

# **IDENTIFYING AND CHANGING STEREOTYPES BETWEEN ROMA AND NON-ROMA: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE**

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## **Abstract**

Having shortly delineated and theoretically defined the concept of stereotypes (as collective social constructs) and stereotyping as such, the author turns to much more complex issue as to how to identify and change stereotypes about Roma, which are deeply rooted in mainstream European societies where they live and also those stereotypes that are nurtured and strictly followed by the Roma and which relate to non-Roma. The author arrives at a conclusion that today one can note several factors and conditions in European countries which still nurture and further reinforce especially anti-Roma stereotypes. According to him, the specific and carefully elaborated stereotypes-oriented policies and strategies which favour mutual education, knowledge and understanding as well as ongoing contact and dialogue between the two different ethnic, social and cultural identities at both EU and member states levels are *conditio sine qua non* for the enhanced and overall Roma inclusion and integration.

**Keywords:** stereotypes, stereotyping, collective social representations, Roma - non-Roma relationships

## **Introduction**

Stereotypes are as old as human culture itself. They reflect ideas that groups of people hold about others who are different from them. Most stereotypes tend to make us feel superior in some way to the person or group being stereotyped. Stereotypes ignore the uniqueness of individuals by painting all members of a group with the same brush. Nowadays the number of studies on stereotypes and related topics (mainly prejudice and discrimination) has increased substantially, particularly concerning gender and ethnic issues. As a result, today we have a multitude of studies examining and giving comprehensive analyses of stereotypes and prejudice toward Afro-Americans, women,

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the elderly, the disabled, physically handicapped or mentally ill, fat people, LGBT, individuals with AIDS, to mention just a few of them. Such overwhelming interest in studying stereotypes and stereotyping is quite understandable given that these negative beliefs can easily lead to harmful outcomes both for the individuals, to whom stereotypes directly affect and for society at large.

In many European countries Roma people and Travellers face day-to-day discriminatory and rejecting behaviour and the climate of hostility is maintained towards them only because the mainstream population widely accepts false perceptions of this minority group branded a menace to people and their property. This age-old rejection by the public at large and frequently also by local authorities, is to a great extent, brought about by the negative images each of them holds with regard to Roma and Travellers; vague images eventually grow into active suspicion. Some 10 - 12 million Roma and Travellers are estimated to live in Europe, present in each European country, and particularly in Bulgaria, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Hungary, Turkey, Albania, Greece, Spain, France, Slovenia and Italy. They are amongst the most deprived of all communities, facing daily discrimination, harassment and racial insults, living in extreme poverty and exclusion from the normal life that other people take for granted – going to school, seeing the doctor, applying for a job or having decent housing. Past efforts to help them have not brought the hoped-for results, and although laws do exist in Europe, they all too often fail to make an impact on the daily lives of Romani families. Such bleak picture of Romani people situation in Europe is a consequence of long-lasting stereotypes and prejudices accompanying the members of this ethnic minority for centuries. To understand them properly, first we need to have a look at their creation and evolution.

The article aims at presenting and analysing social stereotypes that prevail within both Roma and non-Roma communities in different countries in Europe. A particular emphasis is placed on examining the possibilities and measures for reducing such collective representations. However, in order to be able to discuss the stereotypes about Roma and non-Roma more in detail, it is first necessary to elucidate the concept of stereotype and stereotyping by focusing on stereotypes defined as collective (social) representations. Therefore, in continuation, I centralise myself mainly on this aspect of the social and cultural reality.

## **Stereotypes as collective (social) constructs**

An important question for this article is whether all socially constructed images are stereotypes. Most certainly not but it is astonishing that so many beliefs are wrongly labelled as stereotypes. Some authors, including Berting, Glăveanu and Hofman (Berting, 2012: 13-14; Glăveanu, 2007; Hofman, 2004: 249-250), are of opinion that stereotypes are only those beliefs that surpass the individual level. In other words, stereotypes can be described as “collective constructs” and particularly the subtype of “shared constructs”. According to Glăveanu “as shared constructs stereotypes gain validity only when group members share similar perceptions” (Glăveanu, 2007). Glăveanu is further of belief that “genuine stereotypes are beliefs shared by groups and refer to members of another group/category” (Glăveanu, 2007).

A proper understanding of the concept of stereotype requires deeper insight into the link that exists between stereotypes as collective images and reality and, in particular, conditions on which this link is based. In my view, the most valuable and the clearest explanation of this question has been given by distinguished professor Jan Berting (2012: 19-23) in his most recent treatise on collective representations. After thorough discussion and analysis of this problematic issue he has arrived at some relevant and substantial conclusions and findings. For instance, he has discovered that in daily communication and relationship as social beings we are confronted with various types of collective representations and that in this context several theories, models and paradigms are closely tied to the empirical world. These outcomes coincide with the position of most of the natural sciences, whereas in most other cases the relation between collective representations and social reality is much more equivocal or even totally absent. Also, when the collective representations refer to an empirical reality, this reality is much less stable and much more versatile than in the natural sciences. Consequently, several collective representations are rather close to reality, even though they can never correspond to the reality. The other types of collective representations are further removed from this reality or are just pictures in our head without any real empirical references.

Following these findings and explanations professor Berting (2012: 23) defines collective representations as:  
shared mental images (in some cases also shared conviction or belief), which persons and collective entities have about the social and natural reality they live in, but also about social worlds with which they do not have an immediate experience.

He also claims that “often collective representations refer to imaginary worlds or to worlds that we cannot perceive empirically”. According to him, collective representations can be seen as “mental maps of the social scene” or “systematic ways of perceiving the outside world” (Berting, 2012: 25). As such they are conscious constructions. Although collective representations sometimes pose serious problems in intergroup relations, they can be very instrumental for a given social entity, since they are, in the first place, means by which individuals and groups orient themselves in an otherwise extremely complex and incomprehensible world. Professor Berting (2012: 24) is convinced that stereotypes as collective representations “give indications about who we are and who are the others”. However, they can also lead to confusions, disorientations and distortions. What is more, they can serve (to political leaders for example) as instruments of manipulation, delusion and deceit.

In his recent discussion about collective representations professor Berting gives particular attention to the social stereotypes, which can refer, among other, to racial and ethnic groups. I share his opinion that “collective stereotypes are inside us” and thus they are actually “pictures in our head” (Berting, 2012: 83). I also agree with him and other scholars that, in this context, stereotypes can be connected with positive and negative attitudes towards other people, communities and groups to which they refer. According to professor Berting (2012: 83), the social stereotypes are implanted in our heads in the process of growing up in a specific society and in a specific social milieu together with the language that we learned at home, in school and in the social networks in which we participated.

As we shall see below stereotypes about Roma and non-Roma carry mostly racial and ethnic connotations. Thus, for the purposes of this article, they are looked at from the perspective of collective social stereotypes as explained above.

## **Identifying stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma**

### **Stereotypes about Roma**

Despite some positive stereotypes (e.g. Roma have a natural talent for music), the stereotypes about Roma are overwhelmingly negative. The dominant groups in Eastern Europe regard Roma as uneducated, uninterested in school and work, conniving, dirty, and lazy. Identification of a Roma is made in the first place by physical appearance (e.g. dark skin and hair), smell (e.g. they are dirty and stink), attire (e.g. women wear the traditional Kaldarashi costume with multiple colourful aprons

and hair separated in braids decorated with coins) or language spoken (Romanes, the language spoken by Roma in Eastern Europe). Nowadays images about Roma and Travellers include several criminal stereotypes: they are regarded as beggars, thieves, swindlers, pickpockets, trespassers, rowdies, dirty, immoral, con-man, trickster. In addition, they are considered unsocial, social misfits, dishonest, lazy, work-shy, layabouts and parasitic deviants. Based on the stereotype that Roma children are unteachable, they are often refused admission and are sent to schools meant for mentally disabled. Many people see Roma as riff-raffs (social marginals) living on the edge of town, as idlers ill-disciplined and in general they have been deemed lawless, depraved and irreligious. The same stereotypes about Roma find expression in the terms employed in many languages and their popular slangs.

In most countries whatever term is used to designate Roma and Travellers in general is pejorative, tinged with disparagement and carrying the full negative weight of the group image. Roma and Travellers are often accused of living outside the most basic rules, but the fact is that their rules are not known by outsiders, and certainly not recognised (Liégeois, 1994: 190). Opinion polls show that the prejudice and stereotypes about Roma which form the kernel of popular imagery are universal and ubiquitous these days. As a general rule, people interviewed have little tolerance for contact of any kind between themselves and Roma, who are seen as outside the pale of their lives and their culture, and as very peculiar. The urge to make nomads settle down is still very strong. The settled person sometimes recognises his own refusal to accept Roma and Travellers, but never admits to actively rejecting them. (Liégeois, 1994: 191).

Today, the following stereotypes about Roma are widespread in European societies: "Gypsies steal", "Gypsies are mentally handicapped, they spread diseases and don't like school", "The Gypsies live off other people's backs", "Gypsies are work-shy parasites worthy only of contempt", "Gypsies are antisocial and destroy their dwellings", "Gypsies have bad manners – they are all fiddlers and brawlers", "Gypsies like to live in isolation and they are united among themselves, unlike us (members of mainstream population)", "Gypsies do not want to be integrated or to work or to live in a civilized way like us (members of mainstream population)", "The Gypsies are damaging the image of our country in Europe", etc. Recurring themes regarding Roma in most European countries are stealing, refusing to work, having too many children, atrocious personal hygiene and bad personal finance management.

The text given below comprises a great number of most common stereotypes about Roma which are nowadays to be found in European countries: Roma are freedom loving, easy going, and carefree nomads, wearing colourful clothes and lots of golden jewellery. They are passionate dancers, gifted artisans, and great musicians. Their women are beautiful and seductive like Georges Bizet's *Carmen* or Esmeralda from the 'Hunchback of Notre Dame'. They tell fortune and can curse you if you do not give them any money. They are poor and beg. They do nothing to improve their own situation and steal geese and chickens. They prefer to live on welfare than to work. They have more children than they can feed and clothe. One day they will probably "out-baby" the majority population. Girls get married at a very early age, the men beat their wives and exploit their children. At night they dance around camp fires and sometimes they steal babies in order to sell them. They do not have a religion, are dirty, and a burden to society. They do not want to integrate and marginalize themselves. They are most happy when they are away from non-Roma. They do not want to be citizens of the country they live in and whenever they migrate, they ruin the reputation of the country that they have come from. They like to live close to trash dumps and their houses are very dirty. They are afraid of water, allergic to soap, and do not know how to use a water toilet. They are a source of disease. They do not know how to read and write, and somehow are not interested in learning it or in going to school. They must be mentally deficient. Maybe they are not even human beings. They live in huge family groups and do not mind to share one room with ten people. They are greedy and never satisfied. They are lazy and untrustworthy. They are genetically predestined to become thieves and drug dealers. And anyway, the term 'Roma' is just an invention and they are actually called Gypsies or Tsigani (Internet 1).

Many of afore-mentioned stereotypes about Roma have proved to be unrealistic. For instance, there is no evidence to suggest that perceptions regarding idleness when it comes to education and employment are true and studies from Hungary suggest the contrary, that given a supportive environment Roma students are no less motivated than other students. Also, the survey data indicate that Roma actively seek employment. In Bulgaria in 1997, 46 per cent of Roma reported that they were looking for a job, in comparison with 19 per cent of the total unemployed population. In Romania, 35 per cent of unemployed Roma had looked for employment during the previous week, in comparison with 15 per cent of the total population. Similar results were found for Hungary (Ringold, 2000: 16, 26). In reality, poverty nowadays is often due to the fact that Roma have been left out of the post-communist political and economic transitions. Still today, they

are discriminated and often excluded from the school system; they face discrimination when seeking for a job, and in many countries they are segregated in geographically isolated settlements. In some cases they are victims of institutional discrimination, for example when their situation excludes them from the social protection benefits. As a consequence, many Roma today are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion which cannot be considered only their own fault.

### **Stereotypes about non-Roma**

On the other hand, Roma define themselves as distinct and different from “Gadje”. The word “Gadjo/Gadji”<sup>1</sup> is commonly used within Roma communities to indicate non-Romani man/woman and, unlike the term “Gypsy” does not carry a pejorative or offensive meaning. A Gadjo man or Gadji woman is a person who does not have Romanipen (i.e. Romani spirit, Romani essence, Romani Code and willingness to follow the Romani Code, self-perception as a member of Romani society and willingness to be such a member, set of “Romani” strains etc., all as part of the whole). Usually this is a person who is not ethnic Roma, but an ethnic Roma may be considered as a Gadjee if he/she has no Romanipen. At the same time, Gadjo is also one of Romani philosophical terms. Roma of the Western Europe and Americas often interpret gadjos as “impure” people because they think that only following Romani Code (i.e. a set of rules regulating relationships inside the Romani community and set limits for customs, behavior and other aspects of Romani life) may make a person be “pure”. This helps to explain how Roma have maintained a separate and unique identity across centuries, despite repeated pressures for their integration. In this context, the following text is quite interesting:

I found the strangest contradiction among the Roma was their talk of the Gadje when they did not want to be stereotyped as Gypsy. Despite their progressive attitude in the areas of literature, rights and the domestic situation, the Roma with whom I was able to meet, still seemed to hold

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<sup>1</sup> “The word Gadjo comes from Sanskrit (*gadjjha*) and basically it meant a civilian, a non-warrior, when the Rajputs and their followers left India to become the Roma in Asia. Roma were warriors, Gadje were civilians, domestics belonging to non-military castes. Today, Gadjo is a parallel of goy among the Jewish people, somebody who is not of your own group. It is simply a word used to define a person who is not a member of the Roma nation. It is not pejorative in the sense of “Gypsy”. If somebody wants to say a man was killed in an accident, Romani has no general word for man; Roma have to say the victim was a Rom or a Gadjo.” (Sijercic, 1999).

an innate prejudice against the Gadje world. I can hardly blame them considering the difficulties they've faced in gaining rights in the European community, but I found myself offended when they referred to me as Gadje. The Gadje is the 'other' to the Roma, the Outsiders and Interlopers. By remained separate from us, the Roma had managed to do what Hitler and his Holocaust had attempted to do for the German people: create a pure race. By not mingling with the Gadje the Roma were able to keep their blood 'pure', and their culture has remained intact, despite centuries of persecution. But what had been their protection in the early days of Europe, had now become their handicap. While at first, being separated helped keep the Roma within Roma culture, that same separateness had alienated them from the rest of Europe and any benefit they may have gained by learning the outsider's ways. When they called me a Gadje, my first thought was that they had just slighted me, and I frowned. I tried to explain that I was just as offended by their discrimination and stereotype of me as a Gadje as they were by others' stereotypes of them as Gypsy. They all said that when they called me Gadje, it was not meant to offend, but rather as a marker of what I was 'other-than-Roma' (Spicer).

It is obvious that Roma people have also developed certain stereotypes about the non-Roma, the Gadje. Authors that studied Roma found that the Roma often view the Gadje "negatively as oppressive, domineering, source of trouble, easy victims of Gypsy cunning, or sometimes positively as trustworthy, but most significantly, the Gadje are considered impure because they do not respect the Gypsy code of hygiene—marimé" (Gabor, 2007: 279). This distinction continues to impact the integration of Roma into society at large, their participation in civil society, and their use of public services.

### **Concluding observations concerning Roma and non-Roma stereotypes**

To varying degrees Romani communities have remained insular and separate from the rest of society. While some Romani communities have integrated, other traditional Romani communities and extended families are close-knit, providing both security and protection from the outside world. In some cases, this division between the worlds of Roma and Gadje (non-Roma) has reinforced stereotypes and mistrust on both sides, and has contributed to the exclusion of some communities. Roma may therefore be reluctant to participate fully in education because of fear of losing their cultural identity. This dynamic likely influences other aspects of life, including employment preferences and use of health services. Conversely, the distance between Romani and non-Romani communities causes mistrust and misunderstanding, especially among



non-Roma and contributes to negative stereotyping and discrimination. Lack of integration and participation of Romani people in civic life, as well as the poverty of many Romani communities, contribute to resentment, as Roma are perceived by mainstream society as dependent on social assistance and regular consumers of scarce state resources (Ringold, 2000: 7-8).

To sum up, the early common stereotypes about Roma in Europe can be seen to have strong racial, ethnic and class bases. These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually reinforcing. Indeed, the three overlap to the extent that it is impossible to be sure where the influence of one ends and the others begin. The subsequent stereotyping of Roma invoked fears and antipathy among non-Romani people alongside themes of idleness, indiscipline and depravity, themes which persist to this day. Later all these stereotypes assumed more economic and social character and the main concern is that various aspects of Romani culture and living conditions also reinforce stereotypes by limiting communication between Roma and non-Roma in European countries, and thus contributing to a vicious circle of isolation and marginalisation. On the other hand, stereotypes, mostly those with negative connotation, also evolved within Romani communities. The latter reflect harsh conditions, suppression and ill-treatment to which the Roma in European societies have been subjected throughout the history and the truth is that poor communication and negative stereotypes of both Roma and non-Roma breed mistrust and reinforce preconceptions and prejudice on both sides.

### **By way of conclusion: Strategies and tools for changing stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma**

A significant feature of social stereotypes is that they, as collective images in our head that have only a weak link with the observable reality, are extremely resistant to changes despite information that contradicts them. Mostly “such information is interpreted as an exception to the general rule, as an incident, etc.” (Berting, 2012: 84). Two attributes of stereotyped attitudes which are closely related to each other and are to be found especially in the early stage of research and scholarly work on stereotypes (Lippmann, 1922: 99; Rokeach, 1948: 261) are those of persistence and rigidity. The majority of stereotypes about Roma have practically maintained their original purport in different societies for centuries.

Professor Berting (2012: 84) states that this resistance to change is also due to the fact that the stereotypes “facilitate the communication between the members of the in-group, being a sort of short-hand

description of the “Other(s)”. He points out that social stereotypes are to be considered “collective representations of a specific type” and “in many cases these collective representations can be conceived of as elements that are very resistant to change within a more encompassing collective representation” (Berting, 2012: 84). On the other hand, “it is also possible that a collective representation of a society as a whole is in fact a social stereotype, resistant to change and with only shallow connections with the reality it pretends to represent” (Berting, 2012: 84).

Many researches and studies on stereotypes suggest that stereotypes are learned at an early age and can thus be stubbornly resistant to change. “Even when people encounter a stereotyped group member who violates the group stereotype, they often continue to maintain the stereotype by splitting it into subtypes. For example, when encountering a Jewish philanthropist, people with anti-Semitic stereotypes may distinguish philanthropic Jews from “money-hungry Jews” by creating a subtype for “good Jews”. As a result of subtyping, stereotypes become impervious to disconfirming evidence.” (Internet 2). Professor Jan Berting and dr. Christiane Villain-Gandossi are of opinion that stereotypes may become, under specific circumstances, less outspoken and less frequently used, while it is much more difficult to change or reduce them.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of social stereotypes as it is described above. Yet all is not lost. Some studies and researches (including the one carried out by Jennifer Crocker and Renee Weber in 1983)<sup>2</sup> indicate that stereotypes are responsive to new information and subsequently can be successfully changed or even reduced to some extent if dealt with properly and social perceptions made more accurate when people are motivated to do so. Several scholars and researchers have found that stereotypes may be widespread and persistent, but they are also amenable to change when people make an effort to reduce them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Email consultations with Prof. Berting and Dr. Villain-Gandossi in March 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Authors proposed three models of stereotype change which predict different response patterns and are to be chosen dependant on concrete conditions such as the size of samples: “*the bookkeeping model in which each instance of stereotype-relevant information is used to gradually modify the stereotype, the conversion model in which stereotypes change radically in response to dramatic or salient instances, and the subtyping model in which new stereotypic structures are developed to accommodate instances not easily assimilated by existing stereotypes.*” (Crocker and Weber, 1983: 459).

<sup>3</sup> In a study on the effects of counter-stereotypic imagery, for example, Irene Blair and her colleagues found that implicit gender stereotypes declined after people spent a few minutes imagining a strong woman. Likewise, Nilanjana Dasgupta and Anthony Greenwald found that pro-White biases on the Implicit Association Test declined after

In the light of these findings one can presuppose that also (social) stereotyping between Roma and non-Roma can be reduced, though it is not always easy to identify the most appropriate method or a combination of two or more approaches which could lead to effective results in specific circumstances. When looking for adequate strategic tools aimed at changing stereotypes about Roma and non-Roma, in my mind, it is first necessary to ensure that measures and actions chosen seek to eliminate false beliefs by providing correct and accurate information; avoid “one-way” communication (both Roma and non-Roma must be given an opportunity to engage with the topic of stereotypes and to contribute their views); provide the practical skills to empower Roma and non-Roma to speak out against stereotypes (this is of key importance if one wants to successfully fight against stereotypy behaviour of those who may assume, in the absence of dissenting voices, that their beliefs are widely shared); invoke empathy for members of outgroup on both sides; initially point out similarities among rather than differences between Roma and non-Roma, but subsequently emphasising cultural diversity and plurality; focus on changing stereotypy behaviours and actions, rather than on modifying attitudes and/or beliefs, which are remarkably resistant to change (research suggests that altering behaviour can in itself lead to altered attitudes); offer communities sound alternative explanations to people’s justifications for their stereotypy views, emphasizing that ethnic groups are not homogenous; obtain and have the support of clear unambiguous political leadership; draw from a coalition of leaders from academia, sport, police, public life etc. who are committed to delivering a consistent message against stereotypy behaviours; be supported by sustained and substantial funding and by collaboration across relevant agencies and full consultation/involvement of all ethnic communities; offer practical solutions to changing stereotypy behaviour rather than just focusing on widely held beliefs; develop long-term plans rather than one-shot interventions, as changing stereotypes, by necessity, takes a lot of time.

In line with the approaches outlined above and based on previously conducted researches, studies and experiments (e.g. Allport, 1954; Peters, 1971; Pate, 1981 and 1988; Byrnes and Kiger, 1990 and 1992; Gadamer, 1993; Batson, Early, and Salvarani, 1997; Pettigrew, 1998 and 2000; Levy, 1999; Finlay and Stephan, 2000; Batterham, 2001; Duckitt, 2001; Son Hing, Li, and Zanna, 2002; Pedersen et al., 2003),

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people were exposed to pictures of admired Black Americans and disliked White Americans (e.g. Bill Cosby and Timothy McVeigh). Still another study found that implicit and explicit anti-Black biases were reduced after students took a semester-long course on prejudice and conflict (Internet 2).

possibly viable strategies for reducing stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma can be proposed. These strategies are generally to be divided into two categories: a) individual strategies and b) interpersonal strategies. The former include actions and measures directed towards individuals such as providing knowledge about social and cultural issues, dissonance and empathy, whereas the latter foster intergroup contact, consensus information, dialogue and advertising and awareness-raising campaigns. In continuation I discuss each of these anti-stereotyping strategies its appropriateness and the prospects for its success in eliminating – or at the very least modifying – stereotypy beliefs and attitudes in Roma – non-Roma relationships.

### **Individual strategies**

#### **a) Providing knowledge about social and cultural issues**

This method can be in fact quite effective in undermining false or negative beliefs about target groups (members and representatives of Roma and non-Roma). Educational institutions and teaching materials have the opportunity to affect stereotypes, and hence influence intergroup relations. Efforts to teach about different cultures, and the history of different racial or ethnic groups can help build inter-group understanding if it is done in an effective and sympathetic way. The educational system (teachers, schools, textbooks) needs to also try to paint a fair and accurate picture of the conflict and the different people involved, being aware that different sides of a conflict will view what is happening very differently. Through stories, discussions, and exercises, teachers can help students (of all ages and levels) understand the complexity of the conflicts that surround them, and develop age- and situation-appropriate responses to the current conflicts in their homes, communities, and nations. To the extent that classrooms contain Romani and non-Romani students, teachers can help their students learn to understand and appreciate each other better, while protecting the safety (physical and emotional) of those on both sides. If the classroom only contains one group, reaching such intergroup understandings is harder, but still worth the effort through books and articles, discussions, TV and movies, and when available, online exercises.

Public knowledge about the history and culture of Roma is still marginal among ordinary people in all European countries. National governments and international organisations are trying to overcome segregation, stigmatisation and marginalisation of the Roma and to integrate them into society. One of the keys for integration is education of both Roma and non-Roma. An integral part of this educational process is mutual

knowledge about the common history and culture of Roma and non-Roma in Europe. Mutual knowledge and understanding as well as ongoing dialogue between the two different ethnic, social and cultural identities have the power to create a cultural space where an elementary respect for dignity, equality, solidarity and human rights can be learned and internalized by both Roma and non-Roma.

### **b) Dissonance**

Some studies revealed that evoking people's dissonance, or inconsistency between egalitarian values and negative attitudes, is a useful strategy for reducing stereotypes and prejudice (Pedersen et al., 2003: 13). Stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma can be reduced also by having participants feel dissonance (i.e. psychological inconvenience or even guilt as a result of a perceived incompatibility among their beliefs). For instance, they might see themselves as being egalitarian but also express stereotypical behaviours and/or prejudiced attitudes. This method is very useful when we have to deal with those Roma and non-Roma who outwardly endorse egalitarian principles, believe that prejudice and discrimination are bad and wrong, but still have negative feelings/attitudes towards outgroup members.

### **c) Empathy**

Some researches (Pedersen et al., 2003: 13) indicate a strong interrelation between levels of stereotypes and empathy towards members of other racial/ethnic group (e.g. Indigenous-Australians) and that invoking empathy in bearers of stereotypes helps reduce stereotyping levels. One of the most effective methods to reduce stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma is to do this with empathy. "Simply by taking the perspective of outgroup members and "looking at the world through their eyes", in-group bias and stereotype accessibility can be significantly reduced." (Internet 2). However, the ways for invoking empathy with a view to reducing stereotypes should be approached with a great care and by taking into account the concrete circumstances. This can be done by eliciting either parallel empathy (i.e. involved emotions such as hopelessness or anger in line with the target group) or reactive empathy (i.e. involved emotions such as compassion or sympathy) dependant of course upon various scenarios. Imagining how an outgroup member feels in certain conflict situation evokes a purely empathic response, and may lead to altruistic behaviour. Yet, imagining how you personally would feel if you were in his/her shoes evokes a more complex combination of personal distress and empathy (Pedersen et al., 2003: 15). To benefit the most from the "empathy"

approach both forms of perspective-takings should be used interchangeably.

It is also worthy to note that imparting knowledge alone cannot reduce stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma but should be accompanied by other individual tools such as creating dissonance and using empathy if one is to achieve tangible results.

## **Interpersonal strategies**

### **a) Intergroup contact**

The early research carried out by René Weber and Jennifer Crocker (1983: 961-977) demonstrated that stereotype change requires counter-stereotypic behaviours to be performed more frequently and by typical group members. However, when getting to know an individual group member, feelings about this member may not generalise to other members of the group. Stereotype change is only possible when a member is not treated as an exception to the rule, so this member should repeatedly remind others of his or her group membership. Building up a close relationship with an opposite-group member can result in more positive evaluations of the group as a whole. In addition, knowing that someone from your group has a member of the other group as a friend reduces negative feelings towards this group. This was shown, among others, in the studies conducted by Stephen C. Wright et al. (1997: 73-90) and Donna M. Desforjes et al. (1991: 531-544). Research also shows that people feel relatively positive about groups that live nearby, and people who have friends who are members of other groups are less prejudiced against the out-groups. Although not all stereotypes ought to be changed, contact of the right type can break down negative stereotypes. This means that stereotyping can be reduced, for example, by bringing people together. When they discover the other people are not as the stereotype, the immediate evidence creates dissonance that leads to improved thoughts about the other group.

This is especially true when people determine that they actually have things in common with people from the other side. Such things can range from enjoying the same music, hobbies, or sports, to having the same worries about children or aging parents, etc. Even when people learn that they share fear or sadness, they can begin to understand each other more. When they come to understand that the other is afraid of being hurt, or losing a loved one in war, just as they are, that brings people together. Such shared emotions make people seem human, while stereotypes typically “dehumanize” people. Likewise, shared

emotions make empathy possible, which opens the door to new forms of interaction and trust building, at least among the individuals involved. Depending on the context and other interactions, the image of the group as a whole may become more positive as well. At other times, people rationalize that their one new acquaintance is not like “the others”. But even learning that one person can deviate from the stereotype is a start. The challenge then is to expand such transformative experiences beyond the individuals involved to larger groups, communities, and eventually whole societies. Developing such mutual understanding is the goal of many intervention efforts. Dialogue groups and problem-solving workshops are two common ways of doing this. So are joint projects such as women's or children's programs, recreational and sporting programs, medical programs - any kind of program that brings individuals from opposing groups together in a cooperative venture. Although they may have additional goals beyond the breaking of stereotypes, working together co-operatively can do much to break down negative images people hold of the out-group members. Once people get to know a person from “the other side”, they often will determine that the other is not nearly as bad as they originally had assumed, though sometimes they might find out they are just as bad or even worse.

Thus, the possible key to reversing stereotypes is to contradict them, in direct interactions between people. Stereotypes can be effectively reduced by direct contact between members of different groups (Roma and non-Roma) as it is suggested by the contact hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> This most compelling social psychological model requires certain conditions under which conflicting groups should have contact with one another if one wants to reduce prevailing intergroup tensions. The research conducted by Petersen et al (2003: 15) specifies four such essential conditions in order to produce some positive results:

- 1.) conflicting groups must have equal status within the contact situation;
- 2.) there should be no competition along group lines within the contact situation;
- 3.) groups must seek superordinate goals within the contact situation;
- 4.) relevant institutional authorities must sanction the intergroup contact and must endorse a reduction in intergroup tensions.

It must be stressed here that Pedersen et al. research (2003: 15-16) found on the basis of some previous studies that attempts to bring

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<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis theory (the theory that certain types of direct contact between members of hostile groups will reduce stereotyping and prejudice) is based on the principle that bringing people together who are in conflict (or where one is stereotyped by the other), will improve their relationship - as they get to understand one another, the conflict will subside.

conflicting groups together to reduce stereotypes can easily exacerbate intergroup tensions if only one of the above-mentioned conditions is missing. Therefore, any anti-stereotyping strategy which relies upon contact between Roma and non-Roma needs to be carefully engineered and must take into consideration all relevant conditions. In addition, interventions through intergroup contacts in the case of Roma and non-Roma should target changing the negative views and stereotypy beliefs of outgroup and especially ingroup members and should simultaneously address both sameness and diversity of both groups' members. However, the reality is that even when contact contradicts a stereotype, this may not undermine it because some powerful mechanisms can be triggered. The fact is that stereotypes may remain unchanged because people can explain away inconsistent information, compartmentalize inconsistent information, or differentiate atypical group members. Contact situations must expose people to stereotype-inconsistent information that is repeated (thus cannot be explained away), involves many group members (thus subtyping is prevented), and comes from typical group members (thus no contrast will occur). People will evaluate out-groups more positively when a person from the in-group builds up a close relationship with an opposite-group member.

It must be also mentioned that both qualitative and quantitative researches clearly indicate that the reduction of stereotypes and prejudice is multi-faceted, and intergroup contact alone is not enough (Pedersen et al., 2003: 16-17).

### **b) Providing consensus information**

People who hold stereotypes about outgroup members are more likely to believe that their negative views are shared by the wider population and that other people think the same way as them. Believing that your views are widely accepted as the 'norm' helps to justify your position. In Pedersen et al. study (2003: 17) it is stated that it has been found that providing feedback to White-American university students that their views about African-Americans were not shared by all resulted in a decrease in negative attitudes one week later. This was especially the case for those who were given information regarding the views of ingroup members. Taking into consideration these research outcomes it might be that providing member of both groups (Roma and non-Roma) with different "consensus" information can assist in reducing stereotypes on both sides.



### **c) Dialogue**

It has already been mentioned above that teaching and providing Roma and non-Roma members with adequate information and knowledge is certainly useful but not sufficient on their own to efficiently change widely held stereotypes. It is more effective to have participants in anti-stereotyping strategies engage in dialogue, rather than just being lectured at. For more tangible results education efforts should be complemented by continuous dialogue involving participants from both sides (Roma and non-Roma). Talking about problems and conflict situations on a regular basis may help create and maintain good relationships and better understanding among members of both ethnic groups and eventually reduce negative views and accept differences in lifestyle. It may also provide flexible proposals and creative solutions in specific and concrete situations. Such ongoing and constructive dialogue can be ensured through establishing deliberative forums, dialogue platforms, round tables or other sustained forms of giving people the opportunity to intensively discuss problems and issues related to stereotypes about Roma and non-Roma.

### **d) Advertising and awareness-raising campaigns**

Advertising and awareness raising programmes and projects cannot be regarded as a separate anti-stereotyping strategy or mechanism, but rather as a means or tool for the effective delivery of interpersonal strategies to a wide audience. Advertising and awareness raising campaigns for delivering anti-stereotypic messages may be broadly defined in order to cover as wide population as possible (using, for example, TV and radio; e.g. a well-known Roma campaign Dosta implemented in 13 CoE member countries) or more tailored (using, for example, various tools, such as particular print outlets to reach target groups). However, Pedersen et al. research (2003: 18) warns that general advertising campaigns are “unlikely to produce significant behavioural changes, and they run the risk of producing counter-productive backlash effects in at least some sections of the community”.

Mass media not only can be seen as one of the major culprits for spreading and disseminating anti-Roma stereotypes in the EU member states but they can also play an important role in breaking down stereotypes about Roma and non-Roma. If they characterise particular groups of people in certain ways, their viewers (or readers) are likely to do the same. So if a movie - or the motion picture industry in general – emphasizes the positive aspects of groups that contradict prevalent stereotypes, instead of characterising them negatively, they can have a significant role in building mutual understanding and are much less likely

to be perpetuating negative stereotypes and making conflicts worse. Therefore,

it is important that the media paint as accurate a picture of both sides of a conflict as is possible. This generally means painting a complex picture. While extremists tend to make the most noise and hence the most news, the media can do much to lessen conflict by focusing attention on moderates and peacebuilders as well. Heartwarming stories of reconciliation can replace or at least stand side-by-side with heart-wrenching stories of violence and loss. Showing that there is hope - helping people visualize a better life in a better world - is a service the media can do better than any other institution, at least on a large scale (Burgess, 2003).

A strategic priority in the EU and its member states should be to challenge negative stereotypes and prejudice on both Roma and non-Roma sides, and counter media disinformation, discriminatory practices, and populist and racist discourse. The Roma initiatives should not be one-shot, "here today, gone tomorrow" efforts, but rather have concrete and durable deliverables that leave a legacy integrated into part of a longer-term process to promote and sustain social dialogue and support ongoing communication with local Roma population. Public campaigns supported by the Roma initiatives need to combine all these components and efforts if they are to serve as a model of good practice that can be scaled-up and replicated (Rorke, 2011: 61).

Just like individual strategies, interpersonal anti-stereotyping strategies can also be quite effective in changing stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma, although a special care needs to be taken given the complex nature of these strategies and problems arising in identifying their proper combination.

Many studies, reports and other relevant documents, including those produced within the EU, suggest that it are non-Roma members who are responsible for the ongoing use of anti-Roma stereotypes. However, one should be aware of the fact that at least a part of Roma behave in a way that confirms certain stereotypes that majority population holds about them (e.g. a general conviction that they are violent and that they do not want to learn or work). On the policy level, it was argued for a long time in several European countries (also in Slovenia) that majority non-Roma population has to adapt itself to the Roma culture and its way of life which has to be respected and valued. It is only recently that this belief in the "goodness" of such societal model has proven to be inadequate and it has been recognized that also Roma people have to acclimatise to their "new" society and at least to learn the dominant language, accept

and observe moral and legal norms that exist in certain society, etc. This means that members of both non-Roma and Roma groups have to take important steps and work together in order to change stereotypes on both sides and improve their relationships. The most significant in this process are upbringing and education. We have to impart to our children the sense of respect of each and every individual, his personality and dignity irrespective of their race or ethnic origin, language, colour, traditions, observances, culture, etc. Such cultural understanding and tolerance-focused approaches are required also by the fundamental international and European legal standards on respecting and protecting human dignity and rights. Only in this way one can break off the vicious circle of transferring the stereotypes and prejudice from older to young generations and thus provide conditions in which Roma and non-Roma will live peacefully together in good relationships and mutual respectfulness.

In conclusion, there are no easy solutions to the problems of spreading stereotypes within Romani and non-Romani communities. The fact is that stereotypes operate at both individual and systemic levels. Therefore, anti-stereotypes strategies need to be implemented at all levels (i.e. individual, institutional, and cultural). For example, previous researches found that stereotypy behaviour relates to some personal characteristics of individuals such as empathy and right-wing authoritarianism; however, it also relates to more societal variables such as lack of education and local norms. Indeed, no strategy for change will be successful without significant political will and adequate support of leading structures in a respective country. The reviewed literature on Roma – non-Roma relationships suggests that the best possible strategy for combating stereotypes that exist on both sides is multi-faceted, inclusive (encompassing all relevant approaches and involving all parties affected) and developed in accordance with the specific and local circumstances of the communities for which it is intended. More specifically, a dynamic, iterative and consultative approach, using both ‘top-down’ strategies (e.g. community or institutionally instigated action, such as advertising campaigns targeting specific actions or behaviours) and ‘bottom up’ strategies (e.g. addressing specific stereotypy behaviours), is more likely to succeed than are replications of ‘one-size fits all’ programs, without due regard for local community concerns and political sensitivities around such issues as entitlement, dispossession, racism and prejudice (Pedersen et al., 2003: 5). In short, the reviews being done in this article tell us that one needs to take into consideration and implement a range of different strategies (as described above) to reduce stereotypes between Roma and non-Roma.

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