 'escape goat' psychology set in: typically, in times of economic hardship and social unrest, minorities are singled out and persecuted, regardless of whether there is a reasonable connection between them and the calamity that has befallen the community (think of historical examples like the Jews, but also the Chinese minority in Indonesia in recent years).

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[39] *Gesellmann* (1989), p. 141.

[40] For example, already in 1880 the Oberwarther Sonntagszeitung had the headline "Zur Zigeunerplage: Beschwerde aus Tatzmandorf und Unterschützen", while in 1928 the Güssinger Zeitung speaks of "Kulturschande" and "Landplage". For further examples see *Benkö* (1979), p. 171 and *Samer* (2001), p. 15 . This type of terminology, which was a clear indication of the approach that was being used, was even more common in Germany. For example, in 1906 the Prussian Ministry for Interior Affairs gave dispositions for the fight against the gypsy nuisance ("Anweisungen zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens"), and in 1926 Bavaria implemented a law to combat gypsies, vagrants and shirkers ("Gesetz zur Bekämpfung von Zigeunern, Landfahrern und Arbeitsscheuen"), *Kaiser* (1993), pp. 109-111.

3. The Nazi-persecutions and the aftermath

3.1 Almost complete annihilation in the Holocaust

By the 1930s the majority society and its institutions were keen to obliterate the existence of the Roma. This attitude was best embodied by a meeting that took place in Oberwart in January 1933 at the initiative of the regional government. The meeting, which brought together the mayors of the Oberwart district, members of the regional and national parliaments, representatives from police and judicial authority, etc., had the goal to discuss the "gypsy plague". The starting assumption of this high-profile panel was that "the gypsy plague in Burgenland, and especially in the district of Oberwart, has reached such a dimension, that soon it will bring particularly those municipalities that host numerous gypsies to the ruin"[41]. In the ensuing debate, a series of proposals to combat this "plague" was made. Some of these proposals were reminiscent of the era of Maria Theresia and Joseph II, suggesting to prohibit marriages and to take away Roma children from their families for educational purposes. Others were anticipating ideas – like sterilisation and forced reclusion - that would later be taken up by the Nazis: the Roma should be forced to demographic restraint, concentrated and imprisoned in reservations. A more quixotic plan suggested to work together with the League of Nations and to deport the Roma to "fertile islands" in the Pacific Ocean. This plan was a clear indication of the desire of the majority population to expunge the Roma from their social sphere. The meeting resulted in a final declaration that underscored solemnly the attendee's resolution to "free the Germanic peasant from a parasite"[42].

In other words, by the early 1930s the situation in Burgenland had deteriorated to the point where "a solution of the gypsy problem from the social standpoint" was deemed "impossible"[43]. The presence of the Roma had to be reduced to a minimum, or even completely negated. Hence, when the National-socialists came into power in Austria in March 1938, the way was paved for a massive repression of the Roma. The local section of the NSDAP had long been crying for a "Burgenland free of gypsies!"[44], and first deportations of Burgenland-Roma to Dachau, motivated with their "anti-sociality", took place in the same year. In 1941 a large deportation of Austrian Jews and Roma to the ghetto in the Polish city of Lodz was decided. A total number of 5,007 Roma (1,130 men, 1,188 women and 2,689 children) was among them. Nobody survived, as all these people were killed either in the *Lager* in Lodz or in the concentration camp Kulmhof/Chelmo[45]. In the following years the

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[41] *Kaiser* (1993), p. 98.

[42] *Kaiser* (1993), p. 106.

[43] From a police document, quoted by *Rieger* (1997), p. 25.

[44] *Samer* (2001), p. 15.

[45] *Baumgartner et al.* (2001), pp. 76-77.

remaining Austrian Roma were gathered in camps (*Zigeuner-Anhalte- und Arbeitslager*), from where they were taken to carry out road works and similar forced labour. The largest of these camps, with a cumulative total of 4,000 prisoners, was situated in Lackenbach, in the Oberpullendorf district. Other camps existed also outside Burgenland, in Maxglan near Salzburg and Weyer in Oberösterreich. After 1943, and following the so-called *Auschwitz-erlaß*[46], many of these people, together with other thousands of Roma from all parts of German-occupied territory, were brought to the large concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Numerous victims did never reach their final destination, and died because of the excruciating conditions in other camps, at work or during transportation. Those that arrived in Auschwitz were placed in a special "gypsy family camp" (*Zigeunerfamilienlager*). Only an exiguous number of these people survived the inhumane conditions, diseases, "medical" experiments, gas chambers and final "liquidation" of the *Lager* in August 1944.

Recent studies have set the total number of Austrian Roma killed during the *Porrajmos*[47] – as the Holocaust is called in Romanés – between 8,000 and 9,400[48]. With respect to Burgenland, a 1948 statistic from the *Sicherheitsdirektion*, speaks of 870 Roma (281 men, 372 women, 214 children) living in Burgenland after the war[49]; other sources report that only 6-700 Burgenland-Roma survived the "final solution"[50]. The ruthlessness of the Nazi regime as to the Roma had thus no equals in the past, and also its pseudo-scientific racist ideology represented a novel element. However, in many ways the Nazi persecutions did not represent a break with the past, but followed a well-established trajectory. "The persecution of gypsies had a tradition that stretched over centuries before the National-socialists came into power. Particularly the measures that they took in the initial period were not substantially different from persecution practices that had already been in use."[51] This view was also stated by the German Federal High Court (*Bundesgerichtshof*), and expressed in a leading decision of the year 1956 that had momentous consequences for the indemnification of the Roma (see the next section): "The measures taken by the National-socialist authorities against the gypsies after 1933 did not

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[46] The *Auschwitzerlaß* of 16.12.1942 called for the deportation of all European "gypsies" to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and thus for a "final solution" of the gypsy problem.

[47] Porrajmos (or Porajmos, O Porraimos) means literally "the Devouring".

[48] *Rieger* (1997), p. 34, *Baumgartner/Freund* (2003), p. 92. In Europe, between 200,000 and 500,000 Roma died as a consequence of Nazi persecution

[49] See *Rieger* (1997), p. 46, *Baumgartner/Freund* (2003), p. 93.

[50] *Samer* (2001), p. 17.

[51] *Thurner* (1983), p. 31: "Die Zigeunerverfolgung hatte bereits vor der NS-Machtergreifung jahrhundertelange Tradition. Besonders jene, in der Anfangsphase getroffenen Maßnahmen, unterschieden sich nicht grundlegend von bereits praktizierten Verfolgungshandlungen".

differ a whole lot from similar actions that had been taken before the year 1933 in the fight against the gypsy nuisance."[52]

3.2 *Wiedergutmachung* – an insufficient reconciliation

The persecution of the Roma had reached a peak with their physical annihilation during the Nazi period. However, the discrimination against the Roma had not started with the *Third Reich*, and it did not end with it. The question of *Wiedergutmachung* (reconciliation) and of the indemnification of the victims of Nazism gives a first indication of its persistence during the post-war period. "It is characteristic of the German and Austrian post-war societies, that with respect to the Roma Holocaust no sense of guilt was developed".[53] In Germany the compensation payments to the Roma were delayed by several decades. Up to 1965, payments to victims of racial persecution during the Nazi period depended on the abovementioned decision by the Federal High Court from the year 1956. This decision acknowledged racial persecution of the Roma only after 1943, i.e. the date of the notorious *Auschwitzerlaß* which determined the deportation of all European Roma and Sinti to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Before this date, only "anti-social" Roma had been deported to the *Lager*. Even the deportation of 2,500 Roma and Sinti in 1940 was regarded only as a "*military and security measure*"[54]. As noted, the national-socialist policies up to 1943 were seen as a continuation of the previous repressive measures – and therefore in a certain sense legitimized[55]. It is only with the Federal Compensation Act (*Bundesentschädigungsgesetz*) of 1965 that the Roma and Sinti were considered as victims of racial persecution in Germany from the year 1938 on. Survivors that had initially been refused indemnity payments could – with more than two decades delay – finally be compensated for the persecutions they had suffered between 1938 and 1945.

In Austria the situation was less clear, and the recognition of victims' claims followed a heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory pattern. The indemnification of Roma was linked to the "Victim Assistance Act" (OFG, *Opferfürsorgegesetz*)[56] of 1945. This law has been amended more than 60 times up to the present day, and represents a "highly complex legal

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[52] Bundesgerichtshof, 7.1. 1956 – IV ZR 211/55 (Koblenz), quoted in *Spitta* (1979), p. 168: "Die nach 1933 von seiten der nationalsozialistischen Gewalthaber gegen die Zigeuner ergriffenen Maßnahmen unterscheiden sich nicht samt und sonders von ähnlichen auch vor dem Jahre 1933 getroffenen Handlungen zur Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens".

[53] *Karoly* (1998), p. 58: "Insbesondere was den Holocaust an den Roma betrifft, ist sowohl für die österreichische als auch für die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und Politik charakteristisch, daß sich kein Unrechtbewußtsein entwickelte".

[54] See *Rieger* (1997), p. 33.

[55] The claim that up to a certain point the Nazi policies presented a high degree of continuity with the past is *per sè* not unreasonable. What is shocking, is that this continuity was used to justify horrible crimes, rather than to conclude that the Roma had been unjustly persecuted even before the climax of Nazi brutality.

[56] The full wording is "Bundesgesetz über die Fürsorge für die Opfer des Kampfes um ein freies, demokratisches Österreich und die Opfer politischer Verfolgung".

subject"[57]. The continuous amendments increased gradually the categories and thus number of people that were entitled to compensation. However, not even the 12th amendment of the OFG (1961) – that was of particular importance to the Roma – led to conclusive clarity with respect to the entitlement of indemnity payments. In many instances, decisions were taken case by case, and often these decisions differed greatly between one regional authority and the other. For example, compensation for the damage incurred through the interdiction of school attendance was accorded much more generously in Burgenland than in Vienna. The opposite was true of indemnities paid to compensate those who were forced to flee or hide in order to escape persecution[58].

In general terms, the Austrian Roma found it difficult to be acknowledged as full victims of Nazi persecutions. In fact, in Austria as in Germany there has been a resilient tendency to discriminate against the Roma on the ground of old prejudices. "The loose taboo on anti-gypsism enabled the political authorities and the various elites to officially avoid referring to the persecution of the Roma in the Third Reich as an evil racist crime, as it was perceived by the Allies and Western public opinion as early as 1943, but rather as a non-racial persecution conducted against criminals and 'Asoziale'"[59]. By reason of an inherently flawed, but well-entrenched argument, the Roma were thus often deprived of their status as victims. The fact that they had been persecuted, deported, imprisoned, forced to labour, or even tortured, sterilized and used for pseudo-scientific experiments, was relegated to secondary importance. According to the authorities, what seemed to matter most, was the rationale that lay behind these measures. And since, at least up to the year 1943, the official motivation of repression had been the "criminal and anti-social" character of the Roma, there was a certain degree of legitimacy in what the Nazi regime had done. Only the persecution on purely racial grounds, as manifest after the year 1943, could be considered worth of reparation.

From an analytical viewpoint, this argumentative line is clearly weak. It is not difficult to prove that the accusation of criminal and anti-social behaviour was made against the Roma on the basis of racial and genetic considerations. Not only in Germany, in Austria too, police, bureaucratic and scientific institutions cooperated to register and evaluate all Roma according to racial criteria, distinguishing between "pure-blooded" and "mixed-blooded" Roma. From the very beginning the Roma were persecuted because of racial hatred, and measures such as sterilisation were envisaged[60]. What is most shocking however is the fact

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[57] See *Historikerkommission* (2002), p. 244 and following.

[58] *Historikerkommission* (2002), pp. 279-280.

[59] *Gilad* (1996), p. 10, quoted by *Karoly* (1998), p. 64.

[60] For instance, no later than 1939 a document from the police station in Salzburg called for the "sterilisation of all gypsies that have been previously convicted, if only once, for grave theft, other profit-seeking crimes or sexual offences. In general, we should not be sparing with sterilisation, because we have to strike at the root of this evil". See *Rieger* (1997), p. 29, who quotes a document from the *Gendarmerieberichte zum "Zigeunerunwesen"* deposited at the *Salzburger Landesarchiv*.

that the arguments adopted by the authorities after 1945 tended to legitimise the crimes of the Nazi period by referring to previous repressive measures. In a certain respect, the discrimination against the Roma reached a new height – up to the point of making them second class citizens even in the concentration camp. By being labelled as "criminals", the Roma were *de facto* often placed outside the "Victim Assistance Act", and thus deprived of the right to reparation.

This is particularly evident with respect to the treatment of the inmates of the Lackenbach and Maxglan camps. Prisoners of these camps were initially denied any form of indemnity, under the motivation that these camps had been conceived as transit and labour camps, and did not fall within the category of concentration camps. In the following years, the association of concentration-camp victims voiced the demand that these camps be recognised for what they were. This, and the high number of indemnity claims from former prisoners, led the authorities to initiate inquiries into the living conditions in Lackenbach and the other "gypsy camps". It is telling that the Ministries of Interior and Social Affairs relied mainly on testimonies of former guard personnel, authorities overseeing the camps, and employers who benefited from the forced labour of the Roma, to collect their information. Not surprisingly, these testimonies led to a distorted picture of the life in the camps.

"Nevertheless the police of Salzburg and Burgenland, who were investigating this issue, relied only on testimonies of former officers and guards, according to whom Lackenbach and Maxglan had been "normal" camps, where people were living of their own free will, where they were receiving vacation periods, and had the possibility to go outside for a walk. Thus the Ministries for Social and Interior Affairs, and as a consequence also the Higher Administrative Court accepted the legitimation strategies of the functionaries that had been responsible at that time."[61]

A classified memorandum from the Ministry of Interior Affairs of the year 1952, went so far as to describe Lackenbach as a place of "social advancement" for the Roma: "We have to take into consideration that particularly those Roma who were resident in the Burgenland had been living in clay huts or other very desolate accommodations; compared to this, the camp-life represented a social advancement for them".[62]

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[61] *Historikerkommission* (2002), p. 275: "Dennoch stützten sich die ermittelnden Gendarmeriekommandos Burgenland und Salzburg einzig auf die Aussagen der ehemaligen "Zigeunersachbearbeiter" und Bewacher, wonach Lackenbach und Maxglan "normale" Lager gewesen seien, wo die Menschen freiwillig gelebt hätten, Urlaub bekommen hätten und es möglich gewesen sei, außerhalb des Lagers spazieren zu gehen. Damit folgten Innnenministerium, Sozialministerium und in der Folge auch der Verwaltungsgerichtshof den Rechtfertigungsstrategien der seinerzeit verantwortlichen Kriminalbeamten."

[62] *Rieger* (1997), p. 147: "Wenn berücksichtigt wird, daß insbesondere die im Burgenland ansässig gewesenen Zigeuner vorwiegend in Lehmhütten oder sonstigen sehr desolaten Wohnräumen gehaust hatten, so war demgegenüber das Lagerleben für sie ein sozialer Aufstieg".

The general attitude behind this type of statement led the authorities to reject indemnity claims from people that had been imprisoned in Lackenbach and Maxglan. No consideration was given to the fact that the inmates of these camps were forced to live massed by hundreds in a few barracks, that they were continuously exposed to mistreatment, and that the hygienic conditions were so bad that a typhoid pandemic killed 300 of them within a few months in the winter of 1941. Only with the 12th amendment to the OFG, in the year 1961, did the attitude that dominated during the 1950s begin to change. The victims of Lackenbach and Maxglan were granted an indemnity that amounted to 350 ATS per month of prison – as compared to the 870 ATS received by the former inmates of concentration camps. An equalization of the Lackenbach victims with other concentration-camp prisoners was determined only in 1988[63].

Other individual cases represent even more disconcerting forms of discrimination and injustice. For instance, in 1964 the Victim Assistance Bureau (*Opferfürsorgeabteilung*) in Vienna denied indemnification to a Sinto because "on the basis of the Reichsführer SS decree of the year 1939, only anti-social gypsies were arrested and deported. A general deportation of gypsies began only in 1942, and therefore prior to this date there was no compelling reason to live in the hiding".[64] In a similar case from the year 1953, the authorities rejected the application of a Sinto who had been imprisoned in 1939 with the motivation that his imprisonment had occurred "because of repeated violations of the interdiction to wander around according to gypsy habits, and not because of political or racial motivations".[65] In another instance, which occurred in 1951, a Burgenland-Rom who had been deported to Dachau in 1938, and imprisoned in several concentration camps until the end of the war, saw his claim rejected because he had been previously convicted of minor offences (theft of timber and fish, whereby the longest prison sentence had been of 3 weeks). In 1962, after his previous convictions had been wiped out, he re-applied, but this time his application was rejected because he had been persecuted not "on political or racial grounds", but "because of his anti-sociality"[66]. Only a petition of appeal that was judged positively by the Ministry for Social Affairs acknowledged the victim status of this Roma. This was in 1963, thus almost two decades after the end of the war.

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[63] *Samer* (2001), p. 18.

[64] *Rieger* (1997), p. 156: "[...] auf Grund des Erlasses des Reichsführer SS aus dem Jahre 1939 seien nur asoziale Zieguner verhaftet und deportiert worden. Die allgemeine Deportation von Zigeunern habe erst 1942 begonnen, sodaß vorher keine zwingenden Gründe für ein Leben im Verborgenen gegeben gewesen seien".

[65] *Rieger* (1997), p. 157: "[...] wegen mehrmaliger Übertretung des Verbotes des Umherziehens nach Zigeunerart und nicht aus politischen bzw. rassischen Gründen erfolgt".

[66] *Rieger* (1997), p. 158.

3.3 Survivors without property and belongings

In addition to the physical and psychological damages that resulted from the Nazi persecution, those Roma who survived the *Porrajmos* were also confronted with heavy material losses. During the inter-war period, many Roma had lived under the poverty threshold. This notwithstanding, numerous Roma owned property of some kind, as well as liquid money and cash accounts. This was particularly true of the Burgenland-Roma, who pursued a sedentary life-style, and possessed houses, furniture and other common belongings. A comprehensive report commissioned by the Austrian Historical Commission has shed light on the Roma properties confiscated or destroyed by the National-socialists. During the first years of the Nazi period, i.e., up to 1943, it was mainly the municipalities that benefited from the confiscation of these assets. These represented the property of those Roma who had been deported to Lodz, and of those that were imprisoned in Lackenbach and Maxglan. After 1943, the remaining Roma assets – chiefly of those Roma and Sinti that were deported to Auschwitz – went directly to the *Reich*. Thanks to the cadastral registers, it has been possible to gain a clear picture of the real estate, i.e. houses and pieces of land, possessed by the Burgenland-Roma before the war.

Table 2: Number of OFG-applications in 10-year cohorts:

Cohort	1946-55	1956-65	1966-75	1976-85	1986-95	Total
Number	304	264	144	63	95	870

Source: *Baumgartner* (2001).

The economic situation of the Roma was not always homogenous, especially in the light of the fact that some of them had settled there at the times of Empress Maria Theresia. The "gypsy settlements" (*Zigeunersiedlungen*) had been erected on communal ground (*Gemeindegrund*). According to Austrian law, the owners of buildings on these parcels of land (so-called *Überbauten* or *Superädifikate*) could be registered as such in the real estate register. In addition, there were the properties of wealthier Roma, who in some cases were living in smaller groups and enjoyed a standard of living that was higher than that of the other Burgenland-Roma. The vast majority of the houses owned by Roma were demolished by the local authorities. The proceedings from these demolitions have been estimated at 300 RM for sub-standard houses/huts, and 3,000 RM for standard houses. As in the case of other Roma assets, these proceedings went initially mainly to the municipalities, and after 1943 to the *Reich*. Conservative estimates speak of at least 230 standard and 1,120 sub-standard houses of the Roma that were expropriated and demolished in this process. No indemnity was ever paid for this destroyed property, and in fact for the whole district of Oberwart there is no

trace of attempts to initiate a reparation claim. The only known application for reparation with respect to real estate property, of a Burgenland-Rom in St. Margarethen, was rejected[67].

An interesting picture emerged from an analysis of the land parcels owned by the Roma. Basing their estimate on the real estate registers of the district of Oberwart, where about 50 percent of the Burgenland-Roma was living, the experts of the Austrian Historical Commission have calculated that the property of the Roma in Burgenland before the war amounted to 47.26 hectares (i.e., 472,600 m^2) of land. In the aftermath of the war, the ownership situation of these estates was intricate and largely unknown. In light of the exiguous number of Roma who found their way back to the places of origin, and of the fragmentary family patterns of the survivors, it is no surprise that in many cases not even the heirs knew about these properties. Most properties remained unclaimed for decades. Even at the present day, around 15 percent of the real estates have an 'unclear' status: some of them are still registered to the names of Roma who, apparently, are more than 100 years old, but who have almost certainly perished during the war; other have been declared as "forfeited" (*kaduk*) and have become public property. This case applies to an estimated 34,860 m^2 land in the Oberwart district, and to 73,735 m^2 in the whole Burgenland. Also the Sinti that were living in other parts of the Austrian territory, and had a more nomadic life-style, were spoiled of what they had. An estimated number of 500 trailers and an equal number of horses were taken from them, and never given back or replaced to their heirs in the period after the war. Other material damages inflicted by the Nazi regime included the losses incurred by the Roma because of the ban on trade licences (*Verbot der Gewerbeausübung*), of failed social insurance payments to working Roma between 1938-40, and of only partial retribution for the forced labour (part of the wage was transferred to municipalities to pay for the social services given to the Roma during the inter-war period).

To sum up, reparation of the crimes committed against the Roma during the Nazi period has not been satisfactory. Over the course of time, the status of the Roma as victims has certainly been consolidated. The applications to the OFG span five decades, and the Historical Commission was able to evaluate 870 files (Table 2), which include both persons that applied for a pension, and those that applied for one-off compensation payments. Unfortunately, no figures for the total payments that have gone to the Roma, nor for the relation between accepted and rejected applications to the OFG, are available. While certainly many victims, or their heirs, could receive indemnification for periods of prison and forced labour, they often had to wait for many years before the legal and administrative machinery recognized their specific claims. Moreover, the OFG has failed to account for all forms of repression to which the Roma have been subjected. "Some forms of persecution, and the thereby resulting

[67] See *Historikerkommission* (2002), p. 296.

damages, were not taken into consideration by the OFG even after its 12th amendment."[68] A conspicuous case is represented by the damages resulting from "medical" experimentation and forced sterilisation.[69] Overall, the Roma had to fight against latent and even overt discrimination. Not only were there issues of discrimination connected to the evaluation of single cases – there were also more fundamental problems which delayed, and in some cases completely blocked, full recognition of the victim status of the Roma. As the Historical Commission has written, "the lack of a lobby in favour of the surviving Roma resulted in a constant discrimination of this victim group within the victim assistance legislation"[70]. The differentiation between persecutions motivated by racism, and those motivated by the alleged "anti-sociality" of the Roma, as well as the assignment of a special status to the "gypsy-camps" like Lackenbach represent the best cases in point. In addition, there has been a failure on the side of institutions and public opinion to give full and official recognition to the persecutions of the Roma during the Nazi era. Last but not least, the Roma have received no compensation for the properties (houses, goods, real estates) that were taken from them during the Nazi era.

4. The Roma in the Second Republic

4.1 Different groups of Roma on Austrian territory

It is difficult to analyse the situation of the Austrian Roma population after 1945 and up to the present day. For one thing, there exists no comprehensive source of information on the Roma. The evaluation of 870 files from the OFG was, up to the present day, "the first and until now only known, secured source of data on the group of the Burgenland-Roma after 1945"[71]. In addition, the situation of the Roma who are currently living in Austria is far from homogenous.

There is a distinction to be made between the Roma as an autochthonous Austrian ethnic minority, and the Roma who have settled in Austria in more recent times – and represent an allochthonous minority. The former are survivors and descendants of the victims of the Holocaust. After 1945 they settled mainly in Burgenland (where most of them came from), but also in other regions and in the urban areas of Vienna, Salzburg and Linz. The Burgenland-

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[68] *Historikerkommission* (2002), p. 280: "Einige Formen der Verfolgung, bzw. die daraus resultierenden Schädigungen wurden jedoch auch nach der 12. Novelle nicht vom OFG abgedeckt. Besonders auffällig ist das im Fall gesundheitlicher Schädigung durch medizinische Experimente oder durch Sterilisation."

[69] For instance, in 1955 a Rom asked for an indemnity payment on the grounds that he had been sterilised. The competent authorities rejected the claim because "there is no serious health damage", and because the victim's ability to work had not been impaired by more than 50 percent". This was not an isolated case; see *Dörres* (1993), p. 110.

[70] *Historikerkommission* (2002), p. 300: "Das fehlen einer Lobby für die überlebenden "Zigeuner" bewirkte, daß diese Opfergruppe in der Opferfürsorgegesetzgebung stets benachteiligt blieb."

[71] *Baumgartner et al.* (2001), p. 12.

Roma, the Sinti and the Lovara that came to Austria in the 19th century constitute this autochthonous minority, which has been recognized as such in 1993 (see Section 5.1). At present, these Roma represent only a fraction of the total number of Roma living in Austria, which is estimated at a minimum of 25,000[72].

Table 3: Origin and dwelling places of Roma groups in Austria

	Sinti	Burgenland-Roma	Lovara	Kalderas, Gurbet	Arlije
Country of origin	Germany, Czech territories	Hungary	Hungary, Slovakia	Serbia	Macedonia, Kosovo
Period of migration	Around 1900	Since 15th century	2nd half of 19th. century, 1956	Starting in 1960s	Starting in 1960
Area of residence	Mainly urban areas	Burgenland, cities in Eastern Austria	Mainly in the metropolitan area of Vienna	Metropolitan area of Vienna	Metropolitan area of Vienna

Source: *Hemetek* (2001), *Halwachs et al.* (2001).

The remaining groups of Roma have come to Austria for different reasons over the past decades, and have settled in the metropolitan area of Vienna, as well as in other regions of the country. In 1956, and following the uprising in Budapest, a small number of Lovara fled Hungary, and settled almost exclusively in and around Vienna. Larger groups of Roma came to Austria to work as *Gastarbeiter* starting in the 1960s: the Kalderas and Gurbet came from Serbia, while the Arlije moved from Macedonia. A last wave of Roma migrated to Austria at the end of the 1980s, with the fall of communism. These people came from the Central and Eastern European countries, as well as from former Yugoslavia. This last group of Roma is arguably even less well-known than the others, and only speculations can be made as of its real consistence. "It is entirely possible, that this group constitutes the largest one, a fact that would mean that the total estimate of 25,000 has at least to be doubled."[73] Most of the Roma who immigrated since 1945 followed the example of the Lovara, and settled chiefly in the metropolitan area of Vienna. Those that arrived last, as well as many Sinti, can also be found in other urban areas of the Republic, but mainly to the East[74]. At present therefore, only the Burgenland-Roma are thought to be living in rural and less densely populated areas. Within this group, a strong migratory trend has led many to move to Vienna and other Austrian cities. However, these individuals have *de facto* been largely assimilated by the majority population, and often do not regard themselves as Roma any more.

Not only country of origin and date of arrival in Austria, but also social and cultural characteristics distinguish the different groups of Roma. For instance, the single Roma groups

[72] *Halwachs et al.* (2001).

[73] *Halwachs et al.* (2001): "Es könnte aber durchaus sein, daß es sich bei dieser Gruppe um die zahlenmässig größte handelt, was die oben angeführte Gesamtzahl von 25,000 zumindest verdoppeln würde."

[74] See *Halwachs* (2001).

have usually adopted the religion of their respective majority populations. As a consequence, the autochthonous Burgenland-Roma and Lovara are Roman-catholic, while the immigrants from the Balkan region have maintained the confession of their countries of origin: the Gurbets and Kalderas are orthodox, and the Arlijes Muslims. Among the Sinti, there are both Catholics and Protestants – which probably depends on the fact that some of them came to Austria from Germany[75]. Also in linguistic terms, the Roma who live in Austria present a far from homogenous pattern. In allusion to a *bon mot* by Karl Kraus, it has been hinted that the Roma are kept apart by their common language[76]. Romanés comprises a bundle of dialects, which in some cases differ significantly from each other. This linguistic diversity and the lack of a unitary standard reflect the fact that the Roma were never able to build the cultural and institutional centres that are necessary to achieve the standardisation of a language. According to the present state of research, it is possible to distinguish between four Romanés variants. The Lovara, Kalderas and Gurbet all speak so-called Vlach-dialects that have been heavily influenced by Slavic languages. The Burgenland-Roma and the Sinti speak a Romanés that is more influenced by German, while the Arlijes speak dialects that can be connected to the Balkan area.

The distinction between autochthonous and allochthonous Roma, and between sub-groups within these categories, is of analytical relevance, and is also important at a political level. Each group has a unique history, and a peculiar set of identifying features. It is no coincidence that these groups tend to live apart, and that their interaction is somewhat limited[77]. In spite of these demarcations, the different groups are however bound by common challenges and problems, confronting them in the educational sphere, on the labour market and in other dimensions of their life. It is therefore also necessary to go beyond the autochthonous/allochthonous dichotomy, and to keep in mind that the Roma in Austria face many common problems, regardless of when they arrived to this country and where they came from. In what follows the paper focuses on the autochthonous minority (and here especially on the Burgenland-Roma), because more and better information is available. This does not compromise the final goal of the paper, i.e. to reach valid conclusions for the entire Roma population in Austria.

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[75] See *Halwachs* (2001).

[76] *Halwachs* (2001).

[77] This can also be explained by the important role of festivities that are centred on family events (e.g., marriages and funerals) for the social life of each group. While marriages between members of different communities do occur, in most cases Roma of the *same* group will come together to celebrate events.

Table 4: Use of language according to ethnic group, generation and functional field

		Family, friends, etc.	Acquaintances, work, etc.	Authorities, institutions, etc.
Sinti	*Old*	German Romanés	German (Romanés)	German
	Young	German (Romanés)	German (Romanés)	German
Brglnd.-Roma	*Old*	German Romanés	German (Hungarian/Croatian) [Romanés]	German
	Young	German (Romanés)	German [Hungarian/Croatian] (Romanés)	German
Lovara	*Old*	German Romanés	German (*Hungarian*) Romanés	German
	Young	German (Romanés)	German (*Romanés*)	German
Kalderash, Gurbet	*Old*	German Romanés	(German) Serbian Romanés	(German) Serbian
	Young	German (Romanés)	German (Serbian) Romanés	German
Arlije	*Old*	(German) Macedonian Romanés	German Macedonian (Romanés)	German Macedonian
	Young	German Macedonian (Romanés)	German Macedonian (Romanés)	German

Source: *Halwachs et al.* (2003). – ( ) ... scarce utilisation; – [ ] ... very scarce utilisation; – *italics* ... refer to Lovara who migrated after 1956.

4.2 The autochthonous Roma pushed once more to the margins of society

It is important to gain a clear picture of the condition of the Sinti, Lovara and Burgenland-Roma who came back to Austria after the war, as well as of the circumstances they had to face on their arrival. Only a tiny fraction of the Roma who had been deported during the Nazi era survived the Holocaust and found their way back to Austria. Some of those that did survive chose not to go back to their original dwelling places. This might well have been linked with the fact that there was little left to go back to. After the third and final wave of deportation, in 1943, all the belongings and accommodation facilities of the Roma had been destroyed or sold (see Section 3.3). In addition, the Holocaust experience had taught the Roma that communal life in segregated areas made them particularly vulnerable to persecution. Thus, some of the survivors chose to disappear in more densely populated urban areas. The Lovara, for example, did not return to the area of the Neusiedler Lake, and decided instead to begin a new life in Styria, Lower Austria and, chiefly, in the metropolitan area of Vienna. The liquidation of thousands of them in the Nazi camps had deprived the

Roma of entire generations. With these people, also a good part of the traditions, skills and knowledge that constituted the identity of the Roma had died. "The grandparents – who were the actual carriers of culture and who transmitted their knowledge to the youngest generation – had been the first to die in the concentration camps. The formerly united minority group had become a social fringe group, condemned to live as outcast at the margins of villages"[78].

As we have seen in Section 3.3, the Roma had been deprived of every form of material belonging, and they had no houses awaiting them on their return. In Burgenland, but also in Vienna, Linz and Salzburg, they were confronted with a dramatic accommodation situation. As for many thousands of other people displaced by the war, their only shelters were wooden huts and barracks. Thus, in the initial period the Roma shared the life of those persons who filled the numerous camps that were present on the Austrian territory in the aftermath of the war. During this period, they enjoyed a standard of living that, while low, was comparable to that of the majority population. Until 1955 Austria lived through a transitory period, where the occupying powers had control over many aspects of security and administration in the country. Under these circumstances, many Roma were able to exploit their traditional ability to adaptation, and found once again niches that secured their survival. In the absence of strong regulations (licences, permits, etc.), with an economy that had to rely heavily on barter and retail trade, and under the benevolent eye of the occupying armies, many Roma were able to secure a living. The same thing happened in Germany, where until the end of the 1950s the Sinti "lived through a phase of relative prosperity"[79]. However, this situation changed rapidly when Austria returned to a state of normality, after 1955. The foreign displaced people had returned to their countries, and the Austrians left the barracks and provisional camps that had hosted many of them during the emergency period. The Roma however continued to live in barracks and trailers, and were rapidly pushed back to the margins of society. Their traditional occupations were not needed, and only few had the necessary capital endowment to develop own activities, e.g., to start to trade carpets. Their cultural heritage – i.e., a mainly oral tradition coupled with a high level of illiteracy – made it almost impossible to cope with a bureaucratic apparatus that had started again to require licences and permits. Moreover, the dynamic between exclusion and self-exclusion hindered them from acquiring even the most minimal skills and qualifications.

The case – reported by Erika Thurner[80] – of a Sinti family that settled in Linz in the aftermath of the war is exemplary. During the occupation period, the breadwinner of this family, who had been a horse trader before the war, was able to make a decent living by dealing – partly

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[78] *Mayerhofer* (1988), pp. 51-53: "Im KZ starb an erster Stelle die Großelterngeneration, der eigentliche Kulturträger, der im Normalfall Überliefertes an die Kindergeneration weitergibt. Aus der ehemaligen intakten Minderheitengruppe wurde eine soziale Randgruppe, die dazu verurteilt ist, am Rand der Dörfer als Ausgestoßene zu leben".

[79] *von Soest* (1979), p. 253.

[80] *Thurner* (1995), pp. 366-371.

legally and partly on the black market – with fabrics and other goods. However, once the occupying armies left the country, the position of these Sinti became fully apparent. Their living conditions and habits set them apart from the majority population, and discriminations and bureaucratic hurdles made it impossible for them to enter the primary economy. They were classified as stateless and possessed virtually no rights: "Until 1955 the occupying soldiers had again and again a protective function, and they tolerated the trading without licences. [...] The authorities refused to give Arthur S. [the head of the family] a trade licence. He shared this experience with many other Sinti and Roma in Austria. [...] After 1956 trade fines were imposed year after year. Police and public officers appeared at home, sometimes one of the parents was arrested and (temporarily) imprisoned. [...] Most people were improving their situation year after year. Not so the Sinti family. She was more and more isolated, pushed to the margin."[81] This type of story was recurrent in post-war Austria, as the "ghettisation" of Roma occurred not only in Linz, but also in Salzburg and in peripheral districts in Vienna (small "gypsy settlements" developed in the 21st and 22nd district).

Also the Roma who had returned to Burgenland were once again confronted with a hostile environment. "The municipalities of origin in Burgenland were for the most part very unhappy about the fact that after their liberation some of the Roma who had been stigmatised as "gypsies" by National-socialism were returning to their dwelling places. [...] In several municipalities it was the occupying powers who had to provide for an accommodation of the returning Roma. Some local administrations even tried to move the Roma to other municipalities by buying pieces of land for them."[82] The authorities "reacted to the (re-)appearance of Roma and Sinti with deportation measures"[83]. Already in June 1945, the governor (*Landeshauptmann*) of Niederösterreich re-instated the edict of 1888 (*Zigeuner-erlaß*), which provided for Roma without Austrian citizenship to be expelled from the *Land*. In September 1948 the Ministry for Interior Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Inneres, Generaldirektion für die öffentliche Sicherheit*) gave dispositions to police and security authorities with respect to the "nuisance caused by the gypsies nuisance in some areas of the federal territory" (*das Zigeunerunwesen in einigen Gegenden des Bundesgebietes*). In its memorandum, the Ministry pointed out that the "gypsy nuisance" (*Zigeunerunwesen*) was increasingly attracting

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[81] *Thurner* (1995), pp. 367-370: "Bis 1955 funktionierten die Besatzungssoldaten aber immer wieder als Schutzmacht, tolerierten das Handeln ohne Gewerbeschein. [...] Die Behörden weigerten sich, Arthur S. einen Gewerbeschein auszustellen. Diese Erfahrung teilte er mit vielen anderen Sinti und Roma in Österreich. [...] Ab 1956 hagelte es Jahr für Jahr Gewerbestrafen. Polizei und Exekutionsbeamten tauchten zu Hause auf, manchmal wurde ein Elternteil verhaftet und (vorübergehend) inhaftiert. [...] Dennoch ging es den meisten Menschen von Jahr zu Jahr besser. Nicht der Sinti-Familie. Sie wurde zusehends isoliert, an den Rand gedrängt."

[82] *Baumgartner/Freund* (2003), p. 98: "Die burgenländischen Heimatgemeinden waren über die Tatsache, daß nach der Befreiung vom Nationalsozialismus als "Zigeuner" stigmatisierte Roma in die Orte zurückkehrten, in der Regel höchst unerfreut. [...] In mehreren Gemeinden mußte die Wohnraumbeschaffung für die zurückgekehrten Roma von den Besatzungsbehörden durchgesetzt werden. Einige Gemeindeverwaltungen versuchten sogar, die Roma durch den Ankauf von Grundstücken in andere Gemeinden abzusiedeln".

[83] *Rieger* (1997), p. 34: "Auf erste (Über-)Lebenszeichen der Roma und Sinti reagierte man mit Abschiebung".

attention, and that some of the "gypsies" were trying to impress the local population by claiming to be concentration camp victims. As a consequence, these people should be expelled from the national territory. These dispositions, as well as the language in which they are embedded[84], betray their roots in old prejudices. The presence of Roma on Austrian soil was certainly not of a magnitude that could justify the fears of the authorities, nor the terminology used to express them (*Unwesen*)[85]. Moreover, it is curious, to say the least, that the Roma were accused of feigning reclusion in concentration camps – with no acknowledgement of that possibility.

4.3 Precarious employment and housing situation of the Roma

As we have seen in preceding sections, the importance of the traditional occupations pursued by the Roma had already declined during the inter-war period. This development continued inexorably during the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, as a result of the demise of whole generations, a large share of the techniques and crafting skills of the Roma had died with them in the concentration camps. A few Roma were able to enjoy a short spell of relative prosperity in the aftermath of the war – but as time went by they found it increasingly difficult to carry out their trades. Most survivors of the Holocaust looked for employment as casual labourers in agriculture, or as unskilled workers. An analysis of the information contained in the OFG applications reveals that only 3.5 percent of the applicants had ever learned a vocation[86]. Between 1945 and 1955 83.4 percent of these people were employed as unskilled labourers (*Hilfskräfte*): 38.8 percent were working in the agricultural sector, and 44.6 percent were unskilled workers in other sectors.

An additional problem was the short duration, and therefore high fluctuation, of employment opportunities of the Roma. According to the study, only 5.7 percent of the OFG applicants kept a job for longer than 6 years, while 82.1 percent of the jobs lasted no more than 36 months, and 60.9 percent no more than 12 months.

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[84] "Die Kontinuität der traditionellen Zigeunerverfolgung durch die Polizei schlägt sich im stigmatisierenden Amtsdeutsch nieder. Wie schon im 19. Jahrhundert ist die Rede von der ‚Zigeunerplage' und von der ‚Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens'", *Rieger* (1997), p. 40.

[85] In this connection, *Rieger* (1997) speaks of an "anti-gypsism without gypsies", p. 35.

[86] *Baumgartner et al.* (2001), p. 191.

Table 5: Occupational situation of the Roma in the post-war period (data from OFG applicants, in percent)

Occupation	Application cohorts					Total
	1946-55	1956-65	1966-75	1976-85	1986-95	
Entertainment sector	2.2	3.4	1.7	--	14.3	3.1
Executive Clerical jobs	--	0.8	1.7	--	--	0.6
Skilled jobs in services sector	2.2	4.2	--	7.7	14.3	3.4
Unskilled jobs in services sector	1.4	--	3.4	15.4	14.3	2.6
Unskilled jobs in agriculture and forestry	38.1	44.5	42.4	7.7	14.3	38.5
Skilled jobs in manufacturing, construction	11.5	8.4	5.1	15.4	9.5	9.4
Temporary jobs	44.6	38.7	45.8	53.8	33.3	42.5

Source: *Baumgartner et al.* (2001)

Table 6: Duration of occupation (data from OFG applicants, in percent)

Occupation	Duration of occupation					
	Less than 6 months	6 months to 1 year	1 to 3 years	3 to 6 years	6 to 8 years	8 years and more
Entertainment sector	12.5	12.5	25.0	37.5	--	12.5
Skilled jobs in trade and banking, clerical jobs	28.6	--	28.6	14.3	14.3	14.3
Skilled jobs in services sector	--	55.6	--	11.1	--	33.3
Unskilled jobs in services sector	10.0	15.0	45.0	10.0	10.0	10.0
Unskilled jobs in agriculture and forestry	19.2	51.1	16.4	9.1	1.8	2.3
Skilled jobs in manufacturing, construction	--	7.7	23.1	30.8	7.7	30.8
Unskilled jobs in manufacturing, construction	41.7	8.3	16.7	16.7	8.3	8.3
Temporary jobs	45.2	20.3	18.0	11.5	2.3	2.8
Total	29.7	33.1	18.4	11.5	2.8	4.6

Source: *Baumgartner et al.* (2001)

These figures cannot be explained solely by the generally poor labour market conditions in Burgenland. In fact, 60.5 percent of Roma employment which has been recorded, was outside of Burgenland. However, also these jobs were to a large extent temporary: the share of jobs that had a duration of less than 12 months was 48.4 percent in Vienna, and 75.5 percent in the remaining *Länder*. It has to be stressed that the population of the OFG-applicants belongs to older generations: 94.3 percent of the applicants were born before 1938 (and 41.8 percent before 1918), while only 4.6 percent of them were born after 1946. Nevertheless, it seems that the employment situation of the Roma did not improve over time, and that younger generations were affected by the same problems as their parents. Even if the correspondent data have much less statistical significance, it has been shown that the cohorts of people born between 1945 and 1955, and of those born between 1956 and 1965,

had an unchanged employment structure. "This confinement to low-paid and unqualified occupations showed a stable pattern at least until the 1970s". In fact, an analysis of the Roma population in Oberwart from the year 1995 (carried out by the city council) provided little ground for optimism. At that point, only 15 percent of the Roma in Oberwart had a stable occupation[87]. While the overall situation in the district improved – with a reduction in long-term unemployment, and an upswing in tourism and services – the Roma were not able to improve their situation.

Table 7: Illiterate persons among the applicants for a pension within the OFG

	Men	In percent	Women	In percent	Total (in percent)
Illiterates	47	25.0	141	75.0	40.9
Literates	126	46.3	146	53.7	59.1
Total	173	37.6	287	62.4	100

Source: *Historikerkommission* (2002), p. 72.

It is safe to say that the poor employment situation of the Roma is connected with their low educational attainments. Only the acquisition of qualifications can enable the Roma to overcome the additional hurdles posed by discrimination and functional/territorial segregation. However, their background does not allow them to access education on an equal footing with majority population, thus depriving them of the only mechanisms which would allow upward social mobility through decent jobs in the labour market. In 1995, at a point when only 15 percent of the Roma in Oberwart had a stable job, there was not one member of the community who had completed an apprenticeship, as it was a common practice to put "gypsies" into "special need schools" (*Sonderschule*). As we will see in second paper, this situation (at least in the Burgenland) has improved over the last few years. Nevertheless, the lack of formal qualifications is a feature of the Roma everywhere, which can be traced back in time. The level of illiteracy was particularly high among the Roma who survived the Holocaust, as they were deprived of proper schooling by the policies implemented by National-socialism. Table 7 shows the number of illiterates among those OFG-applicants who applied for a pension. To this, one has to add the number of people to be considered semi-illiterates. In light of the fact that only a tiny fraction of the application forms had been compiled by the applicants themselves, and that all handwritten entries denoted a very rudimentary handwriting, "the share of illiterates and semi-illiterates at least among the Burgenland-Roma can be set at a minimum of 70 percent up to the 1960s."[88]

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[87] See *Samer* (2001), pp. 92-95.

[88] *Historikerkommission* (2002), p. 72: "Selbst nach vorsichtigen Schätzungen dürfte der Anteil der AnalphabetInnen und SemianalphabetInnen zumindest im Burgenland bis in die sechziger Jahre bei mindestens 70 Prozent gelegen sein."

It is self-evident that this situation represented a heavy burden on the younger generations. Here again, several elements interacted to form a poverty trap. The cultural heritage of the Roma, which relied on an oral tradition, would have required an active effort to enable educational integration. Already constrained by their low socio-economic standing, the families lacked the type of cultural capital which would have been necessary to foster the educational achievements of their children. The discriminations against the Roma, on the other hand, highlighted the differences between the Roma children and the remaining pupils. Instead of generating active policies to facilitate their integration, the difficulties of the Roma reinforced old prejudices. Left on their own, the Roma were unable to bridge the cultural gap that separated them from the majority population. The latter however, chose not to tackle the problem, and instead relegated the Roma children to the margins of the educational system. "The treatment of the children of the Burgenland-Roma within the educational system of Burgenland after 1945 has to be qualified as catastrophic and outrageous".[89] This fact has been highlighted by a study that screened the educational careers of the Roma children of Oberwart between 1952/53 and 1970/71[90].

Of 55 children, 29 had attended only elementary school and almost the same number, 21, the "special need school" for the mentally retarded (*Sonderschule*). Only 2 had gone on to junior high school (*Hauptschule*), and only 3 to a technical secondary school (*Polytechnischer Lehrgang*). Of the surveyed children, 22 had to repeat a class twice, 12 three times, 4 four times, and 7 five times and more often. The number of pupils that were placed in the *Sonderschule* gives a clear indication of the dominant attitude towards Roma children: rather than to attempt integration, and support the children in their learning process, they were immediately labelled as under-achievers, and put in special institutions. This attitude has continued almost up to the present day: according to another study, by the early 1980s 33 to 50 percent of the Roma children were attending a *Sonderschule*[91]. The equivalent figure for Austria lay between 1 and 2 percent. Even more recent data, while providing scope for optimism, highlight the special status of the Roma. Between 1981/82 and 2000/01 39 Roma children from Oberwart had entered and exited the age of compulsory education. The *Sonderschüler* represented a share of 32 percent of the total, whereby it could be observed that this figure declined in recent years. 44 percent of the observed population was not able to complete the first year of elementary school, and were either put back to the kindergarten, or had to repeat the year.

An analysis of the housing condition of the Roma, which is based on the 870 OFG application files, evidences yet another gap of the Roma with respect to the majority population. According to these data, 72.9 percent of the Burgenland-Roma were living in one-room

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[89] *Baumgartner/Freund* (2003), p. 100: "Die Behandlung der Kinder der burgenländischen Roma im burgenländischen Schulsystem nach 1945 muß als katastrophal und skandalös bezeichnet werden."

[90] See *Samer* (2001), p. 95

[91] *Samer* (2001), pp. 96-101.

apartments, while only 7.8 percent of them had more then two and a half rooms at their disposal. For the period between 1956 and 1965 Burgenland as a whole registered an average of 2 rooms per flat, while this was true of only 4.9 percent of the surveyed Roma housings. Also the furnishings of the Roma flats were clearly sub-standard: between 1945 and 1955 61.8 percent of the apartments did not possess a kitchen, and this figure was still at 32.2 percent in 1965 (in Burgenland as a whole, a survey from 1959 had found 100 percent of the apartments furnished with kitchens). "The houses and apartments of the Burgenland-Roma reached the standard equipment of the Burgenland accommodations of 1959 with a twenty-year lag".[92] The average housing density of the Burgenland-Roma continues to be very high up to the present day, particularly in the still existing Roma settlements: according to a survey from 1995 carried out at Oberwart, each person had only 8.74 m^2 of housing space (as compared to an Austrian average of 33 m^2). To this, one can add the circumstance that the Roma settlement in Oberwart was moved several times in the course of history, with a gradual increase of its distance from the city centre[93]. The isolated position of the present settlement was additionally burdened with the installation, in the early 1970s, of a waste disposal site in its close proximity[94]. In light of these dire circumstances it does not come as a surprise that many Roma chose to abandon the areas their ancestors had inhabited for three centuries. In the decades following World War II, a high number of the autochthonous Roma migrated from Burgenland to other parts of Austria, and even abroad. "There are indications, however, that migration of the Burgenland-Roma to Vienna after 1945 has been considerable. [...] Therefore, the share of Roma who after 1945 moved mainly to Vienna, and in lesser numbers to Styria, Lower Austria and Upper Austria has to be estimated at 50 percent".[95] Unfortunately, only few of these people, who settled in Vienna and other parts of Eastern Austria, encountered more favourable conditions – and mostly at the price of rejecting their Roma background.

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[92] *Baumgartner et al.* (2001), p. 254: "Auf das ganze Burgenland umgelegt bedeutet das, daß die Wohnungen und Häuser der burgenländischen Roma erst mit einer rund zwanzigjährigen Verspätung den durchschnittlichen Ausstattungsstandard burgenländischer Wohnungen des Jahres 1959 erreichten".

[93] The present settlement, "am Anger", which lies approximately 1 km from the city limit, was built after the Roma had to abandon their previous dwelling place in 1971/72, to make space for the construction of a new hospital.

[94] This waste disposal site was shut down in 1983.

[95] *Baumgartner/Freund* (2002), p. 97: "Es gibt jedoch einige Hinweise dafür, daß die Zuwanderung der Burgenland-Roma nach Wien nach 1945 beträchtlich gewesen sein muß. [...] Der Anteil der in erster Linie nach Wien und zu einem geringeren Anteil in die Steiermark, nach Niederösterreich und nach Oberösterreich abgewanderten Angehörigen der Burgenland-Roma nach 1945 muß daher auf rund 50 Prozent geschätzt werden".

5. The awakening of Roma consciousness — to what avail?

5.1 The Roma take the initiative

After decades during which the Roma were surrounded by silence and oblivion, the last fifteen years have seen some significant change, and the issue of the Roma has gained some resonance in Austria's public opinion. This has happened primarily thanks to the initiative of Roma who decided to bring to the fore the neglected history of their persecutions, as well as the problems and difficulties confronting them in the present. The first steps in this direction were made in Germany, where in the late 1970s first critical re-assessments of the history of the Roma were made[96]. In collaboration with the "International Romani Union" and the "German Sinti Association", the "Society for Threatened People" (*Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker*) lobbied in favour of the rights of the Roma. This led the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to acknowledge officially the genocide against the Roma and Sinti, and in the same year (1982) the "General Council of the German Sinti and Roma" was founded in Heidelberg. In Austria the topic of the Roma started to get some attention in the late 1980s. The year 1988, which marked the 50th anniversary of the *Anschluss* to Nazi Germany, gave a crucial input to this development.[97] This, together with the initiative taken by some Romni and Rom in Vienna and Burgenland, brought about first signs of self-organisational efforts and political claims.

In 1989, and as a follow-up to a common project of Roma and non-Roma that had been initiated in concomitance to the Commemorative Year 1988, the first Roma association (*Roma-Verein Oberwart*) was founded in Oberwart. Shortly afterwards, in 1991, the "Cultural Association of Austrian Roma" (*Kulturverein Österreichischer Roma*) and the "Romano Centro" were founded in Vienna in 1991. The associations "Nevo Drom" in Güssing, "Ketani Association of Roma and Sinti" in Linz[98], as well as the theater ensemble "Romano Drom" and the "Austrian Roma Youth Association", followed suit, and integrated a cultural and political landscape that – after 4 decades of lethargy - had started to become lively[99]. A common characteristic of these Roma associations is their strong socio-political orientation[100]. They came into being at a time when the situation of the Roma – at least those still living in Burgenland – had reached an absolute trough. Not only were the educational, occupational and housing conditions of the Roma terrible; exclusion and self-exclusion had led to wide-spread

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[96] For instance, the important book edited by *Zülch* (1979).

[97] The persecutions and discriminations of the Roma (in this specific case Lovara) in Austria were vividly depicted in the autobiography published by *Ceija Stojka* in 1988. See also *Rieger* (1996), p. 225 for futher examples, like the documentary novel "Abschied von Sidonie", which was published in 1989 by the writer *Erich Hackl*.

[98] In 1993 the Sinti had founded their own association in Villach, but this organization was rather short-lived, and was closed down in 1997.

[99] For this part on the different Roma associations, see *Karoly* (1998), p. 95-98.

[100] *Karoly* (1998), p. 98.

disillusionment and low self-esteem among the Roma. Denial of the own Roma identity seemed to be the only escape route from a situation of misery. A clear indication of this attitude can be found in the progressive decline of Romanés as spoken language: while their grandparents and parents were usually bi- and trilingual, "the majority of present-day Roma youth possess a vocabulary that is *de facto* monolingual"[101].

Within this context, the Roma associations have made it their task to claim basic political and social rights, as well as to cater directly to the needs of the Roma community, and to provide services which were not offered by the public institutions. For instance, in 1990 the *Verein Roma* started to offer extra-curricular learning support to Roma children – a service that provided the basic infrastructure to improve the educational attainment of these pupils. A major breakthrough represented the official recognition of the Roma as an ethnic minority, which was granted in 1993. This recognition is based on a law, the *Volksgruppengesetz* (VGG) of 1976, which from the beginning posed serious obstacles to the emergence of the Roma as a minority. It defined ethnic groups (minorities) as "groups of Austrian citizens that are resident and domiciled (have their home) in a part of the federal territory, with a non-German native language and an own folklore" ("*in Teilen des Bundesgebietes wohnhafte und beheimatete Gruppen österreichischer Staatsbürger mit nichtdeutscher Muttersprache und eigenem Volkstum*"). This definition establishes a clear link between an ethnic minority and its prolonged presence on (a particular part of) Austrian soil. In this way, the legislators have sought to restrict the benefits accruing from the new legislation to autochthonous minorities, while excluding individuals that have settled in Austria in recent times. The VGG does not quantify the time-span that entitles to be recognized as member of a *Volksgruppe*. However, in practice the law has always been interpreted in a restrictive sense, requiring residence for at least three generations. With a generation measured as 30 years, this means that "a Rom or Romni who can prove that their family has been in Austria for more than 90 years can claim the status of "autochthon" or membership in the *Volksgruppe*"[102].

The VGG and its interpretation had blocked the recognition of the Roma as minority for fifteen years. In the early 1990s several factors contributed to change the status quo. Not only the engagement of the Roma associations, but also the voices of other minority organisations, of scholars and individuals, as well as of the international community, helped to bring this change of attitude about. The recognition of the "Roma and Sinti" as the sixth Austrian minority group[103] brought some tangible benefits: now the Roma could benefit from the financial support to ethnic minorities, and they were entitled to form an advisory council

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[101] *Baumgartner et al.* (2001), p. 304: "Der Großteil der heutigen Roma-Jugend verfügt jedoch über ein de facto einsprachiges Repertoire [...]."

[102] *ERRC* (1996), p. 9.

[103] The other five groups, i.e. the Slovens, the Burgenland-Croats, the Hungarians, the Czechs and the Slovacs, had been recognised with the VGG of 1976.

(*Beirat*) that has consultative powers with the Chancellor[104]. The advantages that have come with the official recognition have to be set against the backdrop of less positive elements. For one thing, the recognition of the Roma and Sinti as minority was long overdue, and it has come too late for many of those Roma who had lived through the period of Nazism. In addition, the inclusion of the Roma and Sinti among the Austrian minorities has been based on the old VGG from the year 1976, and has *de facto* brought about a new division, by differentiating between autochthonous and allochthonous Roma. For this reason, many Roma organisations and experts have sharply criticised the shortcomings of the recognition that was accorded in 1993: "However defined, the number of Roma receiving political rights through the recognition is seriously limited, [...] it stands to reason that no more than 5,000 Roma in Austria received political and social rights through recognition, and a likely 20,000 to 30,000 were, at the same moment, excluded"[105]. In other words, "a scant 5,000 were permitted to carry on as before, with an occasional subsidy from the state, while the remaining 20,000 to 30,000 were delivered into legal limbo"[106].

It is no coincidence that the official number of Roma living in Austria, as recorded in the censuses, is very low. In the 1991 census (the first one were this question was posed) only 122 persons declared to speak Romanés as colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*), and 95 of them were resident in Burgenland. In 2001, and thus after the official recognition of the Roma as ethnic group, the number of people willing to identify themselves as Romanés-speakers jumped to 6,273, with 303 from Burgenland. This number is still far from the estimated population of Roma living on Austrian soil. However, it highlights the importance of the official status and of the acceptance of public opinion with respect to the "outing" of individuals as Roma. Arguably, strong discrimination and the lack of institutional recognition alienate individuals from their own ethnic identity, and lead them to avoid exposure. For instance, it can be shown that in Australia an increasing degree of public acceptance of the Aboriginal population, coupled with a loosening up of their definition[107], has brought about a sharp increase in their reported numbers. While in 1981 only 159,897 persons had declared to be Aboriginal, this number surged to 386,000 in the census from the year 1996. On the contrary, with respect to the Roma official statistics lead to stark underestimates in almost all European countries: in Slovakia the 1991 census reported 80,627 Roma (estimate: 480,000 to 520,000

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[104] "The exact form of the advisory council, as well as whether the ethnic group is afforded other positive rights, such as bilingual schooling and the use of first language in the administrative setting, vary by ethnic group, and are generally worked out at the political level.", *ERRC* (1996), p. 8.

[105] *ERRC* (1996), p. 10.

[106] *ERRC* (1996), p. 10. Schruiff (Stimme 49) argues that: "Das derzeitige System des VGG ist [...] geradezu pervers: Zuerst wird Generationen lang assimiliert, und nur jene Restgruppe, die trotz Assimilation noch vorhanden sein wird, dann – hundert Jahre später – plötzlich als Volksgruppe anerkannt. Dann wird auf einmal investiert und gefördert, um die letzten Reste von Sprache und Kultur zusammenzuklauben und zu archivieren"

[107] The most recent definition, coined in the 1980s, is very comprehensive, and states that: "An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives."

people), in Hungary the 1990 census counted 143,000 Roma (estimates range from 400,000 to 800,000 people), in Romania the official number of Roma has been set at 409,700 persons (estimates speak of a figure between 1.4 and 2.5 million). The discrepance between official figures and estimates in these countries, and its persistence in Austria, is a clear indication that more has to be done to induce the members of the Roma minorities to identify with their ethnic group.

Not long after its official recognition, the Roma community gained the spotlight as a consequence of the assassination, in February 1995, of four Roma in Oberwart. The four men were killed by the plastic explosive placed under a sign with the inscription "Roma back to India" (*Roma zurück nach Indien*) that had appeared on the dirt track leading up to the settlement *am Anger* in Oberwart. This xenophobic murder, the bloodiest racially motivated crime in the history of the Second Republic, had a strong impact on the Roma community, as well as on public opinion. "It is likely that Oberwart was selected as a target for the bombing precisely because the Roma there had begun demanding civil rights and equal treatment."[108] As a consequence, some Roma were led to re-consider the strategy, aimed at visibility and public denunciation, pursued by the leading Roma associations over the previous years. On the other hand, the Austrian institutions and civil society showed an, albeit belated, unprecedented degree of interest and solidarity with the Roma[109]. Although the policy-makers did not live up to the promises they made in the wake of the bombing, a sort of ban had been broken, and the Roma had become a more visible entity within the social and political sphere.

5.2 The present situation – a mixed picture

The decade that has passed since the bombing in 1995 has brought some tangible improvement to the Roma, at least to those living in the Oberwart district. In the aftermath of the tragic event, donations to the *Verein Roma* and to the *Kulturverein Österreichischer Roma* made it possible to set up a Roma-fund[110] that, besides supporting the relatives of the victims of the assassination, had mainly the goal to finance initiatives geared at improving the educational situation of the Roma, as well as their qualifications in view of the labour market. This, together with already existing programs aimed at supporting Roma children of schooling age, helped to bring about a change in the educational attainment. The most important project in this sense is run by the *Roma-Verein* in Oberwart: with the help of two teaching

[108] *ERRC* (1996), p. 8.

[109] See *Samer* (2001), pp. 79-81

[110] The fund was initially endowed with 1.8 mio. ATS, of which 800,000 were devoted to the financial assistance of the families of the victims.

assistants, over 30 children are assisted, in groups or – if need arises – on an individual basis[111]. At present, compulsory education is no longer a prohibitive goal for Roma children in Oberwart. For instance, in the years 1995/96 and 1996/97, none of the pupils in schooling age had to repeat a class. More significantly even, several Roma youngsters have been able to continue their studies up and beyond high school level; and a Romni who enrolled at the *Fachhochschule* in Eisenstadt in 2000 is likely to become the first holder of a bachelor's degree of her community. The Roma-Verein has also been running a helpdesk (*Beratungs-stelle*) for Roma that provides counselling for employment and a wide array of connected issues. At a local level, the housing situation of the Roma has been improved through a refurbishment of the Roma settlement *am Anger*. This action was part of a larger initiative by the city council, which included also a labour market project for Roma. Unfortunately, this last project did never reach its third and final module, which provided for the training of young Roma as skilled workers (*Facharbeiter*).

More in general terms, the last fifteen years have led to a rediscovery of the culture and identity of the Roma, both in Burgenland and in remaining Austria. Particular efforts in this direction have been made to encourage the use of Romanés, a language that the younger generations of Roma hardly speak. Language courses were organised first at the Roma helpdesk (in 1997), then at the primary school in Oberwart (1999) and eventually also at the adult education centre for Roma (*Volkshochschule der Burgenländischen Roma*) in 2000. In 1993, a linguistic project to "codify and develop teaching methods for the language varieties of the Austrian Roma" was started at the university of Graz. Initially the project had the goal to codify the four major variants of Romanés which are present in Austria. However, up to the present point, and partly due to the lack of organizational and cultural support within the respective Roma groups, only the Burgenland-Romanés has been covered successfully. In the meanwhile, an important contribution to the preservation and enrichment of the Roma languages has been given by the publication of (bilingual) periodicals: the *Verein Roma* publishes "Romani Patrin", the *Kulturverein Österreichischer Roma* is the editor of "Romano Kipo", and the *Romano Centro* has a journal that carries the same name as the association. Other significant cultural initiatives that have taken place include a documentary movie produced by the *Verein Roma*, the publication of several collections of poems, stories and fairy tales from the Roma tradition, the organization of conferences, as well as the formation of music and dance groups and theatre ensembles.

Although not all of the abovementioned initiatives have enjoyed the same longevity and success, they have brought some vigour to cultural identity and self-perception of the Roma. This development has gone hand in hand with a greater awareness of the Roma and their problems, both at a national and international level. So, for example, an exhibit with the title

[111] This number refers to children in compulsory school age only. Since 1997, the association has also started a successful collaboration with the local *Volkshochschule* to provide extra-curricular support to Roma pupils in high school.

"Roma Policies in Austria, the European Union and beyond" has recently been organised in the European Parliament in Brussels by Austrian MEPs. The exhibit covered information about the Roma in Burgenland, and wanted to make a contribution to the debate that is currently taking place at EU level in light of the impending enlargement of the Union. Together with Slovenia and the Czech Republic, Austria has also participated in "RomBase", an EU-funded project with the goal to provide a set of tools (from a database with information on history and culture, to didactic games and materials) to facilitate the encounter with the Roma culture. Its target group are both non-Roma, especially teaching staff at schools, and Roma, with the aim of "giving them an opportunity to seriously deal with their own culture and history".[112] While all these initiatives have to be valued positively, because they aim at raising awareness and spreading information, it seems that concrete solutions to tackle the problems affecting the Roma in Austria are still lagging behind. In fact, all specific differences notwithstanding, the Roma in Burgenland and in remaining Austria continue to share common challenges on their way to integration: these consist mainly of problems resulting from discrimination, and from poor access to education and employment.

It has already been shown that discrimination has been a constant companion to the Roma, both through time and through space. While many Roma have chosen to hide their identity, and live largely assimilated to the majority population, those that have maintained their diversity are still a target of prejudice. This has been particularly true of the Roma in Burgenland who have lived in close proximity, and isolated from the rest of society. The discriminations against them reached a peak in the 1980s, and were one of the driving forces behind the decision of many Roma to speak out. At that time, Roma youngsters were interdicted access to some bars and clubs in the Oberwart area; the state-run Labour Market Service (AMS) accepted the requests of employers "not to place gypsies" for job openings; and the municipality of Oberwart placed a sign with the name of the town short of the settlement *am Anger*, as if to highlight that the Roma did not belong to them[113]. The developments of the 1990s improved this situation, and at least the discriminatory acts against Roma lost their overt and self-evident character. This does not mean, however, that the Roma are accepted as equal members of society. The *European Roma Rights Center* has compiled a detailed report on the situation of the Roma in Austria, finding ample anecdotal evidence of discriminations and persecutions[114].

Another crucial issue is represented by education – seen by many as the only path the Roma can follow to reach a true integration in society. Social and political activism, as well as the public outcry that followed the bombing of 1995, have brought momentum to educational initiatives for the Roma in Burgenland. As noted, there have been considerable improvements

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[112] See http://www-gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/rombase/index.en.html.

[113] *Samer* (2001).

[114] *ERRC* (1996).

there. At the same time, it has to be stressed that the situation of the remaining Roma is still precarious, and that their present educational situation contains the seeds of future exclusion and marginalisation. The Roma community in Burgenland has enjoyed a certain degree of popularity, and was, in many ways, easier to target with educational support projects. However, the bulk of the Roma children are living in other parts of Austria, and mainly in the area of Vienna. These children face great hurdles at school, and would need active support and integration policies to compensate for cultural and socio-economic deficiencies. However, the willingness of local and national authorities to provide funding for such initiatives is very limited. For instance, a specific project set up by the *Romano Centro* that sends trained part-time teachers to schools with high numbers of Roma pupils, in order to support their integration, has to rely mainly on external funding, and its continuation is constantly endangered. The *Romano Centro* runs also a program that sends high school and university students to Roma families in order to provide pupils with free extra tuition. These initiatives are very popular and successful, but they alone are not sufficient to solve the problems faced by the Roma children. This is particularly true because, at the same time, due to budgetary considerations the number of regular teachers in schools is being reduced all over Austria. In the city of Vienna alone 1,400 teaching jobs are scheduled to be cut between 2001/2 and 2004/5[115]. This drastic measure hits also the "integration-teachers" (*Integrations- und StützlehrerInnen*) – who for obvious reasons are particularly numerous in Vienna – and thus adds additional strain to the position of children from Roma families, and from ethnically diverse backgrounds more in general.

Whereas education is of crucial importance for the future of younger generations of Roma, the labour market represents the terrain where adult Roma meet the most pressing challenges. As will be seen in the second paper, the labour market situation in Burgenland, and especially in Oberwart, has not improved sufficiently over the last years. Particularly low-skilled categories of workers, to which the Roma belong, are confronted with circumstances that have deteriorated over the last decade. The high numbers of Roma who seek the support of the help-desk of the *Verein Roma*[116] bear testimony to the feeble job perspectives of the Roma community. Our survey will provide a clear picture of the occupational situation of the Roma in Oberwart. On the contrary, no detailed information on the employment situation of the Roma in remaining parts of Austria is available. However, the persisting difficulties in the educational sphere, coupled with the existing discrimination problems, relegate all Roma who are living in Austria to a precarious position on the labour market.

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[115] "Lehrer-Vorruhestand: In Wien werden viele Posten nicht nachbesetzt: Zwischen 2001/02 und dem Schuljahr 2004/05 sollten so nach und nach österreichweit rund 5.000 Landeslehrer eingespart werden, rund 1.400 davon in Wien", APA, 19.11.2003, http://www.ahs-aktuell.at/news/11/191103c.html.

[116] According to information provided by the *Beratungsstelle*, in the course of the year 2003 almost 240 counselling sessions were given.

6. The marginalisation of the Roma – the outcome of a multifaceted process

We have indulged in a historical analysis to provide evidence for the social, political and economic forces that have determined the marginal position of the Roma in modern society. The facts that have been recounted permit to isolate the elements that have given rise to the present condition of the Roma, in Austria as well as in other parts of Europe, with its distinctive features. Exclusion of the Roma minority was not instantaneous, nor was it inevitable. "The birth of stereotypes is rather a process, which has to be reconstructed in the light of the western civilisation – as part of progress itself".[117] The marginalisation of the Roma is the outcome of an exclusion process that has taken place at several levels. We can differentiate between a socio-anthropological, a politico-institutional, and an economic dimension of the problem.

At a socio-anthropological level, the discrimination of the Roma is connected with their diversity in respect of the majority population, their role as 'strangers'. According to Zygmunt Bauman, "the threat he [the stranger] carries is more awesome than that which one can fear from the enemy. The stranger threatens the sociation itself – the very possibility of sociation. He calls the bluff of the opposition between friends and enemies as the complete *mappa mundi*, as the difference which consumes all differences and hence leaves nothing outside itself. As that opposition is the foundation on which all social life and all differences which patch and hold it together rest, the stranger saps social life itself. And all this because the stranger is neither friend nor enemy; and because he may be both."[118] In this light, the presence of the Roma has always questioned the fundamental dualism between friends and enemies that is a determinant part of the identity of majority society. As groups that were in constant movement, the Roma kept coming in touch with communities that found it problematic to be confronted with them. As strangers they were not taken for what they were, but rather reduced to clichés. Since their appearance, the Roma had been viewed as eerie beings, and accordingly labelled as spies, liars, thieves, wizards, and so on. These stereotypes represented strategies to avoid confrontation with them, to keep them at safe distance.

It is therefore no coincidence that romanticism, with its emphasis of nature over civilisation, emotion over rationality, mystery over enlightenment, found great interest in the "gypsies"[119]. The romantics turned some of the stereotypes affecting the Roma in a better light – only to confirm that their perception of them was dominated by clichés and generic definitions. The mere definition "gypsy" – which negates the diversity of the many groups of Roma, and which has often been used as a synonym of social parasite or thief – is a case in point. The

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[117] *Maciejewski* (1996), p. 12: "Die Geburt der Stereotype ist vielmehr ein Vorgang, der aus der Dynamik des westlichen Zivilisationsprozesses rekonstruiert werden muss – als ein Moment des Fortschritts selbst".

[118] *Bauman* (1990), p. 145.

[119] See *Maciejewski* (1996), p. 21.

discrimination against the Roma as strangers was not limited to the terminology used to address them, nor to the notions and stereotypes that shaped collective imaginary; it embraced also more concrete dimensions. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman, the most common approach of majority society to the uncertainties, fears and hermeneutic problems posed by strangers is represented by "the method of territorial and functional separation"[120]. The historical facts that have been recounted in the previous sections provide numerous examples of this territorial and functional separation. The countless pieces of legislation targeting the Roma, their relegation to precarious economic niches, and their geographic segregation in the outskirts of towns and villages, are such examples. These discriminations have assumed many forms in the course of history, and can easily be traced up to recent times: "An apartheid, i.e. the allocation of special places outside or at the margin of society could moreover be found in schools, where children were often relegated to a "gypsy bench"; and even in the Catholic cemetery in Oberwart, where a special area for "gypsy graves" existed[121].

The emergence of strong institutions – like compulsory education and a regulated labour market – has greatly increased the scope of territorial and functional separation. This is why the modern nation-states have played a major role in the exclusion of the Roma at a politico-institutional level. "The national states collectivize friends and enemies. In addition to this universal function, however, they also eliminate the strangers; or at least they attempt to do so. [...] The national state is designed primarily to deal with the problem of strangers, not enemies".[122] The era of absolutism first, and the age of nationalism in the 19th century, constitute the decisive moments of this development. "The [...] homogenisation process of the state system, as well as of the life of its population, becomes stronger during the period of the so-called absolutism. The nation-state – which emerges later as a consequence of the bourgeois revolution – is the apex of this process, and expands its functions to the point where it wants to homogenise the population itself".[123] As we have seen in Section 1.2, both the absolutist monarchy and the modern nation-state have targeted the Roma with their policies and institutional enforcements. Empress Maria Theresia tried to bring about homogenisation, and to shape the Roma according to the traits of majority population. The emerging nation-

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[120] *Bauman* (1990), p. 146.

[121] This separation was abolished only when the cemetery was re-structured in the 1970s. *Rieger* (1997), p. 65: "Eine Apartheid, also die Zuweisung eigener Plätze außerhalb, bzw. am Rand der eigentlichen Gemeinschaft gab es außerdem in Schulen, wo den Kindern häufig eine "Zigeunerbank" zugewiesen wurde, aber auch auf dem katholischen Friedhof von Oberwart mit einem eigenen Bereich für "Zigeunergräber". Diese Trennung wurde erst bei der Neuordnung des Friedhofs in den siebziger Jahren aufgehoben".

[122] *Bauman* (1990), p. 153.

[123] *Heckmann* (1998) [in Bielefeld], p. 61: "Die mit den genannten Bedingungen verlaufenden Vereinheitlichungsprozesse des staatlichen Systems wie der Lebensbedingungen der Bevölkerung verstärken sich noch in der Phase des so genannten Absolutismus. Der danach mit der bürgerlichen Revolution entstehende Nationalstaat als erster "Höhepunkt" dieses politisch-staatlichen Vereinheitlichungsprozesses dehnt seine Funktion aus und will jetzt auch die Vereinheitlichung der Bevölkerung."

state focused its attention on migratory movements and the control of the existing Roma. Since they did not fall within the categories of people that represented the constituting elements of the nation and the national economy, the constitutional state excluded them from citizenship.

This last observation, with its reference to the national economy, highlights another dimension of the marginalisation problem of the Roma. The emergence of the nation-state was clearly linked to the industrial revolution, and the creation of a national economy, based on a market for the circulation of goods and persons. During previous centuries, the Roma had been able to find socio-economic niches, and to define their contribution to society through the trades and handcrafts that constituted their traditional occupations. This situation did not change much during the initial phases of the industrial revolution, when thriving cities existed along backward rural areas. "Once upon a time the Roma had a fix place within the loose context of the waning feudal realms. Their life-style was a concrete alternative for some impoverished peasants and survived mercenary soldiers; in the production and circulation [of goods] in rural areas impoverished by wars and early industrialisation, their contribution was as important as that of others outside the agricultural sector."[124] It is no coincidence that in Austria the Roma confined their presence mainly to Burgenland, a region whose economy rested largely on the agricultural sector until well into the 20th century. As Box 1 evidences, up to the 1920s the Roma had kept to their traditional jobs. However, these skills and crafts became gradually obsolete. During the inter-war period it became apparent that the Roma were fated to loose out of the structural change in the mode of production. The economic basis for their subsistence was waning. At the same time, their status as second-class citizens made it very difficult for them to adapt to the changed economic circumstances. As we have seen in Section 4.2, this became particularly true in the aftermath of World War II. "While the traditional subsistence opportunities for the Sinti and Roma had been reduced since the beginning of industrialisation, the socio-economic transformations after World War II left them with even less scope for development."[125]

To sum up, in the case of the Roma, social discrimination, institutional exclusion and economic deprivation have come to form a vicious circle. This process pushed them to the margins of society, and by the early 20th century it had transformed them into obscure, dispensable subjects in the eyes of the majority population. The Roma were strangers in the socio-anthropological sense of the word, they did not enjoy the rights of full citizenship, and they were losers of the economic transformation process. The labour market and labour as

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[124] *Streck* (1979), p. 65. [in Zülch]: "Die Zigeuner hatten einmal einen festen Platz im losen Zusammenhang sich auflösender Feudalreiche. Ihre Lebensweise bot sich manchem verarmten Bauern und überlebenden Söldner als konkrete Alternative; in der Produktion und Zirkulation der durch Krieg und frühe Industrialisierung verelendeten Landstriche war ihr Beitrag so wichtig wie der anderer außerhalb des landwirtschaftlichen Sektors."

[125] *Thurner* (1994), p. 90: "Erfuhren seit Beginn der Industrialisierung die traditionellen Existenzmöglichkeiten für Sinti/Roma ohnehin eine Reduzierung, so ließen die sozio-ökonomischen Veränderungen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg noch weniger Freiräume offen".

activity represent a sphere where these aspects come together, and as labour has become increasingly organised and regulated the Roma have become increasingly excluded. Modernity, the emergence of mass society and the establishment of the capitalist mode of production have gone hand in hand with the attribution of a central role to labour. The ennoblement of work is a product of the last centuries, and stands in contrast with the more differentiated notion that was prevalent up to the Middle Ages[126]. From Luther's concept of *Beruf* to the Marxist idea of labour as the building-stone of class-consciousness, labour has come to be seen as *the* defining activity of the human being. Moreover, the sphere of labour has increasingly become the medium through which the individual has determined his/her position with respect to the rest of society. This is particularly evident if we look at the emergence of the welfare state, where work secures the existence of the individual 'from cradle to grave'. Also, and especially so in the Anglo-Saxon world, the job and the attributes that go with a particular position are seen as an integral part of a person's identity[127]. The Roma – partly because they have their own set of values and partly because they have been living at the margins of modernity – do not have a proper place within this world defined by work. This is why inclusion in the labour market is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for their social integration. The success of this inclusion and integration process (as opposed to assimilation) depends on a certain degree of acceptance of the diversity represented by the Roma. And this acceptance, as all instances in which diversity is addressed explicitly and not merely glanced over, could prove very fruitful for our society. It could make a valuable contribution to a critical reflection about the role of work in our value-system. From Hannah Arendt's distinction between work, labour and activity[128], to the re-evaluation of 'leisure'[129] and the debate about "the end of work"[130], the last decades have produced a lively discussion that has been questioning our understanding of labour. To deal with the challenge represented by the integration of the Roma, provides therefore an additional occasion to reflect about the values that underpin the socio-economic functioning of our society.

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[126] For a brief overview of the evolution of the idea of labour in the Western tradition, see *Drescher* (1996).

[127] Another aspect worth of mention is the paramount role that paid work has played in the emancipation of women, and in the re-definition of gender-roles.

[128] Hannah Arendt has analysed the "human condition" from the point of view of the activities that the human being is capable of, and this analysis is connected to the evolution of the concept of work. See *Arendt* (1973).

[129] See, for instance, *Martin and Mason* (1985) and *Glyptis* (1989).

[130] See, for instance, *Rifkin* (1995) and *Beck* (2000).

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